Italian Filmmakers in China after 1949: Transnational cinema and its cultural, economic, and political implications

by

Stefano Bona

Thesis
Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

6 March 2018

Table of Contents

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Stefano Bona, 6 March 2018

Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on Italian Film Studies and the role of Italian cinema in a transnational and translocal context.

To this purpose, it exposes the case histories of Italian filmmakers working in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and their representation of that country, its culture, and its people. Since 1957, for about three decades, Italian filmmakers were among the first, few Western directors allowed to shoot feature-length films (both documentaries and fiction films) and TV miniseries in the PRC. Then, after an almost 20-year-long cinematic absence from the PRC, in 2004 Italy signed a co-production agreement with China. This agreement became fully effective only ten years later.

This study analyses the six productions made by Italian directors in the PRC and internationally distributed between 1957 and 2014, when the co-production agreement becoming effective. The analysis covers aspects of their genesis, production, visual and narrative contents, meaning and reception, paying special attention to the historical context and cross-cultural aspects of each film. The six productions are:

- *La muraglia cinese / Behind the Great Wall* (Carlo Lizzani, 1958)
- *Chung kuo / China* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1972)
- *Marco Polo* (TV miniseries, Giuliano Montaldo, 1982)
- *The last emperor* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987)
- *La stella che non c'è* / *The missing star* (Gianni Amelio, 2006)
- *Two tigers* (Sandro Cecca, 2007).

Investigating the experiences of these filmmakers over a span of six decades also becomes a way to illustrate the challenges and opportunities that new and future co-productions are likely to

meet, from the planning phase through to distribution in China, which is soon expected to become the world's largest market for the cinema industry.

Keywords: China, co-productions, Italy, Italian cinema, orientalism, transnational cinema, translocalism

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all those individuals and institutions who helped me to develop this study, be it through funding, conversations, interviews, or simply a cup of coffee at the right moment – it also had its importance! Without them, the completion of this project would have been impossible.

Starting with institutions, I acknowledge the contribution of the Australian Postgraduate Awards in this thesis and any publications that arise directly from this study undertaken during this research higher degree candidature. I am extremely grateful to Flinders University and its College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, which allowed me to work on a long-term project and develop my academic skills. The Australasian Centre for Italian Studies (ACIS) has also been extremely supportive in allowing me to carry out my field work and present my research at relevant conferences. I would also like to acknowledge the role of the Italian Benevolent Foundation and of the Association of Italian Researchers in Australia – SA (ARIA SA) in supporting my research and giving me the opportunity to discuss it in front of a non-specialist audience. Thanks also to the Italian state broadcaster RAI for allowing me to access their archives, and to the Cineteca Nazionale for letting me watch one of the few available copies of Carlo Lizzani's *La muraglia cinese.*

As for individuals, I shall list dozens of names and hope not to leave anyone out. Firstly, special thanks to my supervisors Luciana d'Arcangeli and Mike Walsh, who managed to guide me and put me back on track at times when I was missing the point. Thanks also to Kerrie Le Lievre for her precious and meticulous editing work. My heartfelt gratitude goes also to Paul and Remo Ambrosini and their families, to Mario Andreacchio, Jana Anvari, Laura Argento, Simon and Sue Ball, Beatrice Barbieri, Maria Barbieri, Linetto Basilone, Sergio Basso, Peter Beaglehole, Luca Bigazzi, Emilia Bonzi, Eric Bouvet, Tara Brabazon, Clara Bulfoni, Jan Byrne, Sandro Cecca, Carolina

Castro Huercano, Gourav Chopra, Andrea Cicini, Daniela Cosmini, Marco Dalla Gassa, Carmine De Pasquale, Enrico Di Addario, Antonio Dottore, Matteo Dutto, Julia Erhart, Graham Fordham, Jeffrey Gil, Diana Glenn, Maria Grazia Gismondi, Melinda Graefe, Pamela Graham, Gerry Groot, Alice Healy, Cassandra Hood, Maggie Ivanova, Karen Jacobs, John Kinder, Jeffrey Kong, Lucetta Lanfranchi, Alessandra Lavagnino, Flavia Laviosa, Aihui Li, John Long, Laura Lori, Marco Lucchi, Anne Luszesky, Simone Marino, Carmelo Marmo, Marinella Marmo, Daniele Mattioli, Alessandro Minisola, Gino Moliterno, Giuliano Montaldo, David Moss, Colette Mrowa-Hopkins, Keiko Nakao, Stefano Nava, Ignazia Nespolo, Matteo Paiato, Jinmin Park, Sergio Pelone, Rodrigo Praino, Melanie Prior, Ian Ravenscroft, Madeleine Regan, Ken Rippin, Heather Robinson, Viridiana Rotondi, Natalia Sanjuan Bornay, Paolo Saporito, Beppe Severgnini, Michele Soranzo, Antonella Strambi, Herbert Schwartz, Giorgio Tinazzi, Luciano Tovoli, Graham Tulloch, Marta Valentini, Lara Vanderstaay, Alessandro Vecchiarelli, Duncan Vecchiarelli, Vito Zagarrio, Houman Zandi-Zadeh, and Gaoheng Zhang. Special thanks also to my family, in particular my parents Egidio and Mariangela, my brother Alberto and my wife Shilin for always being on my side. And welcome to Leonardo, who arrived just in time to accompany me through the final stages of this work.

Finally, I would like to thank and remember a person who opened his door to me. Carlo Di Carlo (1938-2016) welcomed me – a perfect stranger – into his home, and shared with me everything he could about Antonioni and Pasolini. He was knowledgeable, passionate and incredibly warmhearted. I will always live with the memory of his Roman apartment, whose walls were covered with books on cinema and photographs of his past that were the testimony of an important yet overlooked scholar and filmmaker.

Introduction

> ***"No transnational cinema exists without encountering and negotiating national spaces and cultures."*** (Chris Berry)

Films shot by Italian directors in the People's Republic of China (PRC) offer the possibility of going well beyond their apparent scope.[1] Their cultural, economic and political realities open a window on what we call today transnational cinema – a cinema that goes beyond the traditional national and cultural borders. They form a compelling case-study in outlining a theoretical framework for the role Italian cinema can play in the new global context, for at least two reasons. First, these productions have played a key role in the practical redefinition of the very concept of 'Italian Cinema'. Second, they showcase the transition from a phase in which the world economy was dominated by Western countries to one in which new global and regional powers are playing a major role, with obvious implications for the film industry.

Both of these issues share a common denominator: globalisation, a term that political scientist Manfred B. Steger defines as "the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space", implying "tight global economic, political,

---

[1] **Note on citations, translations from Italian and romanisation of Chinese names.** In the present work I make use of the APA6 referencing system. Therefore, for reasons of uniformity, only the first word is capitalised in film, book, and article titles, regardless of their original form.

Quotes from sources written or spoken in Italian have been translated in English by me. Footnote reminders will be used to remark when the original text is in Italian.

Finally, Chinese names will be written in accordance with the pinyin system, which is the official phonetic transcription method adopted by the PRC. Only one exception will occur: 'Chung kuo', which is used in the title of Antonioni's documentary (instead of 'Zhongguo'). While names of people and locations do not need a translation, all the original film and article titles, as well as the names of relevant Chinese institutions will also be translated in English and written in simplified characters. Their romanisation will also include tones.

cultural and environmental interconnections and flows that make most of the existing borders and boundaries irrelevant" (Steger, 2013, pp. 9, 15). This phenomenon is bringing widespread changes everywhere, and the PRC is one of its major protagonists. China's rise to the ranks of the top economic powers by means of an unprecedented four-decade growth since 1978 has impacted Western countries' – the dominant economies for large part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – perception of a culture that was previously 'other' to them.[2] As a form of art, but also as a capital-intensive industry, the film industry is also being affected by these changes, and China is one of its key players. Several Western countries have signed co-production agreements with the PRC, and the emergence in the early twenty-first century of large Chinese private film production companies such as the Wanda Group, Huayi Brothers, Enlight Media and Bona Film Group,[3] along with powerful state-owned producers and distributors such as the China Film Group, has injected fresh capital into the industry on a global scale.[4]

Co-productions are not a new occurrence, as they were already widely used by Western European countries in the 1950s and 1960s, with Italy and France at the forefront.[5] What is new is that recent co-productions are being made between two or more countries that share few cultural affinities, and co-productions with China in particular are currently the only viable pathway for foreign films to improve their chances of being distributed in the barely accessible, yet extremely attractive and competitive, Chinese market. Thus the identification of national cinemas has become more complex, giving way to the development of concepts such as transnational cinema and translocal cinema, which will be discussed in next section.

