ITALY AND THE RECOGNITION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA DURING THE COLD WAR

1. *Introduction*

On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing, thus sanctioning the definitive victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the Chinese Nationalist Party (or Guomindang). Following the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, Jiang Jieshi and the Nationalist leaders moved to Taiwan without giving up their governing powers, which left China divided into two rival governments—one in Beijing and one in Taipei—each claiming sole legitimacy. This gave rise to the so-called "two Chinas" issue. Under these circumstances, individual countries were faced with the decision of whether to maintain their diplomatic links with the Nationalist government, which, until that point, had been internationally recognized and occupied the Chinese seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), or to break with it and establish diplomatic relations with the new Communist government[1].

In fact, the establishment of the PRC not only represented the start of a profound transformation of Chinese state institutions, society, and economy but also redefined its diplomatic relationships with other countries in the world. For the leaders of the CCP, one critical issue at the beginning was what kind of foreign strategy they should adopt in order to consolidate the new regime[2]. Under the policy of "leaning to one side"[1], the PRC established diplomatic relations with the

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[1] G. Samarani, *La Cina del Novecento. Dalla Fine dell'Impero a Oggi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2008.

[2] N. Volland, *Translating the Socialist State: Cultural Exchange, National Identity, and the Socialist World in the Early PRC*, in «Twentieth-Century China», Vol. 33, No. 2, 2008, pp. 51–52.

Soviet Union and other socialist countries; however, as time went on, this was no longer in line with the PRC's long-term interests due to the strategy's over-reliance on the Soviet Union at the expense of developing ties with Western Europe, Japan, and other non-socialist states[3].

The end of the Korean War and the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina offered an opportunity for the PRC to normalize its relationship with more Western countries[4]. The Communist government was willing to increase its global status in order to take over the Chinese seat on the UNSC and, in the meantime, to cultivate relationships with the world[5]. In the mid-1950s, the Chinese Communist government introduced the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which included mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. These five principles summarized the overall characteristics of the new type of state relations they desired and fully reflected the long-term demands of the PRC's foreign policy—in particular, the non-interventionism that Beijing considered as the major principle of its foreign policy[6].

In the case of Italy, its orientation towards Communist China did not appear prejudicially negative, especially after the UK's recognition of the PRC on January 6, 1950, which was followed immediately by that of Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland. By the end of 1950, twenty-six countries had recognized Communist China[7]. On the part of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the direction of Minister Carlo Sforza between 1947 and 1951, there was already an initiative for similar recognition, as well as a draft telegram that would be sent to the Chinese Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai in order to communicate the desire of Italy to

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[3] B. Zhang, *An Outline of Chinese Diplomacy during the 20th Century*, in «Zhongguo shehui kexue (Social Sciences in China)», No. 1, 2002, p. 12.

[4] J. Chen, *Bridging Revolution and Decolonization: The Rise of the Bandung Discourse in Chinese Foreign Policy and the Changing Themes of the Global Cold War*, in «Lengzhan guojishi yanjiu (Cold War International History Studies)», No. 9, 2010, pp. 2–46.

[5] E. Fardella, *The Normalization of Relations Between Italy and the People's Republic of China*, in M. Marinelli and Giovanni Andornino eds., *Italy's Encounters with Modern China: Imperial Dreams, Strategic Ambitions*, New York,Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 119.

[6] W. Meng, *Developmental Peace: Theorizing China's Approach to International Peacebuilding*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2024.

[7] F. Joyaux, *La Tentaion Impériale Politique Extérieure de la Chine depuis 1949*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1994, pp. 59–61.

normalize bilateral diplomatic relations on the basis of equality and reciprocity[8]. However, the caution of their American allies pushed the Italian government not to proceed further at that time[9].

In the absence of diplomatic relations, however, contacts between Italy and the PRC developed thanks to the initiatives of individuals who, for political, ideological, economic, or cultural reasons, were interested in China and hoped that these early contacts would pave the way to future political developments[10]. The Italian left-wing parties, which had considerable influence in Italian society, supported the Beijing government by spreading a positive image of Communist China through travel, publications, and parliamentary interpellations[11]. Even the left wing of the Christian Democratic Party encouraged the development of relations with the PRC[12]. All of these activities were organized within the framework of a flourishing "people's diplomacy" (*renwen waijiao*), which made the Italian public aware of the importance of the PRC[13]. However, it was only when the Italian Socialist Party, the Italian Democratic Socialist Party, and the Italian Republican Party joined the Christian Democratic Party in coalition in the third Government of Mariano Rumor, which lasted from March 28 to August 6, 1970, that there was sufficient pressure to create the final necessary impetus for the recognition process.

The history of the normalization of relations between Italy and the PRC, though interesting and valuable, remains relatively unknown and understudied both in Italy and in China. The sources preserved in the Historical Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ASMAE) have not yet been fully explored

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[8] M. F. Pini, *Italia e Cina, 60 Anni Tra Passato e Futuro*, Roma, L'asino d'oro Edizioni, 2011, pp. 67–68.

[9] Ibid., pp. 69–70.

[10] L. D. Giorgi, *Chinese Brush, Western Canvas: The Travels of Italian Artists and Writers, and the Making of China's International Cultural Identity in the Mid-1950s*, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, p. 171.

[11] C.M. Rostagni, Diplomazia a Più Voci. La Questione Cinese nella Politica Estera Italiana (1949–1971), in C.M. Rostagni and G. Samarani eds., *La Cina di Mao, l'Italia e l'Europa Negli Anni della Guerra Fredda*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2014, pp. 28–29.

[12] P. D. Giovanni, *Giorgio La Pira e Vittorino Colombo: Due Protagonisti del Dialogo Italia-Cina (1949–1978)*, Master Degree Thesis. Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy, 2018, p. 3.

[13] L. D. Giorgi, *Chinese Brush, Western Canvas: The Travels of Italian Artists and Writers, and the Making of China's International Cultural Identity in the Mid-1950s*, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 170–193.

and analyzed[14]. So far, only a few scholars have studied this topic. Foremost among them were Paola Olla Brundu, Guido Samarani, Laura De Giorgi, Mario Filippo Pini, and Enrico Fardella, who offered a preliminary study[15]. Carla Meneguzzi Rostagni presented the China question in Italian foreign policy in both parliamentary debates and government programs[16]. Laura De Giorgi and Sofia Graziani, respectively, introduced Sino-Italian cultural and youth contacts in the mid-1950s and revealed that these interactions were viewed in Italy as an opportunity to overcome the ideological barriers of the Cold War[17]. More recently, Paolo De Giovanni focused on the role of Italian Catholics and Christian Democrats. By analyzing the work of various personalities such as Giorgio La Pira, Amintore Fanfani, Vittorino Colombo, and Giulio Andreotti, he was able to reconstruct the bilateral dialogue on the political, economic, cultural, and religious levels, which would promote future détente and promotion of peace between Italy and China[18].

This article explores the contents of those understudied documents of the ASMAE in detail, integrating them with the official literature and oral accounts of protagonists from both sides, and it suggests that the mutual recognition agreement between Italy and the PRC was the result of a complex process and was highly diversified in its phases. The final decision made by the Italian government was neither in agreement with the US nor solicited by Beijing.