Italy is an all-round example of these changes. From a socio-cultural perspective, it can claim an ancient, though intermittent, tradition of contact with China. Its persistent economic stagnation

---

[2] As a study by Angus Maddison showed in 1998, this phenomenon seems to be a readjustment to conditions pre-existing the Industrial Revolution, when China had been for centuries the world's leading economy in terms of GDP share (Maddison, 1998, pp. 11, 13, 40; *Economist*, 2010).

[3] There is no connection between the Bona Film Group and the author of this thesis.

[4] Bona Film Group, for instance, is also trading on the Nasdaq exchange (Cain, 2012) and Wanda is carrying out international acquisitions of movie theatres and production companies.

[5] Regarding European co-productions, see Gili (2014, pp. 211-218).

since the late 1990s contrasts with China's enduring growth, which echoes Italy's economic miracle in the 1950s and 1960s on a thirtyfold scale, and this situation has had inevitable repercussions for its film production. Moreover, Italian cinema – a term to be used with due care on the basis of what has just been discussed – has continued to play a significant pilot role in political, diplomatic and artistic relations between Western countries and the PRC. In the half-century between 1957 and 2006, six internationally-distributed productions were shot in China by Italian directors:

- *La muraglia cinese / Behind the Great Wall* (Carlo Lizzani, filmed on location in 1957 and released in 1958, produced by Astra Cinematografica and Leonardo Bonzi).[6] This was the first feature documentary ever shot by a Western filmmaker in the PRC. It portrays daily life in a number of different geographical areas, from north to south, using mostly rural settings and a limited number of urban settings.
- *Chung kuo – Cina* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1972, produced by RAI – Radio Televisione Italiana). Antonioni was one of the first Western directors to complete a feature documentary in China during the Cultural Revolution, and focused on the 'new man' created by it.[7] His film also shows daily life across the PRC, although in a limited number of locations and adopting a style which, in comparison with *La muraglia cinese*, appears closer to a travelogue.
- *Marco Polo* (Giuliano Montaldo, filmed on location in 1981 and released in 1982). This eight-hour-long work was broadcast as a television film in over seventy countries and projected in a different cut as a six-hour feature film in Chinese cinemas. It was strongly backed by both the Italian and the Chinese governments at a point when China was starting to open up its economy to foreign investors. The use of the famous Venetian merchant as a cinematic subject in that moment had strong diplomatic implications, and Montaldo's *Marco Polo* set a precedent as the first co-production between several

[6] Film and book titles are cited according to APA format, regardless of the capitalisation in original titles.

[7] Antonioni, 1974, p. IX.

Western countries, Japan and the PRC.[8] Because of its cross-media nature, and also because Montaldo himself considered *Marco Polo* a film (Agostini, 1979, pp. 22, 24), in the present study it will be referred to both as a film and as a television film or miniseries.

- *The last emperor* (Bernardo Bertolucci, filmed in 1986 and released in 1987). This epic British-Chinese co-production – also occasionally broadcast in episodes – follows the life of Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, through his youth as a child-emperor to his adulthood. Bertolucci's work, which won nine Academy Awards in 1988, was the first Western fiction feature film about a Chinese protagonist to be shot in the PRC, and shot extensively in the Forbidden City in Beijing.[9]
- *La stella che non c'è / The missing star* (Gianni Amelio, filmed in 2005 and released in 2006, Italian-Swiss-Singaporean co-production). This contemporary road-movie tracks an Italian metal-worker's trip to industrial China. The film deals with his relationship with a young Chinese interpreter and single mother, and questions the Italian social situation at the beginning of the new millennium.
- *Two tigers* (Sandro Cecca, filmed in 2006 and released in 2007, Italian independent production). This work marks a change from the previous films' documentary and art cinema approaches. It is a low-budget erotic thriller shot in Shanghai, about the encounter between two women, one a Western professional killer working for an international organisation, and the other, her Asian neighbour who works from home as a prostitute.

Although other Italian directors shot films in China before and after those years, my selection has been limited to movies completed after the proclamation of the PRC and before the ratification of

[8] *Marco Polo* was co-produced by RAI and Vides Cinematografica (Italy), NBC and Procter & Gamble (USA), Tokyo Broadcasting System (Japan) and CCAA (China). Retrieved from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083446/companycredits?ref_=tt_dt_co

[9] *The last emperor* was funded by the British independent producer Jeremy Thomas and five European banks, and its original title is in English (Knoedelseder, 1988). Shots of the Forbidden City had already appeared in Antonioni's documentary and Montaldo's *Marco Polo*.

the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement in 2013, for reasons of contextual uniformity and a well-defined historical timeframe.[10]

The above set of films follows a clear trend. The early works were undoubtedly national in terms of their mode of production (producers, crew, directors and editors were all Italian), and featured transnational content (specifically a producer and crew from the Republic of Italy visiting the PRC) in decades when Western audiences needed to 'explore' the new Maoist China. The more recent films - shot when post-Maoist China and Western nations were consolidating their relations and in the following decades when China became a key player in the global economy - showed transnational characteristics on the production side also, as they featured a blend of producers, cast and crews from multiple nations. This trend is expected to gain momentum thanks to the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement, which will be thoroughly examined in this study.

Simultaneously with these transformations within the industry, the discipline of Italian Film Studies has also been changing, and now seems to be moving in two main, though not conflicting, directions. On the one hand, it has abandoned the idea that only a few canonical films (in particular, Neorealist films) are worthy of academic attention, and decided instead that Italian national cinema in its entirety is the product and expression of a popular national culture. On the other, it has embraced an approach that considers the redefinition of Italian cinema beyond its national borders and its relations with other cultures.[11] Especially after World War II, from *Germania anno zero / Germany, Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948) onwards, the list of Italian films shot outside of Italy could well include not only single films but also entire genres such as the Spaghetti Westerns, the *Mondo* shockumentaries, the Bud Spencer & Terence Hill slapstick comedies, and so on. The relevance of Italian films shot in the PRC lies in their approach to a

[10] The most notable case of an Italian filmmaker in China before 1949 was that of director and producer Amerigo Enrico Lauro (1879–1937), who worked there for over thirty years from the early 1900s and established his production company in Shanghai. In the present, recent films shot in the PRC by Italian directors include the co-produced comedy *C'è sempre un perché / There is Always a Reason*, official Chinese title: *事出有姻 Shì chū yǒu yīn* (directed by Dario Baldi in 2012, but not yet released as of September 2017) and Cristiano Bortone's *Caffè* (2016). The latter is the first official co-production completed under the new agreement). For this reason, it will be further discussed in the Conclusion. The agreement will also be examined in Section 1.5 and the Conclusion.

[11] These two perspectives are intertwined and will be discussed further in the next section of this Introduction.

specific foreign context which is geographically and culturally distant from the Eurocentric and Americanised educational background of Italians. The relevance of these films has become even more intriguing since well-known contemporary Chinese directors have openly talked about the influence of some Italian directors – particularly Antonioni – on their own *oeuvre* (Pollacchi, 2014, pp. 7-21).

All these considerations set the conditions to raise two major questions: first, why did some Italian directors decide to make feature films in the PRC, and second, how did they do so, in terms of both production history and the visual/textual representation of China? To answer these questions, this thesis will illustrate the degree to which the social, political and cultural context influenced these filmmakers' portrayals of China, though a first key definition is needed at this stage. Representation is here used to mean a constructed image of reality, with the implication that "every representation is partial and contingent" (Correia Gil, 2014, pp. 470-471). The social construction of representation has been noted by sociologist Pierre Sorlin, who wrote that "[m]ost representational works, be they novels or plays, paintings or audiovisual creations, provide glimpses into the world in which they have been conceived" (Sorlin, 1966, pp. 3-4). On this basis, the analysis and comparison of the six productions considered in the present study reveals changes in Italians' understanding of the PRC over six crucial decades that were characterised by dramatic changes both in Italy and China, including the reversal of their economic roles.

To clarify the theories that underpin this dissertation, the following section will examine the connection between the already-sketched evolution of Italian Film Studies and the concepts of Orientalism, transnationalism and translocality, as well as image perception and international relations. This will be followed by an excursus on methodological issues and study delimitations, an outline of the present work, and considerations on the relevance of this research.

Theories, reasons, and definitions

Criticism, academy and film industry

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, several Italian auteur films obtained worldwide acclaim. Neorealist films such as Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta / Rome, open city* (1945)

and *Paisà* (1948) and Vittorio De Sica's *Sciuscià / Shoeshine* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette / Bicycle thieves* (1948) won numerous international awards and were screened from America to China. In these years cinema became a mass phenomenon in Italy, and figures suggest that Italians became the most enthusiastic of European moviegoers. By 1955, Italy had 10,570 screens, considerably more than the 5,688 in France and 4,483 in the United Kingdom. Theatres were opened not only in major cities but also in working-class suburbs and smaller towns. Thus, the demand for and production of popular films expanded as the Italian film industry actively reacted to this trend (Bayman & Rigoletto, 2013, pp. 3, 4). The critical establishment, though, overlooked for decades this booming production, which it deemed excessively detached from "the true centre of life" (Bayman & Rigoletto, 2013, p. 13), and focussed its attention on the positive influence of Neorealism on the success of Italian cinema abroad (Cannella, 1973, p. 7). Several attempts to implement a change to this approach were made in the 1960s and 1970s, when a new transnational intellectual climate began to challenge the established order.[12] Italian Film Studies was introduced as an academic discipline by "self-taught Italian film teachers in the '70s and '80s, working within departments of language and literature" in Italy and in Anglophone countries (Marcus, 2011, in O'Leary & O'Rawe, 2011, p. 122). To have Italian cinema accepted within the academy, teachers and academics had to remain anchored to an auteur-based approach focussing on the prestige of Neorealism, including its closest offshoots of political cinema and the *commedia all'italiana* (Marcus, 2011, in O'Leary & O'Rawe, 2011, p. 122).[13] As a consequence, films from other periods and genres were neglected and considered of minor importance, as bearers of inferior cultural content (O'Leary &O'Rawe, 2011, pp. 109-111).

In 2009, however, a systematic disciplinary re-evaluation began when *The Italianist* journal commenced publishing a yearly cinema issue to examine "current trends in Italian film studies" (Marcus & O'Leary, 2009, p. 173). Following this breakthrough, a lively, and still ongoing, debate was sparked by a series of new, sometimes polemical, proposals ranging from a re-evaluation of

[12] The intellectual climate of this period will be discussed in Chapter 1.

[13] Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe (2011, p. 108) note that "(…) all Italian films started to be measured against neorealist films: a film was evaluated according whether it posited a progressive cultural function for the cinema or was a regression into escapist entertainment".

popular Italian cinema to the analysis of a new political Italian cinema.[14] What is being proposed, in simple words, is to look beyond auteur cinema and

> treat Italian cinema as a unitary phenomenon (*all* cinema is popular art); or, if we prefer, as a multiple set of phenomena that contains versions of realism as it does any number of other modes or moments, but not in any position of authority or origin. (O'Leary & O'Rawe, 2011. p. 116)

The need to rediscuss Italian cinema within the academy also gave way to other scholars' attempts to structure an interdisciplinary approach to this subject, by creating a space open to debate between academics and directors, and also cinema and media. Thus in 2012, Flavia Laviosa founded the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, whose aim is to create an alternative to the traditional perception of Italian cinema as a "subdomain of literary or cultural studies". In particular,

> The journal will elaborate a multifaceted definition of Italian cinema, transcending geo-ethnic land and sea borders and moving away from merely celebratory local cinematic experiences. Epochal transformations since 1989 have reconfigured Italy's translocality and its cinema has become quintessentially global, artistically perceptive and alert, receptive and responsive to international influences. (Laviosa, 2012, pp. 315-316)

The above 'translocality' (or 'translocalism') perspective assumes "socio-spatial dynamics and processes of simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries — including, but also extending beyond, those of nation states" (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 373). In other terms, it

[14] The publication of *The Italianist* cinema issue opened a Pandora's Box. A roundtable on "Framing crisis and rebirth of Italian cinema" was held at the University of Warwick in 2010 (Bonsaver, 2010, p. 288), and numerous publications followed soon after. Details of the current debate are not relevant here, but it is worthwhile mentioning the new proposals. These include: Brizio-Skov, F. (2011). *Popular Italian cinema: culture and politics in a postwar society*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris; Marlow-Mann, A. (2011). *The new Neapolitan cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; O'Leary, A. (2011). *Tragedia all'italiana: Italian cinema and Italian terrorisms: 1970-2010*. Oxford: Peter Lang; O'Leary, A. & O'Rawe, C. (2011). Against realism: on a 'certain tendency' in Italian film criticism. *Journal of modern Italian studies*, 16(1) 107–128; Perra, E. (2011). *Conflicts of memory: the reception of Holocaust films and TV programmes in Italy, 1945 to the Present*. Oxford: Peter Lang; Hope, W., d'Arcangeli, L. & Serra, S. eds (2013). *Un nuovo cinema politico Italiano? Volume I: lavoro, migrazione, relazioni di genere,* Leicester: Troubador; Hope, W., Serra, S. & d'Arcangeli, L. eds (2014), *Un nuovo cinema politico Italiano? Volume II: il passato sociopolitico*, *il potere istituzionale, la marginalizzazione*, Leicester: Troubador; Bondanella, P. ed. (2014), *The Italian cinema book*. London: British Film Institute; Bayman, L. & Rigoletto, S. (2013). *Popular Italian cinema*. Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

focusses on situations of "connectedness, flows, networks, rhizomes, decentredness, and deterritorialization", as well as on the creation of a place's identity through its interactions with the "outside" (Oakes & Schein, 2006, pp. 1, 2; Massey, 1994, p. 169, as cited by Oakes & Schein, 2006, pp. 1, 2). Although cinema abounds in translocal practices (Zhang 2010, pp. 136, 137) and the relevance of translocal cinema shall be acknowledged here, I contend that a discussion on filmmaking in a context where official international relations largely occur between sovereign nation-states shall focus on the concept of transnationalism.

This has been widely used by geographers and anthropologists since the 1990s to reflect the ongoing globalisation of economy powered by large transnational corporations (Ley, 2009, p. 388). The same term has been applied to recent migration patterns that follow the global movement of capital (Ley, 2009). Inevitably, it has also become part of academic discussions in the field of Film Studies, ever since the term 'transnational cinema' was introduced in the late 1990s with reference to the emerging production and consumption of Chinese cinema beyond the borders of the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Higbee & Lim, 2010, pp. 10-11; Fu & Indelicato, 2017, p. 47). Over the years, attempts to define transnational cinema have created a profusion of meanings, and the term has often been used acritically as a synonym for 'world cinema' (Berry, 2010, p. 111).[15] To overcome this problem, in 2010 Higbee and Lim formulated the idea of 'critical transnationalism', meaning "the interface between global and local, national and transnational, thus moving away from a binary approach to national/transnational" (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 10). Soon after this, Chris Berry added that "no transnational cinema exists without encountering and negotiating national spaces and cultures" (Berry, 2010, p. 112). In other words, there is no contradiction between the concepts of global and local, transnational and national cinema: they co-exist, and they feed each other. The national value of cinema is an old phenomenon dating back to the 1910s, when the industry – born as a mere form of entertainment – was transformed along

[15] Gledhill and Williams' even theorised the concept of the dissolution of Western Film Studies into "transnational theorisation" (Chow, 2001, p. 1386). To highlight the importance of this debate, the journal *Transnational Cinemas* was established in 2010.

national lines for economic and political reasons, with Hollywood becoming the main reference point ever since (Sorlin, 1996, p. 2; Vitali & Willemen, 2006, p. 3).[16]

However, events occurred in these latest years such as changes in filming and communication technologies, and the increasingly international flows of capital in the film and television industries have

> re-posed the question of the suitability of the nation-state as a productive way of categorizing clusters of film. Under the pressure of vague notions of 'globalisation', the competitive industrial logic that had informed national film historiographies came to be perceived as an obstacle to the understanding of a film's actual mode of functioning. (Vitali & Willemen, 2006, p. 4)

With these concepts in mind, this thesis follows the approach of O'Regan (1999), Shaw (2013) and Hobbs (2015), based on the notion of filmmaking as a flow of "concepts, texts, personnel, filmmaking practices and reception cultures" – and, I would add, capital – across the borders of nation-states (Hobbs, 2015, p. 35).