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[14] E. D. Nolfo, ed., *La Normalizzazione delle Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese*, Catanzaro, Rubbettino, 2010, p. 1.

[15] P.O. Brundu, *Pietro Nenni, Aldo Moro e il Riconoscimento della Cina Comunista*, in «Le Carte e la Storia», No.2, 2004, pp. 29–51; M. F. Pini,*Italia e Cina, 60 Anni Tra Passato e Futuro*, Roma, L'asino d'oro Edizioni, 2011; E. Fardella, *The Normalization of Relations Between Italy and the People's Republic of China*, in M. Marinelli and Giovanni Andornino eds., *Italy's Encounters with Modern China: Imperial Dreams, Strategic Ambitions*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; G. Samarani, and De Giorgi, Laura, Lontane, Vicine. *Le relazioni fra Cina e Italia nel Novecento*, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2011.

[16] C.M. Rostagni, *The China Question in Italian Foreign Policy*, in«Modern Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 107–132.

[17] L. D. Giorgi, *Chinese Brush, Western Canvas: The Travels of Italian Artists and Writers, and the Making of China's International Cultural Identity in the Mid-1950s*, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 170–193; S. Graziani, *The Case of Youth Exchanges and Interactions Between the PRC and Italy in the 1950s*, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 194–226.

[18] P. D. Giovanni, *Giorgio La Pira e Vittorino Colombo: Due Protagonisti del Dialogo Italia-Cina (1949–1978)*, Master Degree Thesis. Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy, 2018.

It began towards the end of 1968 at the initiative of the Italian Foreign Minister Pietro Nenni, whose personality dominated the entire first phase of the negotiations; it concluded two years later thanks to his successor Aldo Moro and, consequently opened a new page in diplomatic relations, the impact of which still resonates today.

2. *Informal Contacts*

In the early days of the PRC, left-wing political forces in Italy—notably the Italian Communist Party and the Italian Socialist Party, together with some members of the Christian Democracy—were already in favor of the new Communist government. These groups actively engaged in promoting relations with Beijing[19]. In the absence of official contact between the two countries, an unofficial or "people's diplomacy" was created. It was designed to supplement and reinforce conventional state-to-state diplomacy, as well as to improve cultural and trade relations with nations with which they had not yet established diplomatic ties[20]. This form of diplomacy, which Beijing actively pursued to break its diplomatic isolation during the Cold War, has been studied extensively in recent years across different national contexts. Studies on "people's diplomacy" have shown that it served as a parallel channel through which the PRC cultivated sympathizers abroad, inviting intellectuals, journalists, and activists to visit the country and then disseminate positive images upon their return[21]. In the Italian case, several students, intellectuals, businessmen, and public figures with political interests were invited to visit China, initiating a kind of parallel diplomacy through cultural and economic exchanges[22].

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[19] G. Samarani, and De Giorgi, Laura, Lontane, Vicine. *Le relazioni fra Cina e Italia nel Novecento*, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2011, pp. 105–112.

[20] S. Graziani, Sofia, The Case of Youth Exchanges and Interactions Between the PRC and Italy in the 1950s, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, p. 196.

[21] B. Rupar, *Viajeros argentinos a China en el marco de la 'Diplomacia entre pueblos' (1950–1965)*, in «Cahiers des Amériques latines. Instituto de Altos Estudios para América Latina (IHEAL, Universidad Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3) y el Centro de Investigación y Documentación sobre las Américas», No. 94, 2020, p. 204.

[22] L. D. Giorgi, *Chinese Brush, Western Canvas: The Travels of Italian Artists and Writers, and the Making of China's International Cultural Identity in the Mid-1950s*, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 170–193.

2.1. Cultural exchanges

The "people's diplomacy" of the 1950s and 1960s cannot be reduced to mere political propaganda. Rather, it involved a complex process of cultural translation and the provincialization of Europe—that is, the relativization of Europe's monopoly over the definition of modernity[23]. This theoretical insight applies equally to the Italian case, where engagement with China served not only political ends but also a deeper cultural reorientation. Ideology, culture, and public diplomacy played a significant role in the "battle for hearts and minds"[24]. As the major Communist party in Europe, the Italian Communist Party was fundamental in promoting Sino-Italian relations, particularly through youth exchanges. In fact, during the Cold War, young people were important instruments for foreign policy and diplomacy in both Italy and China[25]. The youth interactions took different forms and mainly involved students and members of adult-led youth political organizations such as the Italian Communist Youth Federation and the Communist Youth League of China. The first was the Italian Communist Party's junior partner and, according to its document *The Youth Initiative for a Foreign Policy of Independence and Peace*, the youth should assume responsibility for various issues in Italian foreign policy, strike for peace and friendship across blocs, and favor the development of East–West cultural and economic exchanges[26]. At the same time, its counterpart, the Communist Youth League of China, also had the task of strengthening the PRC's relations with the youth of socialist countries and promoting contacts with leftist youth organizations in Western capitalist countries[27].

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[23] J. Locane, *Del Orientalismo a la Provincialización de Europa. A Propósito del Viaje a los Albores de la República Popular China*, in «Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World», Vol. 9, No. 3, 2020, pp. 67–69.

[24] Y. W. Zheng, Hong Liu and Szonyi, Michael, eds., *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, Leiden, Brill, 2010; T. Vu, and Wongsurawat, Wasana, eds., *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity and Culture*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

[25] N. Volland, *Translating the Socialist State: Cultural Exchange, National Identity, and the Socialist World in the Early PRC*, in «*Twentieth-Century China*», Vol. 33, No. 2, 2008, pp. 51–72.

[26] S. Graziani, Sofia, The Case of Youth Exchanges and Interactions Between the PRC and Italy in the 1950s, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, p. 196.

[27] W.Z. Cao, *The Historical Development of China's Youth Foreign Affairs and its Fundamental Experiences*, in «*Zhongguo Qingnian Zhengzhi Xueyuan (Journal of China Youth University for Political Sciences)*», No. 4, 1999, p. 234.

The Communist-party-affiliated organizations thus provided both Italy and China with a privileged channel of exchange. According to the *Chronicle of events related to China's youth foreign affairs (1949–1999)*, the capitalist European countries had the most exchanges with the PRC (Communist Youth League Central Committee 2000). Between 1951 and 1966, for instance, the Wuhan Communist Youth League Municipal Committee received 316 foreign youth delegations, with an average of 20 per year. The number of foreign visitors, coming from 20 European countries and representing a range of different political groups, totaled 2431[28].