Recalling the above mentioned idea that there is no contradiction between national and transnational, it may be argued that transnationality has been a major trait of Italian cinema for decades with regard to cultural mixes in film production and film-making. Well-known Italian cinematographers, composers and costume designers have worked across national borders for years, with their efforts resulting in forms of cultural hybridisation in terms of both content and genres (such as the invention of the Spaghetti Western) and production mode (Italian-foreign crews, mixes of Italian and foreign actors on set, and so on). Producers such as Carlo Ponti, Franco Cristaldi and Dino De Laurentiis were active in Hollywood and in several European countries, as were stars including Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida and Vittorio De Sica. The Spaghetti Western phenomenon of the 1960s saw a rich concoction of Hollywood finance, imported stars and re-named Italian actors, cheap locations such as Spain, and international distribution. In television, the Italian State broadcaster RAI has also been active on the international market. Although the transnationality of the Italian film industry has been traditionally oriented toward Hollywood and

[16] For a comprehensive overview of national cinemas, see Crofts (2006, pp. 44-57).

Europe, Italian filmmakers and producers did not neglect more 'exotic' locations like Brazil, India, Indonesia, and the largely unknown PRC. Moreover the present-day Italian film industry – heavily burdened by a long-lasting economic crisis and with the historic Cinecittà studios constantly on the verge of being shut down – needs to broaden its horizons and look for (financial, artistic) opportunities in new directions.[17] China, by now a major player in the global economy, may be one of these.

Considering the potential opportunities in the large Chinese movie market and the obstacle of quotas imposed on foreign films, at least 12 other countries from Belgium to Australia have signed co-production agreements with China, and studios from Hollywood to Germany have established partnerships with the PRC.[18] In this context, the Italian film industry is trying to promote its image and attract Chinese investors on an unprecedented scale. An Italian-Chinese co-production agreement to boost the two countries' cooperation in the audiovisual sector was signed in 2004 and became effective in 2014 once the procedural rules and standards for implementation had been finalised. In July 2013, the Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche Audiovisive e Multimediali / Italian National Film, Audiovisual and Multimedia Industry Association (ANICA) set up a liaison office in Beijing, and three co-productions were set to be filmed in China. These were the features *The Everlasting Moment* (co-written and directed by Maurizio Sciarra and Ni Zhen) and *Hibiscus* (written by Paolo Logli and Alessandro Pondi), and the documentary *China Loves Italy*, directed by Ignazio Agosta (Laviosa, 2014: 3). Further events were organised to attract Chinese investors, including the first China Day at the Rome Film Festival in November 2013, following which fourteen Chinese productions were scheduled to be filmed in Italy (Rome Film Festival, 2013; Bona, 2015, p. 393).[19] Further China Days and China Film Forums followed at the Rome and Venice Film Festivals in 2014, 2015 and 2016 (Mazzanti, 2016). To underline the

[17] Details of the Italian movie market will be discussed in Chapter 1.

[18] China is expected to become the world's largest movie market during 2017 (Garrahan, 2015). Import quotas were limited to 20 films per year until 2012, when in an agreement with WTO China increased this figure to 34 per year on a revenue-sharing basis. This is expected to further increase in 2017 (Coonan, 2014). More on co-productions will be discussed in Chapter 1.

[19] The real results of the agreement, though, are to be evaluated in terms of the films' critical and commercial success rather than in the mere number of projects undertaken.

transnational approach to Italian-Chinese connections, it is worth noting that some of these China Forums were organised in partnership with Bridging the Dragon, a recently-established association based in Berlin that aims to connect European and Chinese film professionals at major international film festivals (Bridging the Dragon, n.d.).[20]

To sum up, these changes in the Italian film industry appear to confirm the necessity for a more comprehensive approach to Italian Film Studies. This approach should consider all Italian cinema to be worthy of academic attention, not only as a national product but also as a phenomenon charged with a noticeable transnational dimension. These considerations make it possible to adopt a perspective that considers the geographical and cross-cultural side of filmmaking. They also make it possible to shed new light on a part of Italian cinema that has so far been overlooked by scholarship: the films shot in the PRC by Italian directors.

The importance of studying Italian filmmakers in China

The fascination with China felt by some Italian filmmakers is part of a larger trend both at home and abroad, and represents a significant cultural variable in the widely-studied economic and political understanding of China. In particular, Chinese films have been a constant presence at the Venice Film Festival for decades, and since 1999 Italy has hosted the Far East Film Festival in the city of Udine. This interest is part of a larger pattern of increasing European and North American attraction to the representation of 'Asianness' and to East Asian cinema (Chow, 2001, p. 1393). Such attraction is not limited to cinema and has deep roots. The need for Western cultures to define their own identity through the comparison with 'othered' cultures is a phenomenon labelled as Orientalism by Edward Said:

[20] After the co-production agreement was finalised, a link to a comprehensive bilingual *Guida al sistema audiovisivo italiano /意大利影视产业指南/ A guide to the Italian audio-visual system* was published in 2015 on the ANICA website homepage (www.anica.it). The same guide is also available in both languages on Italian and Chinese institutional websites, such as those of the Italian consulate in Shanghai and of the Chinese Film Co-production Corporation (http://sedi2.esteri.it/sitiweb/ConsShangai/commerciale/cina_guida_al_sistema_audiovisivo_italiano.pdf and http://www.cfcc-film.com.cn/assets/ueditor/php/upload/20150728/14380664037481.pdf respectively). The co-production agreement and its future will be fully discussed in Section 1.6 and the Conclusion. The Bridging the Dragon project will also be further discussed in the Conclusion.

> [T]he Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. (Said, 1978/1991, pp. 1–2)

Orientalism is a "political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (Said, 1978/1991, p. 43). As such, it is a form of Western social introspection implying a dual stance: on the one side, the idea of European – and, by extension, Western – identity as superior to all non-European/non-Western peoples and cultures (Said, 1978/1991, p. 7), and on the other the need to understand 'them' in order to understand 'us' through a process philologist Mikhail Bakhtin called 'creative understanding', which has outsidedness as its driving force:

> In the realm of culture, outsidedness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (…). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings. (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 6-7)

Paul Willemen has added that

> [C]reative understanding requires a thorough knowledge of at least two cultural spheres. It is not simply a matter of engaging in a dialogue with some other culture's products, but of using one's understanding of another cultural practice to re-perceive and rethink one's own cultural constellation at the same time. (Willemen, 2006, pp. 36-7)

This approach has turned into an urgent necessity in the era of globalisation, during which industrial production in the West has been displaced by the rise of so-called developing countries. Specifically, the rise of China is forcing the West to rethink itself as it deals with other cultures and to question its perception of the dramatic transformations China has experienced. As Qing Cao suggests, this process is loaded with political and diplomatic implications: "perceptions and images are important dimensions of international relations and a contributing factor in conflict or peace", therefore "[u]nderstanding the production, circulation and reception of China's image is critical to China-Western relations" (Cao, 2014, p. 4). Drawing on semiotics and citing Hartley (1992, p. 265) and Hall (1997, p. 17), Cao also contends that image should be understood as the "perceived

reputation" or "public impression" of reality, rather than its mere "visual representation", and that representation – meaning the "production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language" – is a political construct with a central role in the production of culture (Cao, 2014, p. 5).

The relations between Italy and China therefore comprise a significant case study, and statistics suggest that the two countries can be considered two faces of the changes brought by globalisation. The most evident of these changes is industrialisation: in the twenty-five years between 1990 and 2014, China's industrial production averaged an impressive 13% yearly growth, while the mean growth of Italy's industrial production was -0.3% (Trading Economics, 2015a; 2015b). Between 2000 and 2013 China's GDP rose by an aggregate 138%, while Italy's increased by a modest 3.6% (World Bank 2015).

Despite these dramatic differences, Italy and China share a past of long-term, though not continuous, relations, and it may be argued that Italy was among the first European cultures to attempt cultural contact with the then Chinese Empire. Sinologist Maurizio Marinelli argues that

> Generally speaking, a positive aura dominates the narrative of the encounter between these two countries that have been portrayed, more widely, as representatives of two millenarian civilizations, each of them upholding a specific set of ideas and unique customs.[21]

Certainly the idea of a historical affinity between two such distant cultures is intriguing, and Italy could be regarded as an early instance of Western-Chinese relations, with Marco Polo (1254-1324) and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) often cited as prominent examples. However, sinologists caution against overemphasising this approach, and suggest analysing the relations between Italy and China in "a less self-reflexive and celebratory way" (Marinelli, 2010, p. 493), because the Italian examples were exceptions, whereas other European cultures (such as the Portuguese) had more stable and continuing relations with China.[22] Moreover, for centuries the perception of China in

[21] Marinelli (2010, p. 491).

[22] Marinelli (2010, p. 493). Despite friendly relations, Italy was also one of the foreign countries which held a colonial concession territory in China from 1902 to 1947. However, its half-a-square-kilometre concession in Tianjin was the smallest in China.

Italian culture followed a generalised one-sided, Eurocentric approach, characterised by Western travellers reaching China rather than the opposite.[23]

Isaacs (1958, p. 71), Mosher (1990, pp. 20-21) and Cao (2014, p. 6) claim that the Western image of China has changed repeatedly over the years, and group the oscillation between positive and negative perceptions into different 'ages'. If this periodisation is applied and adapted to the decades considered in this thesis (1949-2006), it is possible to divide the Western perception of China into six stages, or 'ages': hostility – and, it may be added, curiosity (1949-1972); admiration (1972-1977); disenchantment (1977-1980); benevolence (1980-1989); a second age of disenchantment (1989-2001); and uncertainty (2001-present).[24] After the foundation of the PRC in 1949, ideological determinants linked to Maoism became new filters to be used in the representation of China. Such ideas have changed altogether since China started its three-decade-long period of economic growth while Western countries were facing the consequences of a large-scale de-industrialisation process and a series of long-lasting financial crises.

In relation to the scope of this thesis, Table 1 provides a background to contextualise Italian filmmakers' different attitudes to the PRC, as well as suggesting reasons for China's variable attitude toward Italian filmmakers who shot on location, and their finished films. In addition to the other variables considered, these attitudes were reflected in the narratives and aesthetics aspects of the films, as will be explained in the next section. Therefore, it is possible to include Lizzani's 1957 film in the age of hostility and curiosity, and Antonioni's 1972 documentary in the late age of admiration. The works of Montaldo (1982) and Bertolucci (1987) were made in the age of benevolence, while Amelio and Cecca worked in China in the mid-2000s, during the second age of disenchantment. This claim will be illustrated following a thorough analysis and discussion of the historical context of each film in the following chapters.

---

[23] For more details about this school of thought, see Marinelli (2010, p. 500, n. 6).

[24] Some caveats are necessary here. This periodisation is instrumental to illustrating – conceptually and visually – the broad sub-division of the chronological periods under consideration in this thesis and does not have historiographic presumptions. More specifically, the 'ages' mentioned here are rough heuristics, whose aim is to provide a helpful generalised context against which the films should be viewed.

Table 1.

Years	Image of China in the West
1950	Age of hostility and curiosity
1960	
1970	Age of admiration Age of disenchantment
1980	Age of benevolence
1990	Second age of disenchantment
2000	Age of uncertainty
2010	

Thus far I have discussed my reasons for studying the films shot by six Italian directors in the PRC. In the previous pages it was argued that cinema as an industry is being affected by globalisation, and the category of national cinema is tightly connected with that of transnational cinema. Italian cinema and its academic study are also being influenced by these changes. This set of considerations makes it possible to frame answers for the two research questions posed in the opening section: 'Why did that group of directors make those films? And how?' In this thesis, it will be argued that it is possible to outline two trends in these films. Firstly, they demonstrate a broad transition from purely political (internal and international) motives for film-making to increasingly financial ones. And secondly, they showcase an evident representational transition from a faraway, mysterious, rural China where social disparities are non-existent, to an easily-accessible, heavily-urbanised industrial country plagued by social inequalities. In addressing these questions, this study also offers an account of the connections between the changes caused by the broad

economic context of globalisation, those that are more specific to the industrial context of filmmaking, and those occurring within the evolving discipline of Italian Film Studies.

Methodology and sources

Methodology

This thesis is organised chronologically around the analysis and comparison of the six previously-mentioned productions. As each of them is a carrier of innovation in its specific historical context, and as their making has spanned a period of six decades, it is essential to put each of them into its historical context. A preliminary socio-historical analysis of Italy, China and their relations after 1949, in Chapter 1, enables this contextualisation. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of each film – one per chapter – using strategic primary sources and textual analysis, as well as selected secondary sources.[25]

In order to analyse the six productions, it is necessary to focus on their comparable aspects. These include their genesis, production, textual style and reception. The first component, genesis, includes the reasons why each film was conceived and made (see Table 2). These are related to the film's socio-historical context and can be distinguished by extrinsic and intrinsic variables. Extrinsic variables include contextual factors, while intrinsic variables are essentially linked to the sphere of the specific production. For example, intrinsic socio-historic variables such as the filmmakers' and producers' cultural awareness are reflected in the effectiveness of their negotiations with the Chinese authorities (part of the 'production' parameter summarised in Table 3), while the director's cultural awareness also influences the film's aesthetic aspects, and therefore the building of China's image in the West.

The second parameter, production, explains how the films were created (see Table 3). It comprises at least twenty-six variables, which can also be extrinsic and intrinsic and belong to separate fields: the socio-historical field is largely made up of the same variables listed above, while technical

[25] Notes on the literature search and review will be discussed in the next section.

variables include the technology available to and/or used by the filmmakers, the absence/presence of relevant Italian and Chinese regulations, and the directing style (in particular, the degree to which the director adheres to the approved screenplay or decides to improvise). Interactions on set must also be taken into account, especially when the crew is mixed (Italian-Chinese, or more generally Western-Chinese). The combination of these variables during the production of films also impacts their content and style.

Table 2. Genesis of production

Socio-historical variables	
Extrinsic (contextual) variables	• National politics, ideology • Diplomacy / International relations • National economy • International trade / global economy • Cultural background ("shared meanings") • Cross-cultural openness / closeness • Subject's political acceptability
Intrinsic (individual) variables	• Filmmaker's and producer's biography / history • Filmmaker's and producer's political vision • Filmmaker's artistic vision • Filmmaker's and producer's cultural awareness

The textual analysis of these films takes into account key indicators related to film narrative, such as genre, editing, cinematography, acting, and visual appearance (including the representation of landscapes and people, and their interaction), which combine to create meaning within the film, where the values the filmmakers attribute to China (such as the presence or absence of traditions) may be included.[26]

[26] The analysis of these films will be accompanied by screenshots acquired under the Australian Copyright Act 1968. These provisions state that "People can use copyright material for the purpose of criticism or review without infringing copyright, provided they acknowledge the author and title of the work, and provided the dealing is "fair". The criticism or review may relate to the work being used or to other material. For example, television film reviewers may show clips from other films as well as the one they are reviewing, in making their criticism or review" (Australian Copyright Council, 2014, p. 2).

In this analysis, it is important to consider descriptors such as the types of landscapes, characters and historical claims made by filmmakers. The juxtaposition of landscape and people, as they appear in different films, allows a visual comparison of the changes in filmmakers' perception of the PRC over the years;[27] while the historical accuracy of epic films became a focal point of interest and discussion at the time they were released, and is also indicative of the directors' perceptions of China and its people.[28]

Table 3. How the films were made (production)

	Socio-historical variables	Technical variables
Extrinsic (contextual) variables	• National politics, ideology • International relations • National economy • International trade / global economy • Cultural background ("shared meanings") • Cross-cultural openness / closeness • Linguistic barrier	• Laws and regulations • Censorship • Controls on set • Geography and logistics • Film industry • Technology available • Choice of 'politically acceptable' subjects • Budget • Support on location • Modality of co-production • Time on location
Intrinsic (individual) variables	• Filmmaker's and producer's biography • Filmmaker-producer relations • Filmmaker's and producer's political vision • Filmmaker's and producer's cultural awareness • Filmmaker's and producer's artistic vision • Filmmaker's and producer's negotiationg skills • Filmmaker's and crew's attitude and adaptability	• Directing style (Planning / Improvisation) • Interaction on set

[27] The analysis of the Chinese landscape has also other implications. For example, Zhang notes that "Some social scientists have recently theorized translocality with respect to the changing landscape of a globalizing China" (Zhang, 2010, p. 138).

[28] Historical accuracy has both narrative and visual implications. The time setting is a narrative choice, visually rendered through elements such as costumes, making it necessary to ask whether the costumes used in the film correspond to those really used at the time represented in the story.