In 1953, Ugo Pecchioli, a 28-year-old Italian man who later became a member of the National Secretariat of the Italian Communist Youth Federation, was sent to China, where he had the opportunity not only to participate in the Second National Congress of the New Democratic Youth League but also to travel across the country and visit numerous cities between June 20 and July 18. After his return to Italy, he reported his journey in the official newspaper of the Italian Communist Party *l'Unità*. He recognized that Chinese comrades were united in overcoming emergencies and poverty and that the Chinese people had many great qualities, "one of the greatest [of which] was their ability to look far ahead, to be patient, to carefully avoid making hasty decisions that could lead to serious mistakes"[29]. Pecchioli believed that the establishment of the PRC gave the entire country new hope and opportunity. He remembered having visited the medical faculty of the University of Mukden (today Shenyang), where hundreds of young students quickly learned medical science, studied the modern discoveries of Soviet medicine, and never wasted a moment of their time because they knew that millions of their compatriots were waiting on them. Pecchioli was amazed at how Communist China benefitted society: "In three years, 2120 health services were organized in cities and cantons, 7699 health centers in districts, 29,000 assistance services for mothers and children, and 396 anti-epidemic stations". In fact, "from 1950 to today not a single case of cholera has been verified"[30].

A critical reading of such accounts is essential. Studies of similar travel narratives produced within the framework of Chinese "people's diplomacy"

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[28] S. Graziani, Sofia, The Case of Youth Exchanges and Interactions Between the PRC and Italy in the 1950s, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 197–200.

[29] U. Pecchioli, Note di un Viaggio nella Cina Popolare: Calamità Che Scompaiono, L'Unità 27 August, 1953, p. 3.

[30] Ibid., p. 3.

have shown that foreign visitors were typically granted access to model sites and success stories, while the full picture of China's material constraints, infrastructural weaknesses, and the gap between official claims and local realities remained largely invisible to them[31]. This caution applies equally to the Italian case: Pecchioli's report, like many others of its kind, reflected both his genuine observations and the inherently managed nature of such visits, shaped by his ideological affinity and the carefully orchestrated itinerary. While the accuracy of the statistical claims he cited may be difficult to verify independently, what matters for this study is that the writings of Pecchioli, albeit influenced by ideological affinity, contributed to a greater understanding of Communist China in Italy as it was presented to and perceived by foreign sympathizers at the time. These accounts belonged to a broader cultural diplomacy program that Beijing used for its propaganda and that would help shape public opinion. In fact, these young visitors were often positively impressed by their tours in China and, once they were back home, would become themselves conduits of "people's diplomacy".

The activities of unofficial diplomacy were further facilitated by the founding of cultural and friendship associations or organizations, and increasing cultural contacts[32]. At the end of 1953, the Italian anti-fascist politician Ferruccio Parri founded the Center for the Development of Cultural and Economic Relations with China (Centro Cina), which aimed to promote exchanges with China[33]. The center was composed of several dozen intellectuals, university professors, and members of parliament. On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the PRC in 1959, "400 university professors and scientists asked for the recognition of China", making the headlines of various Italian newspapers[34]. In fact, other Italian intellectuals, artists, and writers visited China, and Italy became a must for the Chinese delegations during their missions in Europe. Many seemed positively eager to establish direct

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[31] B. Rupar, *Viajeros Argentinos a China en el Marco de la 'Diplomacia entre Pueblos' (1950–1965)*, in «Cahiers des Amériques latines. Instituto de Altos Estudios para América Latina (IHEAL, Universidad Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3) y el Centro de Investigación y Documentación sobre las Américas», No. 94, 2020, pp. 207–212.

[32] H. Passin, *China's Cultural Diplomacy*, New York, Praeger, 1963, pp. 72–77.

[33] G. Samarani, *Roma e Pechino Negli Anni della Guerra Fredda: il ruolo del Centro Studi per le Relazioni Economiche e Culturali con la Cina*, in C. M. Rostagni and G. Samarani, eds., *La Cina di Mao, l'Italia e l'Europa Negli Anni della Guerra Fredda*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2014, pp. 93–118.

[34] Ibid., p. 106.

connections with the capitalist West, thereby reducing their dependence on the Soviet Union[35]. In Italy, these activities were considered an opportunity to overcome the ideological barriers of the Cold War, while the PRC sought to strengthen the perception of the Italians that the Chinese revolutionary experience was similar to that of the Italian Resistance. In this way, Chinese foreign propaganda could always overcome ideological or cultural differences and find a way for cultural cooperation. Indeed, many of those Italian visitors produced publications that not only appreciated Chinese culture and traditions but also constructed a positive image of the PRC[36,2].

The appeal of Mao's thought in Italy, however, extended beyond the institutional left examined above. A recent global history of Maoism has shown that Mao's ideas inspired not only the parliamentary left—the Italian Communist Party and the Italian Socialist Party—but also more radical, extra-parliamentary groups such as Lotta Continua and, later, the Red Brigades[37]. More specifically, a study of Italian Maoism traces its emergence in opposition to the Italian Communist Party's reformist path, highlighting a key distinction: while the Italian Communist Party sought to work within the system to achieve diplomatic recognition, radical groups such as Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaia took Mao's slogans literally, arguing that a revolution in Italy was not only possible but necessary[38]. These radical movements lay outside the framework of "people's diplomacy" examined in this article, and they did not directly contribute to the diplomatic recognition of 1970. Nevertheless, their emergence underscores the broader and more fragmented appeal of Maoism across the Italian political spectrum—from the government-seeking Socialists to the anti-system revolutionaries. This article focuses on the former, the institutional actors who ultimately brought about diplomatic normalization, while acknowledging that Maoism's global reach was a crucial motor of the Cold War[39].

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[35] L. D. Giorgi, *Chinese Brush, Western Canvas: The Travels of Italian Artists and Writers, and the Making of China's International Cultural Identity in the Mid-1950s*, in «Modem Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 171–172.

[36] L.D. Giorgi, *Alle Radici della Diplomazia Culturale Cinese*, in La Cina di Mao, l'Italia e l'Europa Negli Anni della Guerra Fredda, in C. M. Rostagni and G. Samarani, eds., *La Cina di Mao, l'Italia e l'Europa Negli Anni della Guerra Fredda*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2014, pp. 133–139.

[37] J. Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, London, The Bodley Head, 2019, pp. 456–458.

[38] M. Gabbas and Lorenzo M. Capisani, *Maoism with Italian Characteristics: China's Global Influence and the Italian Left, 1956–1976*. Singapore, Springer, 2025.

[39] J. Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, London, The Bodley Head, 2019.

2.2. Economic exchanges

While the publications of intellectuals stimulated interest in the history and culture of China, the official line of the government in Rome, which was faithful to the US, was questioned by the critical voices of numerous exponents of the Italian political and industrial world. In particular, they contested the application of restrictions on trade with Communist China[40]. For example, at the Conference for the Free Development of Foreign Trade held in Genoa in January 1954, the assembly unanimously approved a motion that underlined the importance of Italy's intensification of economic exchanges with the Far East and with China in particular, as they could offer both raw materials and markets for Italian industry[41].

At the foundation of the PRC, Italy's trade with China represented 0.25% of Italian exports and 0.32% of Italian imports. Starting from 1952, while imports continued to fluctuate, Italian exports rose to 0.26%, reaching 0.3–0.4% in the next two years (Istat, *Statistica annuale del commercio con l'estero*, annate 1953–1954–1956). Although, in absolute terms, trade with the PRC in the first part of the 1950s remained decidedly limited within Italy's overall trade balance (due to the restrictions imposed by the Cold War), the improvement in Italian exports to China in the following years was nevertheless decisive and positive[42]. Because the Italian economy relied heavily on foreign trade to sustain its post-war recovery, the rigid Atlantic policy that excluded the Communist bloc from its commercial network was extremely damaging[43].