The final parameter considered is based on the films' critical reception, information on their international distribution and – where applicable and/or available – box office data or statistics on television audiences. These data have been collected and scrutinised using secondary and primary sources, including semi-structured interviews with filmmakers and crew members**.**

Notes on literature search and review

This section outlines the primary and secondary sources found and accessed for this thesis, and the criteria that influenced their selection.

When this research project was started in late 2012, a thorough literature search yielded monographs on general history, relations between Italy and China, Orientalism, film style, transnational cinema, translocality, relevant filmmakers, Italian and Chinese cinema, and journal articles on the current status of Italian Film Studies, transnational and translocal cinema, comparative studies applied to cinema, and critical reviews of the six chosen films. These helped to create the theoretical framework outlined in the previous sections and to site the six films in their broad socio-historical context. However, finding academic resources on these films proved to be challenging, and discussions with experts in Italian, Chinese and Film Studies about this topic also failed to produce much information. The only three publications that discuss the representation of China in Western video footage appear to be Jenkins' 1986 essay "Disappearing World Goes to China: A Production Study of Anthropological Films", about British anthropologicical documentaries in the early 1980s, Cao's 2014 *China under the Western Gaze*, and Bloom's *Contemporary Sino-French Cinemas* (2016). The second of these, which deals with the representation of China in British TV documentaries and has become an essential reference for its theoretical approach as described in the previous sub-section, is the one that most helped me to structure my analysis. Cao's work concisely yet precisely summarises key perspectives on the representation of China in the West over the centuries, and before dealing specifically with British TV documentaries on China made between 1980 and 2000, analyses representation as a political construct and a central practice in the production of culture (Cao, 2014, p. 5).

As for specific studies on Italian cinema and China, it was only in 2013 that two US-based researchers, Flavia Laviosa and Mary Ann Carolan, opened a scholarly discussion on China and Italian Cinema. During a public lecture at Wellesley College in April 2013, Carolan examined the representation of China and its people in Antonioni's *Chung kuo – Cina*, Bertolucci's *The last emperor*, and Amelio's *La stella che non c'è / The missing star.* The first specific publication on this topic only appeared in January 2014 with the issue 2(1) of the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, which inaugurated a series of studies on the reciprocal influence of Italian and Chinese cinema. These included articles and interviews on the connections between Italian and Chinese cinema (Pollacchi, 2014), on Giuliano Montaldo's *Marco Polo* (Di Chiara, 2014) and Bertolucci's *The last emperor* (Baschiera, 2014), on comparisons between Antonioni's and Amelio's films shot in China (Bona, 2014), and on the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement (Bona, 2015; Laviosa, 2016). Meanwhile, an increasing number of statistics and information about the Chinese film industry and regulations around film production in China became easily available in electronic format. These sources were integrated into the present study along with extensive research in online digital archives of Italian daily newspapers and relevant periodicals – namely *Corriere della Sera, La Stampa, L'Unità,* and the RAI-published *Radiocorriere TV.* Additional secondary sources were identified in further English-language and Italian online newspapers, as well as institutional papers and booklets, pamphlets, relevant laws and regulations, as well as audiovisual material such as radio news or TV interviews with the filmmakers and producers of interest.

While carrying out the literature search, it soon became clear that published sources on some films – such as *La muraglia cinese* (commercially unavailable), *Chung kuo* and especially *Two tiger*s – were insufficient or absent. It became imperative to organise data-collection work and visits to Italy to gather information from repositories, archives, museums and private collections.[29]

Given the nature of these supplementary sources, and the time distance from the making of these films, it also became necessary to access available oral sources relevant to the production. First-hand recounts were gathered using semi-structured interviews with the filmmakers, crew

[29] Thanks to Flinders University, the Australasian Centre for Italian Studies and the Italian Benevolent Foundation for their financial support.

members and producers of the six films.[30] To reduce the impact of unavoidable errors of memory, interviews were cross-checked where possible with evidence provided by secondary sources, and in one case several people were interviewed together. Finally, where neither primary nor secondary sources were available, it was necessary to access grey sources such as professional blogs and online cinema databases such as IMDb.com.

Given the varied and multidisciplinary nature of this study and the lack of specific resources, a more detailed literature review will be presented at the beginning of Chapters 2 to 7.

Scope of the study

The six productions analysed in this dissertation are a narrow selection from the considerable amount of footage shot by Italians and related to China, which could be divided in two broad categories. The first encompasses footage from a diverse range of media such as feature films, television series and feature documentaries shot in China by professional and non-professional Italian filmmakers. This also includes journalistic footage, travel documentaries following expeditions to China, technical footage shot by Italian engineers, businessmen visiting China, short films and other amateur footage.[31] The second includes Italian footage about Chinese migrants filmed in Italy in formats such as feature films, documentaries, television series, journalistic and amateur footage, and short films. This category, which was almost non-existent until 2007, comprises now at least ten miniseries episodes, feature films and documentaries which have appeared on Italian cinema and television screens, and in some cases on international ones.[32] This category is extremely broad and worthy of research in its own right,

[30] These interviews were approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Ethics Committee in compliance with the Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct 2007*, updated in 2013.

[31] An example of footage shot during professional expeditions is the highly advertised *Marco Polo* and *Overland* car, truck, and cycling expeditions organised by explorer Beppe Tenti in 1985, 1999, 2005, 2007 and 2010.

[32] Namely, *La squadra* TV series, 'La testa del serpente' (season 8, no. 7, episode 202), 2007; *Gomorra* / *Gomorrah* (Matteo Garrone, 2008); *Cenci in Cina* (Marco Limberti, 2009); *Giallo a Milano / Made in Chinatown* (Sergio Basso, 2009); *Gorbaciof* (Stefano Incerti, 2010); *Happy Family* (Gabriele Salvatores, 2010); *Io sono Li / Shun Li and the poet* (Andrea Segre, 2011); *L'arrivo di Wang* (Manetti Bros, 2011); *MozzarellasStories* (Edoardo De Angelis, 2012); and *E fuori nevica* (Vincenzo Salemme, 2014).

as it raises very different questions from the ones expressed in this thesis, and is an area for future study.

There are three reasons for my choice of films. First, although they belong to different genres, they are all films mostly or completely shot in the PRC, and this makes them comparable. Second, they contain homogeneous and comparable social, anthropological, historical, and cinematic factors across a critical period – six decades in which the relations between Italy and the PRC were completely transformed. And third, the number of works involved is limited, and this permits in-depth analysis. Although further productions have been started while this study was being carried out, the selection will not be expanded beyond the date of the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement, to which these works form an essential background. Given the institutional and industrial importance of this agreement beyond the various necessary mentions throughout this work, a brief discussion of its potential benefits and risks will be included in the Conclusion.

Structure

Chapter 1 of this thesis is concerned with outlining Italy's and China's contemporary history after 1949, the relations between the two countries, and the changes that occurred in Italian and Chinese cinema during this period. This shows the socio-historical context in which the six productions were planned and made.

The films are analysed in Chapters 2 to 7, which share a similar structure. Each chapter opens with a literature review and a brief biography of the film's director, followed by a discussion of its genesis and historical contextualisation, an analysis of the film and its representation of China, and its reception. The final chapter brings together my analysis of the six productions to draw out common principles and propose terms for the analysis of transnational cinema. In so doing, it emphasises continuities and discontinuities in the films' production modes and intercultural aspects, and concludes by examining the possible implications of this study for the film industry, the discipline of Italian Film Studies, and future research.

Research significance and possible outcomes

The analysis of six selected feature films shot by Italian directors in the PRC as case studies of transnational cinema presents several advantages. Firstly, by integrating the need for a redefinition of the field of Italian Film Studies with ongoing major changes in the film industry, this thesis shows that films of *all* genres are relevant to the discipline – so much so that all films from large-budget award-winning films to exploitation films should be considered equally important. Secondly, by remarking on the academic relevance of these films, this thesis makes it possible to interpret changes in the industry and outline trends in cinema that are not limited to the Italian case. And thirdly, in so doing it creates the chance for a closer exchange between theory and practice, where the academy and the industry may actively gain from each other.

By studying the feature films made in China by Italian directors before the enactment of the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement, this research provides the backdrop against which the films were made – both the positive aspects and the difficulties, misunderstandings, and mistakes to avoid in the future. Thus it also provides the cinema industry with tools to improve its intercultural knowledge, and ultimately function more effectively in the era of advanced globalisation.

1. Italian-Chinese cinematic relations: a new perspective

"*Everything about China remained vague*" (Walter Tobagi, 1970)

This chapter offers a guide to Italy's and China's cinematic links after 1949 and considers them on the basis of the periodisation outlined in the Introduction (ages of hostility and curiosity, disenchantment, benevolence, the second age of disenchantment, and uncertainty). Rendering a full picture of the two countries' political and socio-economic backgrounds and diplomatic relations would be overambitious and beyond the scope of the present research, however a basic overview needs to be presented to contextualise the two countries' cinema regulations and censorship systems, as well as their film industry and market structure.[1] My attention will focus on an Italian perspective, and specifically on the major events that influenced Italy's understanding of contemporary China. This choice is based on the idea that any interpretation of the Italian cinematic representation of China between 1949 and 2006 requires an understanding of the extrinsic variables presented in the Introduction (see Tables 2 and 3). These affected both the artistic vision and the output of Italian directors, whose personal history was often politically

[1] More than nation states, 'Italy' and 'China' are commonly referred to in terms of their own respective cultures. For example, Marco Polo is often considered Italian, but Venice, his birthplace, was an independent republic in the thirteenth century and he resided in China when the leading dynasty was Mongolian. Italy was unified only in 1861 and China ceased to be an empire in 1912; Italy became a republic in 1946 and China became the People's Republic of China in 1949. Since then, neither country has changed its form of government. Despite so many changes, however, it is not misleading to use the terms 'Italy' and 'China' in their broader senses.

charged.[2] The last section of this chapter will also discuss the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement and current regulations on filming in China.

1.1 Between hostility, curiosity and the PRC's isolation

1.1.1 The 1950s: the two sides of the Bamboo Curtain

The Italian Republic and the People's Republic of China were founded only three years apart, in 1946 and 1949 respectively. Their history is characterised by major political differences, some similarities in the socio-economic development, and several intersections, with Italy in the role of Western forerunner in approaching the PRC in the years of its diplomatic isolation (1949-1970). Both countries were in need for major reconstruction after WWII and the end of the Chinese civil war, but they followed opposite patterns to rebuild. On the one hand, Italy fell into the NATO block and became a recipient of the US-funded European Recovery Program (ERP). It created a state-owned system of heavy and petrochemical industries and at the same time encouraged private entrepreneurship and a capitalist, consumerist market system. These measures allowed the country to rise from widespread unemployment and poverty and to transform a mainly agricultural economy into one of the leading industrial economies within two decades. Since its birth, the new Italian Republic established universal suffrage and was led by a series of Christian-Democratic governments opposed by the socialists and the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

On the other hand, the PRC based its reconstruction on the collectivisation of the economy under the leadership of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with Soviet technical guidance and financial support. The split between the NATO block and the PRC materialised when NATO members refused to establish formal diplomatic relations with Beijing, preferring to maintain formal relations with the defeated Nationalist government that had fled to Taiwan. In

[2] For an exhaustive overview of Italian history between 1949 and the early 2000s, see Baldoli (2009), Duggan (1994), Ginsborg (1990), Ginsborg (2003), Mack Smith (1997), and Salvadori (1990). The literature related to Chinese contemporary history is extremely rich. For their clarity and conciseness, I suggest Bergère (2000) and Tomba (2002). Regarding the Italian-Chinese relations, see Pini (2001), Samarani & De Giorgi (2011), and Meneguzzi Rostagni & Samarani (Eds, 2015).

retaliation, the PRC expelled the citizens of those countries. Ideological rivalry soon escalated to military action during the Korean War (1950-1953), where the UN forces were faced by the sudden intervention of the Chinese army. McCarthyism in the 1950s further exacerbated anti-communist feelings in the US and the Western countries, where fears for a communist takeover became a major strategic concern. While the borders between European NATO and Soviet countries were metaphorically described as "Iron Curtain", likewise the PRC was soon surrounded by a metaphorical "Bamboo Curtain".

In this general context, Italy's rapidly increasing wealth and mass adhesion to consumerism led Italians to change their habits and buy more food, clothes, cars and home electrical appliances, to travel more frequently, and, more importantly for this study, to go to the cinema more often (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 214, 239).[3] In the period between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, also known as 'the golden age of Italian cinema', Italian films enjoyed a unique combination of commercial success and high artistic quality ensured by prestigious directors (such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Vittorio De Sica, Federico Fellini, Roberto Rossellini and Luchino Visconti, to mention a few) and by an exceptional generation of actors and scriptwriters (Bondanella, 2001, pp. 142-144).

However, at least until the mid-1950s the cinema industry had to struggle with a long-lasting lack of funds. Despite what filmmaker Carlo Lizzani called the "unexpected, unbelievable success" overseas of Neorealist masterpieces produced in the late 1940s and early 1950s that depicted the life of the poor during the Nazi occupation and in the immediate postwar period, the Italian film industry had not received support comparable to other economic sectors (Lizzani, 2007, pp. 68-69). In fact, Italy's alliance with the United States became an obstacle to the postwar rebirth of Italian cinema. As priority was given to the economic development of a capitalist society, American cinema played an important role in making mass consumerism appear more appealing than the austerity of the Soviet regime. As historian Christopher Duggan notes, "The dreams of most

[3] Overall, Italy's average annual GDP increased by 6.3% in the years 1958–1963, and by 1970 the per capita income increased more rapidly than in other European country (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 214, 239; Duggan, 1994, p. 263). In his autobiography, Carlo Lizzani explains that cinema played a hegemonic role in the fields of the performing arts and consumer leisure spending. In that period, up to 800 million tickets per year were sold in Italy (Lizzani, 2007, p. 69).

ordinary Italians in the 1950s were made in Hollywood, not in Moscow" (Duggan, 1994, p. 252). Unsurprisingly, Hollywood feature films – whose import was never completely stopped under Fascism – reached a market share of approximately 75% in 1945–1950.[4]

Only in 1951, by signing an agreement with the American Motion Pictures Export Association (MPEA), was Italy able to reduce its imports of American films, and at the same time hope to increase its own exports. However, the results of this agreement were marginal, as Hollywood maintained a dominant position: the numbers of American films imported to Italy remained high (1,662 in 1946-1950 and 1,149 in 1951-1955), while Italian films distributed in America were just a fraction of those figures – 178 and 225 respectively in the same periods (Bondanella, 2001, p. 36).[5]

Moreover, the DC-dominated Italian government had been at odds with the national cinema industry since the very beginning of the Republic. In the early 1950s Giulio Andreotti, a member of DC and undersecretary to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (or, more simply, the Prime Minister's cabinet) with the cultural portfolio, wrote a letter to Oscar-winning director Vittorio De Sica,[6] openly suggesting that Italian directors, rather than depicting the backwardness and misery of Italian society in their films, "should embrace a more optimistic, healthy, and constructive attitude" (Bondanella, 2001, p. 87).[7] Andreotti's message came as a warning not only to De Sica, but also to the entire Italian film industry, which was believed to be under communist influence. Directors such as Giuseppe De Santis, Luchino Visconti and Carlo Lizzani were active members of the PCI, while according to Lizzani other filmmakers like Mario Monicelli, Pietro Germi, Alberto Lattuada and others were wrongly believed to be communists (Lizzani, 2007, p. 101). Although

[4] As David Forgacs notes, in 1938, 74% of the Italian box office was made up of American films, and in 1942, despite restrictive film import regulations, imports still outnumbered Italian films in third-run cinemas (Forgacs, 2014, pp. 42-49).

[5] In 1958, the number of Hollywood films distributed in Italy was still 233 per year. These figures dropped in the following decade to a low of 127 in 1967 (Bondanella, 2001, p. 143).

[6] De Sica had won two Academy Awards in 1948 and 1950, with *Sciuscià / Shoeshine* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette / Bicycle Thieves* (1948) respectively.

[7] Andreotti's words were echoed in 1956 by the Undersecretary for Performing Arts, Giuseppe Ermini, who declared in an interview that "The State will defend (...) institutions in the strictest way and will not allow cinema to offend or ridicule the moral and religious principles of Italian people" (Lizzani, 1979, p. 211).

many of these fears were unfounded, the influence of the PCI on culture and a large part of the economy was considerable. As Stephen Gundle notes, after WWII the PCI "courted artists and intellectuals" (Gundle, 2014, p. 77). According to Gramscian theories, intellectuals are embedded in the social class they belong to (bourgeoisie or proletariat), where they work as active persuaders.[8] On these premises, and considering the collective and popular role of cinema, the PCI defended for years the role of Italian national cinema and filmmakers, and thus it found it easy to gain filmmakers' support when mainstream politics were hostile to them. The influence of the PCI, though, was not limited to the cinema industry. In the early 1960s, the party controlled almost 10% of the Italian press and thousands of recreational/cultural circles, cooperatives and shops, and the communist daily newspaper *L'Unità* was the second most sold in Italy (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 291).