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was attentive to the development of relations with the PRC.[3] An internal discussion at the Farnesina investigated the opportunity to approach the PRC in an informed manner by following the example of other European countries. Opponents pointed out the dangers of hostility from the US, while the officials in favor insisted on the potential Chinese market and underlined the differences existing between the Soviet Union and the

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[40] C. M. Rostagni, *Italia e Cina–un Secolo di Relazioni*, in «*Italogramma*», No. 2, 2012, p. 46.

[41] G. Samarani, *Roma e Pechino Negli Anni della Guerra Fredda: il ruolo del Centro Studi per le Relazioni Economiche e Culturali con la Cina*, in C. M. Rostagni and G. Samarani, eds., *La Cina di Mao, l'Italia e l'Europa Negli Anni della Guerra Fredda*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2014, p. 100.

[42] L.M. Capisani, *Dino Gentili, la Comet e il Dialogo Commerciale fra Italia e Cina (1952–1958)*, in «Studi Storici», No. 2, 2013, p. 427.

[43] C. M. Rostagni, *Italia e Cina–un Secolo di Relazioni*, in «*Italogramma*», No. 2, 2012, p. 47.

PRC[44]. These perceived differences became more pronounced as the Sino-Soviet split deepened in the early 1960s. Studies on the periodization of Sino-foreign contacts during the Cold War have shown that the split marked a turning point: it created space for new actors—including non-communist leftists, nationalists, and even business figures—to engage with China independently of Moscow's mediation[45]. A similar dynamic unfolded in Italy, where the rupture between Beijing and Moscow encouraged a broader spectrum of Italian political and economic forces to pursue relations with the PRC without the stigma of alignment with the Soviet Union. In these circumstances, on October 14, 1954, the Italian Socialist Party member Guido Mazzali appealed to the Chamber of Deputies to promote rapprochement with the PRC, claiming that "the English went to China, the French and the Belgians went there, the Germans and the Dutch are going there too. We haven't been there yet and we're still playing around"[4]. The leader of the Italian Socialist Party, Pietro Nenni, also promoted trade relations with the PRC. Twice nominated Italian Foreign Minister, he adopted a policy of equidistance between Moscow and Washington. After opposing the signing of the North Atlantic treaty, he sought to promote détente, neutrality, and peace[46]. According to Nenni, without the participation of China's 600 million people, any global peace and security initiative would be in vain—meaning that no international agreement on peace or security could be effective if it excluded the world's most populous nation [47].

One of Nenni's closest collaborators, Dino Gentili, became the initiator of economic exchanges between Italy and the PRC. Gentili founded [Comet Società per gli scambi internazionali Srl (Company for Foreign Trade Ltd.)] and had already been trading with the PRC since August 1952. Comet acted

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[44] ASMAE, Historical archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archivio storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, hereafter ASMAE), S. Affari politici (1950–1957), b. 1434, Appunti Cina, Appunto per l'uff. V della direzione degli affari politici (1953), 17/12/1953; L.M. Capisani, *Dino Gentili, la Comet e il Dialogo Commerciale fra Italia e Cina (1952–1958)*, in «Studi Storici», No. 2, 2013, p. 428.

[45] B. Rupar, *Viajeros Argentinos a China en el Marco de la 'Diplomacia entre Pueblos' (1950–1965)*, in «Cahiers des Amériques latines. Instituto de Altos Estudios para América Latina (IHEAL, Universidad Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3) y el Centro de Investigación y Documentación sobre las Américas», No. 94, 2020, pp. 207–212.

[46] P. Nenni, *Tempo di Guerra fredda. Diari 1943–1956*, Milano, Sugarco, 1981, p. 538.

[47] P. D. Giovanni, *Giorgio La Pira e Vittorino Colombo: Due Protagonisti del Dialogo Italia-Cina (1949–1978)*, Master Degree Thesis. Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy, 2018, p. 9.

as an intermediary between Italian companies and Chinese economic entities, and it distributed its business across three offices in Milan, Rome, and Beijing[48]. To make this dialogue more efficient, Comet appointed a stable agent in China, Spartaco Muratori, who was originally from Chiavari and an active partisan in Liguria[49]. On the Chinese side, the first interlocutor was the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), a trade body founded in 1952 and controlled by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade with the primary function of managing economic relations with the Western embargo. The CCPIT used the PRC embassy in Bern as the gateway for European countries that did not have official relations with Beijing[50]. Thus, the CCPIT was identified as "a public body and an independent legal person… composed of the state trade enterprises, representatives of joint-private exporters and importers, economic, trade and legal experts and foreign trade workers"[51]. Muratori succeeded in building a relationship of trust with the Chinese counterpart, Nan Hanchen, president of the CCPIT and first general manager of the People's Bank of China. The personal links between these two mainly served to verify China's import needs, which were generally reported through a list of goods[52] and became the starting point of subsequent collaboration[53].

In addition, Comet sought to maintain dialogue closer to the Chinese production chain, brought together in a single state body called the China National Import and Export Corporation (CNIEC)[54]. The task of the CNIEC was to connect the local market with foreign businessmen through special

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[48] L.M. Capisani, *Dino Gentili, la Comet e il Dialogo Commerciale fra Italia e Cina (1952–1958)*, in «Studi Storici», No. 2, 2013, p. 422; M. F. Pini, *Italia e Cina, 60 Anni Tra Passato e Futuro*, Roma, L'asino d'oro Edizioni, 2011, p. 86.

[49] M. F. Pini, *Italia e Cina, 60 Anni Tra Passato e Futuro*, Roma, L'asino d'oro Edizioni, 2011, p. 86.

[50] V. Zanier, *Energizing Relations: Western European industrialists and China's dream of self-reliance. The case of Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (1956–1965)*. in «Modern Asian Studies», No. 1, 2017, pp. 135–137.

[51] G. T. Hsiao, *The Foreign Trade of China: Policy, Law, and Practice, Berkeley*, University of California Press, 1977, pp. 88–89.

[52] ADG, Private Archives Dino Gentili (Archivio private Dino Gentili, hereafter ADG), Corrispondenza Pechino, lettera Pechino-Milano, 26.8.1952.

[53] ADG, Private Archives Dino Gentili (Archivio private Dino Gentili, hereafter ADG), Corrispondenza Pechino, lettera Pechino-Milano, 25.8.1952.

[54] A. Donnithorne, *China's Economic System*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1967.

representative offices[55]. The two parties, who, given the proximity of their tasks, often acted in synergy, were necessary to reconcile the idea ofsingle orders or short-term agreements with the typical planning of socialism. The efforts of Comet and its founder Gentili were recognized by Communist China and earned him a short but significant article in the newspaper *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), the press organ of the Chinese Communist Party[56]. In the eyes of private Italian operators, Comet had reached its peak in the economic relations between Italy and China[57].

From 1957, the southern city of Canton held regular International Fairs, which opened an important window to the world. They offered a good opportunity for global businessmen, as few restrictions were required on their countries of origin[58]. As a result, more Western companies were attracted by the emerging market of China, as was the case of the Italian National Hydrocarbon Holding (ENI). The interest in the PRC was part of the broader framework of the international expansion project of the ENI, then led by Enrico Mattei, whose entrepreneurial realism was the driving force behind all the initiatives that pushed the ENI to expand on a global scale[59]. Mattei was close to the ideals of the progressive left wing of Italy's Christian Democratic Party, which believed in strong state intervention in the economy and a leading role for the managers of state-owned companies[60].

Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Giuseppe Saragat announced on February 14, 1964 that Italian recognition of the PRC was on the agenda, and that it was just a question of when[61]. Consequently, in November 1964, in the presence of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, Saragat signed an agreement

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[55] L.M. Capisani, *Dino Gentili, la Comet e il Dialogo Commerciale fra Italia e Cina (1952–1958)*, in «Studi Storici», No. 2, 2013, p. 424.

[56] Renmin Ribao [People's Daily], The Manager of the Italian Company Comet has Agreed on Transactions with Our Trade Agency, August 23, 1953.

[57] L.M. Capisani, *Dino Gentili, la Comet e il Dialogo Commerciale fra Italia e Cina (1952–1958)*, in «Studi Storici», No. 2, 2013, p. 438.

[58] X.X Wu, *Hongse huarun [The story of "Red" China Resources]*, Beijing, Zhonghua Shuju, 2010, p. 260.

[59] C. M. Rostagni, *Italia e Cina – un Secolo di Relazioni*, in «*Italogramma*», No. 2, 2012. p. 47.

[60] F. Carnevali, State Enterprise and Italy's "Economic Miracle": The Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi, 1945–1962, in «Enterprise and Society», No. 2, 2000, pp. 249–278.

[61] C. M. Rostagni, *Italia e Cina – un Secolo di Relazioni*, in «*Italogramma*», No. 2, 2012. p. 49.

with China for the exchange of commercial offices in their respective capitals. The Institute for Foreign Trade (ICE) was given the task of organizing the Italian presence in Beijing, while the PRC opened an office in Rome in the following year, which aimed at increasing the economic exchange between the two countries.

In March 1965, Amintore Fanfani became the Foreign Minister and stayed at the Farnesina for more than three years. He was a decisive and action-oriented character who always sought a prominent international role for Italy despite US-led restrictions that prohibited Western allies from normalizing trade and diplomatic relations with the PRC. His ambition was combined with the conviction of the importance of China, as he gradually reduced, whenever possible, Italy's obedience to Washington on the Chinese issue[62]. However, the time was not yet right, and the political turning point came only at the end of 1968, when the socialist Pietro Nenni became the Foreign Minister and was determined to recognize the People's Republic of China, so much so that it was a priority within his government program[63].

3. *Formal Negotiations*

On January 24, 1969, Italian Foreign Minister Pietro Nenni announced Italy's intention to recognize the People's Republic of China without informing the United States[64]. In his first general speech on Italian foreign policy, he pronounced that "in recent years, the Italian position with respect to the People's Republic of China has been to respond affirmatively to the question of whether the People's Republic of China should be recognized and to leave open the problem of 'when' and 'how'". He believed that the moment of "when" had come, and, as soon as possible, he would report to the Parliament on "how"[65].

In the following days, Nenni's head of Cabinet, Ottorino Borin, contacted the head of the Chinese economic delegation in Rome, while the Minister of Italian embassy in Paris, Walter Gardini, also had opportunity to meet the Chinese chargé d'affaires in France, Yi Suzhi, thanks to the intervention of the Head of the Asia Directorate of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and they discussed

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[62] E. Giunipero, *Fanfani e la Cina*, in Agostino Giovagnoli and Luciano Tosi, eds., *Amintore Fanfani e la Politica Estera Italiana*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2010, pp. 432–438.

[63] C. M. Rostagni, *Italia e Cina–un Secolo di Relazioni*, in «*Italogramma*», No. 2, 2012, p. 50.

[64] Ibid., p. 51.

[65] D Zucàro, *I Nodi della Politica Estera Italiana*, Milano, Sugarco, 1974, pp. 195–206.

how to normalize diplomatic relations between the two countries. On February 7, Gardini was received by Yi at the Chinese Embassy in Paris. The Italian representative declared that the purpose of this meeting was formally to communicate the text of Nenni's declarations regarding the recognition of the PRC and, at the same time, to seek the most effective procedure for discussing the normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations—in one of the capitals where both countries had a diplomatic presence, sending a dedicated Italian mission to Beijing or a dedicated Chinese mission to Rome[66].

The Chinese chargé d'affaires Yi Suzhi observed that if negotiations could be carried out in Paris, then there would be no need to send any dedicated missions elsewhere. Yi formally declared that the Beijing government had welcomed the intention expressed by the Italian government to move from commercial relations to the establishment of regular diplomatic relations, and, in order to achieve this result, it was necessary for the Italian side to accept the following principles: 1) to recognize the government of the People's Republic of China; 2) to recognize that the province of Taiwan is an integral part of Chinese territory and sever all relations with the Jiang Jieshi "clique"; and 3) to support the People's Republic of China in the re-establishment of its legitimate rights and place within the UN and no longer support the Jiang Jieshi "clique" within the UN itself[67].

Although the conditions were identical to those proposed to other countries wishing to normalize their relations with Communist China, the Chinese response showed that the negotiations would not be easy for Italy[68]. Nevertheless, formal negotiations between the two countries were started in Paris. It is noteworthy that, when, in January 1969, the Italian ambassador in Washington, Egidio Ortona, met with the former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Robert Murphy, the latter was anything but encouraging, and it was judged that such an Italian initiative could damage relations with respect to both Taiwan and the Soviet Union and with respect to the negotiations that were then underway in Paris for an end to the war in Vietnam[69]. Thus, publicly,

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[66] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Appunto sull'incontro tra un rappresentante dell'ambasciata d'Italia a Parigi e Yi Su Chih, 07/02/1969, p. 2.

[67] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Appunto sull'incontro tra un rappresentante dell'ambasciata d'Italia a Parigi e Yi Su Chih, 07/02/1969, p. 2.

[68] C. M. Rostagni, *Italia e Cina – un Secolo di Relazioni*, in «*Italogramma*», No. 2, 2012. p. 51.

[69] E. Ortona, *Anni d'America. La cooperazione 1967/1975*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989, p. 139.

the United States discouraged its allies from recognizing the PRC. Behind the scenes, however, informal contacts had been held for years between the United States and the PRC in Warsaw, where the two sides maintained a secret channel of communication throughout the 1960s[70].

Alexis Johnson, days before his official nomination as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, announced on January 28, 1969 that he did not exclude the possibility that the PRC could be admitted to the United Nations, provided that it did not insist on asking for the expulsion of Taiwan from the organization, thereby accepting the two-China principle[71]. For the US, it was necessary to maintain a certain ambiguity if only to calm possible internal reactions. However, for China, this option was categorically rejected. It was one of the key points of all the conversations that took place from 1969 until 1979, when the United States also accepted the terms of a resolution agreement[72]. Such oscillations or ambiguities in the American position towards China can be explained by the extreme instability of the general situation and even by the evolution of relations between China and the Soviet Union, as the 1950 alliance was by then a thing of the past[73].

In Beijing, however, there were serious hopes that the "American card" could be used effectively. They knew that as early as 1967, Richard Nixon, in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, had argued for a change in the policy toward China. After his election, Mao Zedong acted quickly in this direction[74]. This was the framework within which the initiative that Pietro Nenni intended to take was placed; it was not a preconceived American hostility towards the PRC but, on the contrary, an evident desire to start serious negotiations between the two countries. After all, other countries, such as France, had already recognized the PRC, and numerous other countries, including Canada, Belgium, Chile, and Lebanon, were also actively involved in negotiations along the same lines as Italy. Therefore, if the Italian initiative encountered apparent hostility from the US, in reality, it was acting in the same direction and would be used as an example by other American allies[75].

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[70] E. D. Nolfo, ed., *La Normalizzazione delle Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese*, Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2010, p. 8.

[71] Ibid., p. 9.

[72] Ibid., p. 11.

[73] Ibid., p. 9.

[74] Ibid., p. 12.

[75] Ibid., p. 13.

On the other hand, in this period, China was represented in Paris by one of the most significant exponents of the Chinese Communist Party, General Huang Zhen, and Italy was represented by Ambassador Francesco Malfatti di Montetretto, who would later become Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the highest-ranking career diplomatic post within the Italian foreign ministry. However, neither of them could appear in person in the preliminary phase, since, from the point of view of protocol, it was not up to ambassadors themselves to take such initiatives. Furthermore, Huang Zhen had been momentarily recalled to China, so Malfatti lacked an interlocutor of equal diplomatic rank[76].

Under these circumstances, on February 25, 1969, Italy and the PRC held their first official meeting. The Italian Minister Gardini recalled that the aim of both parties was obviously to reach the opening of their respective embassies in Rome and Beijing, and in order to reach this result, the following three phases should be overcome as soon as possible:

> "the two parties note an agreement on the principles on which each of them bases the establishment of diplomatic relations; the two governments will communicate their decisions to one other, releasing a joint statement; the two parties will exchange ideas on how, each on their own, they will motivate the public with respect to the agreement reached, in the face of requests for clarification, observations or criticisms that will be formulated after the publication of the statement"[77].

Gardini also referred to the previous Sino-French agreement to specify that, at the time of the agreement, it would be appropriate to provide a maximum term of three months, within which both countries should proceed to the actual sending of ambassadors[78]. With regard to the three principles proposed by the PRC, Gardini stated that, on the Italian side, the first and third were considered correct. As for the second, namely, the recognition of Taiwan

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[76] E. D. Nolfo, ed., *La Normalizzazione delle Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese*, Catanzaro, Rubbettino, 2010, p. 15.

[77] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del primo incontro che ha avuto luogo il 25 febbraio 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 19.15 fra i rappresentanti italiani ed i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 25/02/1969, p. 1.

[78] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del primo incontro che ha avuto luogo il 25 febbraio 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 19.15 fra i rappresentanti italiani ed i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 25/02/1969, p. 2.

as an integral part of Chinese territory and severing of all relations with the Jiang Jieshi "clique", it seemed entirely normal that it should be stated by the PRC and should not require a specific position by the Italian government. As far as Italy was concerned, the Italian government recognized the government of the PRC in Beijing as the government of China. It was also ready to accept all of the consequences derived from the establishment of regular diplomatic relations. Gardini then gave the floor to Councilor Michele Gaetano De Rossi, who further clarified that the recognition of the government of Beijing by Italy obviously excluded anything that would be in contradiction with such an act[79].

However, the Chinese Representative reiterated that the acceptance of the three basic principles by the Italian government was an important and prerequisite condition for the continuation of negotiations, resulting in the publication of the statement and the consequent opening of the respective embassies in Rome and Beijing. Yi Suzhi stated that, in any case, the PRC would never be willing to accept the so-called two-China concept. On this point in particular, he expressly requested that the Italian government take a very clear position[80]. The Italian Representative replied that he did not believe it would be useful to open a discussion of a legal nature on this subject but instead considered it appropriate to remain on the political level. He recalled that the attitude of the Italian government referred to a single fundamental principle, which consisted of the fact that Italy intended to recognize the government of the PRC as the sole government of China and to establish diplomatic relations with it. The consequences of this principle were multiple and affected both parties. If the Italian government were to make specific reference to the issue of Taiwan, the implicit and indirect consequences of the existence of another China could be drawn. Therefore, on the Italian side, "mention was made only of the government of the PRC which has its seat in Beijing and which is the sole government of China"[81]. The Italian

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[79] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del primo incontro che ha avuto luogo il 25 febbraio 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 19.15 fra i rappresentanti italiani ed i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 25/02/1969, p. 2.

[80] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del primo incontro che ha avuto luogo il 25 febbraio 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 19.15 fra i rappresentanti italiani ed i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 25/02/1969, p. 3.

[81] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del primo incontro che ha avuto luogo il 25 febbraio 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 19.15 fra i rappresentanti italiani ed i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 25/02/1969, pp. 3–4.

Representative further stated quite clearly that he considered the question of Taiwan as a Chinese problem: "you tell us which territory you declare to be China and our government responds that it recognizes the government of the PRC, which has explained what its territory is. And that is all."[82].

One of the reasons why the Chinese Representative insisted on the Italian negation of the concept of two Chinas was because the Italian government had previously presented a motion to the UN aimed at exploring the possibility of affirming the thesis of the two Chinas. Several declarations had been made to the UN, one in 1966 ("Both Chinas must have their representatives at the UN") and one in November 1968, on the occasion of the third presentation by Italy of the motion regarding the Study Committee ["The Italian proposal does not have the aim of favoring one or the other solution to the Chinese problem and considers the solution of the two Chinas possible"[83]. Moreover, the Italian Representative to the United Nations, Piero Vinci, had declared in November 1966 that "Taiwan is an independent and sovereign state of 12 million inhabitants", and, in the same month, the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Senator Giorgio Oliva, had also announced that "the problem will not be resolved until the Chinas of Beijing and Formosa are present at the UN"[84] .

Yi Suzhi reiterated that "it is necessary to know whether the Italian government will support motions at the UN that speak of two Chinas or of one China and one Taiwan." The Italian Representative replied that "the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs has asked me to communicate through you to the government of the PRC since last February, and I repeat it today, that the Italian government has decided to enter into contact with you for the purpose we know, that is to

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[82] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del primo incontro che ha avuto luogo il 25 febbraio 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 19.15 fra i rappresentanti italiani ed i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 25/02/1969, p. 4.

[83] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, pp. 4–5.

[84] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, p. 17.

establish diplomatic relations, knowing full well that there is only one China"[85]. Walter Gardini stipulated that "if in the past the Italian attitude at the UN on the Chinese problem was not well understood by you, we are here precisely to clarify things"[86].

Furthermore, regarding the status of Taiwan, the Italian Representative believed that it had a political aspect and a geographical aspect. As far as geography was concerned, there would be "no professors and geography experts in Italy who wanted to deny it"[87] The problem was, therefore, political, deciding which government to recognize as the legitimate government of China[88]. Gardini stated that "by the government of Rome recognizing the government of Beijing, the relationship of the government of Rome will be broken with those who still claim to be a Chinese government based in Taipei"[89]. In these circumstances, Yu Suzhi officially submitted the Chinese draft of the joint statement, hoping that the Italian government could accept it until an agreement would be reached on the matter[90].

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[85] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, p. 6.

[86] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, p. 9.

[87] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, p. 13.

[88] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, p. 14.

[89] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, p. 14.

[90] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del secondo incontro che ha avuto luogo l'11 aprile 1969 tra le ore 16 e le ore 20 ed il 12 aprile 1969 tra le ore 10 e le ore 13.45 fra i rappresentanti italiani e i rappresentanti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 11-12/04/1969, p. 24.

At this point, the Italian Ambassador Francesco Malfatti di Montetretto sent a report to Pietro Nenni, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, in which he suggested that it was important to take stock of the negotiations with China, and communicated that the Chinese asked them to state publicly that "Taiwan is an integral part of the territory of the PRC". For the Italian ambassador, the reasons for these requests were twofold. China knew that in the coming months, it would have to conduct similar negotiations with other countries. Thus, for Beijing, an immediate, firm affirmation was what interested it the most. In this respect, the negotiations with Italy were a test case for Beijing. Furthermore, China feared without an overt statement that the establishment of diplomatic relations with a country that, in recent years, had supported the two Chinas thesis might restrict its international action[91].

In this regard, Ambassador Francesco Malfatti di Montetretto proposed two ways to get out of this "dead point":

> "First, we could continue to reply that Italy will radically change its attitude and behave as if Taiwan were an integral part of the territory of the People's Republic of China…Second, we could try to force the timing. It is essential in this case that Italy…make declarations from which it can be deduced that our attitude on the problem of the two Chinas has radically changed"[92].

On this occasion, the Italian Foreign Minister, Pietro Nenni, transmitted, through the Head of Cabinet of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Chinese economic delegation in Rome, the observations on the Chinese draft of the joint statement, in which Nenni committed himself[5,93]. This position of promoting dialogue was subsequently carried forward by the new Italian Foreign Minister, Aldo Moro, without any changes. On September 12, 1969, he made a statement to the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies confirming that contacts with the government of the PRC were underway[94]. And again, on October 22, 1969, Minister Moro publicly declared that he

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[91] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Comunicazione dell'ambasciatore d'Italia a Parigi al ministro degli esteri Pietro Nenni, 13/04/1969, p. 1.

[92] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Comunicazione dell'ambasciatore d'Italia a Parigi al ministro degli esteri Pietro Nenni, 13/04/1969, pp. 2–3.

[93] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 08/12/1969, p. 10.

[94] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 16/09/1969, p. 2.

wished to confirm the "intention to recognize the government of Beijing and to establish diplomatic relations with it, and that contacts to this end are underway. It is in light of this that we are following with the greatest attention the debate at the UN on the Chinese problem"[95].

In the meeting of December 1969, the Italian Representative reiterated again that, on the question of the legitimate place of the PRC at the UN and the expulsion of Jiang Jieshi, "once the government of Beijing is recognized, Italy will be able to support at the UN only one motion that supports the rights of that government"[96]. Furthermore, he declared that the political principles that guide the Italian government in the conduct of international relations were based on a single constitutional principle of a general nature of the Italian Republic, and that was the search for peace and understanding among peoples. It was precisely in compliance with this principle that the Italian government accepted the invitation of the Chinese government to hold preliminary conversations for the establishment of normal diplomatic relations[97]. For many years, in fact, Italy had made the decision to recognize the PRC; as different Italian statesmen publicly declared on several occasions, the problem was not whether to recognize the People's Republic of China but when and how to establish normal diplomatic relations. The Italian Representative specified that, on the basis of all these elements of high political significance, he was able to tell the PRC that Italy had the firm intention of completing the work undertaken to establish "the best understanding between the two governments and the two peoples"[98].

At this point, the Chinese Representative stated that what had been confirmed by the Italian side demonstrated that the position of the Italian government on Chinese principles was not distant, even if certain points should still be clarified[99]. Furthermore, in a meeting between Ambassador Huang Zhen and Francesco Malfatti di Montetretto in September 1970, Huang had made it clear

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[95] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 08/12/1969, p. 4.

[96] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 08/12/1969, p. 10.

[97] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 08/12/1969, p. 19.

[98] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 08/12/1969, p. 20.

[99] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 08/12/1969, pp. 11–22.

to his counterpart that, contrary to what had been thought in previous years, now, "China had an enemy but this enemy… was not America, but the Soviet Union"[100]. The issue of the Sino-Soviet borders was linked to the conciliatory gestures made by the Nixon administration, with the resumption of the Warsaw talks and the words that Nixon had expressed to Congress in which he described the Chinese as a great and vital people who should not remain isolated from the international community. This oriented the analysis toward predictions regarding relations between the United States and China, relations conditioned, however, by the close alliance existing among Washington, Tokyo, and Taipei. Therefore, at that precise moment, it was clear why the PRC had to raise the issue of "territorial integrity" publicly: Taiwan was protected by the US and Japan. In a bold historical parallel, Malfatti argued that "Taiwan [was] for Beijing, in a certain sense, what Rome [had been] for Italy during the Risorgimento (the 19th-century Italian unification movement): the symbol and the testing ground of its national identity and its territorial integrity". No matter how historically incongruous, the parallel was dialectically effective. For Beijing, it was essential that diplomatic normalization with other countries should be accompanied by the recognition of Taiwan as part of the PRC. Italy could not escape this because China was aiming to create an important precedent for its future normalization of relations with Japan, Australia, and the US[101].

At this point, the PRC stated that the only remaining issue was the official joint statement that would announce the establishment of diplomatic relations. In order to draft it more efficiently, the Italian Representative launched the idea of announcing a joint Italian-Chinese statement with a text similar to the Franco-Chinese one of January 27, 1964, supplemented by subsequent unilateral declarations that each of the two governments could issue on its own behalf [102]. Gardini explained that, according to the Chinese proposal of the above-mentioned joint statement, the content was no longer limited to announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations but also contained substantial elements following the thesis supported by the Chinese side. It followed that it was necessary to explain to the Italian public the adherence to the Chinese thesis in the joint statement. The Italian Representative finally

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[100] E. D. Nolfo, ed., *La Normalizzazione delle Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese*, Catanzaro, Rubbettino, 2010, p. 35.

[101] Ibid., p. 35.

[102] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del quarto incontro che ha avuto luogo il 27 e 28 ottobre 1970 fra i rappresentanti dell'Italia e della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 28/10/1970, p. 3.

pointed out that, in order not to weigh down the text of the joint statement, the Italian government wished that, where possible, after the publication of the joint statement, it be publicly declared that the two governments would provide all necessary assistance for the opening and exercise of the functions of their diplomatic missions in their respective capitals and, subsequently, would agree through diplomatic channels on the settlement of all problems that remained pending between the two countries[103]. The PRC, represented by Tian Zhidong, Minister of Chinese Embassy in Paris, who arrived in 1970, stated that, in order to quickly conclude the negotiations between Italy and the PRC, the Beijing government had taken into account the Italian wishes and, therefore, took as a basis the Italian proposal—with some modifications—that referred to the joint Sino-Canadian statement of October 13, 1970[104].

The final meeting took place on October 30, 1970 between the representatives of Italy and the PRC at the Chinese Embassy in Paris. Except for some minor discussion on the content of the joint statement, the Italian Representative, Walter Gardini, agreed with Tian Zhidong, to conclude the official negotiations and to announce the normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations on November 6, 1970. On the Taiwan issue, it states,

> "The Chinese Government reaffirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China. The Italian Government takes note of this declaration of the Chinese Government"[105].

4. *Conclusion*

On November 6, 1970, after twenty-one months of formal negotiations, diplomatic relations between Italy and the PRC were finally normalized. It was

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[103] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del quarto incontro che ha avuto luogo il 27 e 28 ottobre 1970 fra i rappresentanti dell'Italia e della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 28/10/1970, p. 5.

[104] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto del quarto incontro che ha avuto luogo il 27 e 28 ottobre 1970 fra i rappresentanti dell'Italia e della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 28/10/1970, p. 14.

[105] ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Resoconto dell'incontro che ha avuto luogo il 31 ottobre 1970 fra i rappresentanti dell'Italia e della Repubblica Popolare di Cina presso la sede dell'ambasciata di quest'ultima in Parigi, 31/10/1970; E. D. Nolfo, ed., *La Normalizzazione delle Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese*, Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2010, pp. 205–207.

the end of a long process that began in the early 1950s within a framework of unofficial diplomacy or "people's diplomacy", and it required numerous changes of position and shifts on the part of the Italian authorities and public opinion towards Communist China, as well as changes in the broader Cold War landscape—notably the Sino-Soviet split and the beginning of US-China rapprochement.

For China, this represented a significant step towards global recognition by creating an important diplomatic precedent that it would use as a model in negotiations with other countries. Their repeated insistence on formal declarations which included reference to the PRC as the only China showed how important Italy's change of position was for them, and they did refer to it in their subsequent negotiations with countries such as Japan, Australia, and indeed the United States, when Communist China continued to insist on its position formulated during the previous negotiations with Italy[106].

For Italy, it was both a positive gain in terms of economic relations and a step out of the shadow of the United States in a way that, nevertheless, did not endanger world peace. Although voices had been calling for the recognition of the PRC since the early 1950s, which increased dramatically from 1964 onwards, it was not until an internal shift of power brought the parties of the left into the government coalition that the political drive towards recognition became possible. Indeed, their altered attitude towards the PRC helped to bring about a shift in the American position, thereby paving the way for the full recognition of the PRC at the UN as the "one China".

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[106] Y.Z. Li, *Deng Xiaoping and the Making of the August 17 Communique between China and the US*, in «Guangdong dangshi yu wenxian yanjiu (History and Literature Studies of the CCP Canton)», No. 3, 2024, pp. 83–94.

Abstract

Il 6 novembre 1970, il governo della Repubblica Popolare Cinese (RPC) e il governo della Repubblica Italiana firmarono un comunicato congiunto per stabilire le relazioni diplomatiche. Dopo la ritirata di Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) a Taiwan e la fondazione della Repubblica Popolare Cinese, l'Italia—come il resto del mondo—si trovò di fronte alla questione di come gestire le "due Cine". In assenza di relazioni diplomatiche, l'Italia e la RPC cercarono di ricorrere a una diplomazia non ufficiale o "popolare" per rafforzare i legami bilaterali sia a livello culturale che economico. Solo più tardi, quando gli equilibri della Guerra Fredda cambiarono—in particolare con la scissione sino-sovietica e il miglioramento delle relazioni tra Stati Uniti e Cina—il riconoscimento formale divenne possibile. Questo articolo presenterà l'evoluzione delle posizioni italiana e cinese, nonché le condizioni esterne e i dettagli dei colloqui diplomatici tra le due parti, e suggerirà che il riconoscimento formale della RPC da parte dell'Italia creò un importante precedente per i successivi negoziati con altri paesi occidentali, fino alla sua piena accettazione nelle Nazioni Unite.

Notes

1. From its foundation, the PRC adopted the policy of "leaning to one side", favoring the Soviet Union and the New Democracies, see 1949 September 21, "Mao Zedong's address to the Chinese People's Political Consultative," See Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1977, vol. 5, p. 17.
2. Among the most read are Carlo Cassola's *Viaggio in Cina*, Franco Fortini's *Asia maggiore*, Goffredo Parise's *Cara Cina*, Gianfranco Vigorelli's *Domande e risposte per la nuova Cina*, and Curzio Malaparte's *Io in Russia e in Cina*. See Cocurullo Michelangelo, *La cortina di bambù. La Cina nei reportages italiani della seconda metà del Novecento*, Sestri Levante, Gammarò editori, 2007.
3. This was confirmed by Mario Filo della Torre, former Italian consul in Tianjin, China. See the historic archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archivio storico del minister degli Affari esteri, hereafter ASMAE), *s. Affari politici (1950–1957)*, b. 1434, f. *Appunti Cina, Appunto per l'uff. V della direzione degli affari politici* [1953].
4. See *Camera dei Deputati, Atti parlamentari, II Legislatura, Discussioni*, sedute 14 ottobre 1954.
5. Only on July 2, 1969 did the two countries resume courtesy contact, increasing in number from September 16 onwards. See ASMAE, Fondo Ambasciata d'Italia in Parigi, b. 152. Conversazioni italo-cinesi, 02/1969–03/1970, pp. 1–2.

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Italia
Cina
Relazioni Sino-Italiane
Guerra Fredda
Diplomazia

On November 6, 1970, the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Government of the Italian Republic signed a joint statement establishing diplomatic relations. Following Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-Shek) retreat to Taiwan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Italy—like the rest of the world—faced the question of how to deal with the "two Chinas". In the absence of diplomatic relations, Italy and the PRC sought to use unofficial or "people's diplomacy" to strengthen bilateral relations at both the cultural and economic levels. Only later, as the Cold War balance shifted—notably the Sino-Soviet split and improving US-China relations—did formal recognition become possible. This article presents the evolution of the Italian and Chinese positions, as well as the external conditions and details of the diplomatic conversations between the two parties, and will suggest that the formal recognition of the PRC by Italy created an important precedent for subsequent negotiations with other Western countries, leading up to its formal acceptance into the UN.

KEYWORDS

Italy
China
Sino-Italian relations
Cold War
Diplomacy