In this situation, the government's attempts to prevent offences to public morality in cinema soon also became a way to keep the real or alleged communist inclinations of many filmmakers under control. A censorship system was implemented with laws approved in 1945, 1947 and 1949. This was largely based on the system of the Fascist period, which made film releases subject to approval by government commissions. Under the 'new' system, each film was assessed by one of eight 'Commissioni per la Revisione Cinematografica' (Commissions for Cinematographic Revision). These had the power to impose cuts, issue an approval certificate, and decide on age restrictions. Although the commissions were formally apolitical and composed of members of the public, they were appointed by the 'Ufficio centrale per la cinematografia' (Cinema Central Office, later renamed 'Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo' or General Directorate of Entertainment Industry) which was part of the Prime Minister's cabinet (Bonsaver, 2014, p. 69). Therefore, they were not free of political influence or the opinions of the undersecretary who headed the Cinema Central Office.

Although the new legislation prohibited pre-production censorship, other forms of control over film scripts were implemented. In particular, the Cinema Central Office was given the power to authorise public financial grants for new national films from the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro,

[8] Antonio Gramsci discussed the role of organic intellectuals in *Quaderni dal carcere* (Gramsci, 1975, vol. III, pp. 1550-1551).

subject to pre-approval of their scripts. If pre-censorship was no longer compulsory, these regulations transformed it into a technical necessity and heavily conditioned the work of filmmakers, creating the prerequisites for self-censorship. To avoid being unfunded and/or censored, filmmakers had to avoid scenes challenging *buon costume* (public morality, particularly with regard to sexual content), national reputation and international relations, and representations of violence, as these would easily be censored. In an attempt to minimise the impact of preventive censorship, the film industry association ANICA created self-regulation guidelines, called "Codice per la cinematografia" (Cinema Code). Other, more subtle forms of censorship that became common practice included delays in issuing screening approvals and – after these had been granted – even the confiscation of films by magistrate's order (Bonsaver, 2014, p. 69; Gaudenzi, 2014; Treveri Gennari, 2013, pp. 259-262).[9]

Political and religious pressure on Italian cinema remained high even when it became clear that the Italian public had developed a marked preference for melodramas, comedies, and other commercial genres that did not take an explicit political stance. Popular works and comedies by Raffaello Matarazzo and Carlo Borghesio became box-office sensations in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Thanks to a high demand for this kind of product, filmmaking quickly became based around the mass production of commercial entertainment films. This soon caused an overproduction of commercial films and a rapid increase in production costs, which seemed to bring the film industry to a new standstill (Lizzani, 1979, pp. 205-245). However, the local and international success of domestic comedies and art films, combined with the location filming of Hollywood epics such as *Ben Hur* (1959) and *Cleopatra* (1963) in Rome, soon revitalised the Italian film industry to such a point that for a short period in the 1960s Cinecittà seemed able to compete with Hollywood (Bondanella, 2001, pp. 142-144).

[9] Relevant regulations were: Decree on "Nuovo ordinamento dell'industria cinematografica italiana" (October 5, 1945, No.678); law on "Ordinamento dell'industria cinematografica nazionale" (May 16, 1947, No. 379); law on "Disposizioni sulla cinematografia" (December 29, 1949, No. 958); and law on "Revisione dei film e dei lavori teatrali" (April 21, 1962, No. 161). In addition to official state censorship, a second form of censorship was in place. This was managed by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico (Catholic Cinema Centre, or CCC) created in 1935, which classified all films produced and released according to Catholic moral judgments. In addition, to keep a tight control on films and audiences, in the post-war period the Church sponsored the opening of an extensive network of cinemas in all parishes (Treveri Gennari, 2013, pp. 258, 262-264).

Despite the government's anticommunist stance, from the 1950s on Italian Neorealist films and comedies were also screened in several communist countries, including China, where they were dubbed in Mandarin (Lizzani, 2007, p. 182). Although the communist PRC was an enemy of Western countries, its sudden isolation created a lack of authentic information on and a consequent Western curiosity about its internal events. As exemplified in archival research which I carried out on newspaper articles about China published by the liberal daily *Corriere della Sera/Corriere d'Informazione* between October 1, 1949 and the end of 1956, these events were reported occasionally in the Western media based on the testimonies of expelled missionaries, refugees in Hong Kong and even official PRC radio announcements collected by correspondents in Hong Kong, Moscow or London, but not on journalists' direct experiences.[10]

Some of this mounting curiosity could be satisfied in the aftermath of the Korean War, when the PRC began to relax restrictions on Western travellers and to invite some of them for short-term visits. Unsurprisingly, and despite exceptions like the French journalist Pierre Gascar who wrote at least six reports for *Le Monde* and *Corriere della Sera* daily newspapers in November-December 1954, most of them were so-called 'fellow travellers' – left-wing intellectuals and sympathisers of Mao Zedong.[11] They were generally accompanied on a carefully planned itinerary by official interpreters and chaperons appointed by the Chinese authorities. Although they were only allowed a limited and partial glimpse of the country, their reports and diaries are important because they show the interpretation of Maoism that filtered out of China and conditioned its perception in the West (Rampini, 2007, p. 7).

One of the first diaries of this kind was allegedly *La longue marche: Essai sur la Chine,* written by Simone de Beauvoir in 1955 (Rampini, 2007, pp. 7-8). Its author was one of the most influential intellectuals of her generation, a leader of the French Left, one of the founders of feminism, and the partner of Marxist and pro-Maoist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. In her essay she described the

[10] The overwhelming majority of the 2,000 articles found concerned foreign policy issues, including the Korean War, the China-Taiwan issue, problems in Indochina, and negotiations between the US and the PRC for the release of American prisoners. Of these 2,000 articles, fewer than 20 were written by journalists who had entered the PRC – namely, Pierre Gascar in late 1954 and Ciro Verratti in August–September 1956.

[11] Gascar collected his articles in the book *Chine Ouverte* (1955).

progress of the socialist economy, the perfection of a society without classes, and the improvement in morality, but such descriptions were strongly ideologically-biased and affected by her poor knowledge of Chinese history and culture (Hudson 1959, pp. 64-6; Rampini, 2007, pp. 8-15).

Italian intellectuals were also active in relations with the PRC in that period, although their reports did not enjoy the large circulation of *La longue marche*.[12] The Italian Communist Party's newspaper *L'Unità* had a correspondent based in Beijing from 1953,[13] and eighteen Italian journalists and scholars visited China in 1955, soon after de Beauvoir's visit. For some of them, like writer Carlo Cassola, that visit was their first international travel experience, and their understanding of communist China therefore remained largely based on predictable comparisons between what they saw and their own cultural background. Thus, Cassola wrote in his diary that Manchuria was similar to the Maremma area in Tuscany, and that Shanghai and Canton reminded him of Naples (Manacorda, 1973, pp. 104-105). Certainly his hosts seemed more interested in showing him the material progress of Chinese society (in the form of agricultural co-operatives, infrastructure and industries) than its traditions. Cassola found a reciprocal ignorance in Italian-Chinese exchanges, and he accepted the Western stereotype of Chinese art as static and repetitive. Despite feeling "the shame of being white", he gave a positive opinion of Chinese society and of the Maoist regime, which from his point of view had defeated the previous moral and material degradation and had greatly improved the living standards (Manacorda, 1973, pp. 104-107; Cassola, 1956, cited by Bertoni, 2015).

What the majority of travellers who visited China and wrote about it in that period had in common was an ideological bias combined with an ignorance of Chinese language and culture, and the fact that they were only allowed limited interaction with locals – always mediated by interpreters. Such limitations deeply affected their reports, and consequently, Italians' opinion of China (Rampini, 2007, pp. 14-18). This was also the case for film director Carlo Lizzani, who spent almost

[12] For details, see Pini (2011, p. 83).

[13] Namely, Franco Calamandrei (1953-1956).

all of 1957 in China shooting the documentary *La muraglia cinese* / *Behind the Great Wall* – a film also deeply conditioned by Italian censorship, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.[14]

Besides these fellow travellers, the PRC was also visited by a high-ranking Italian politician, the socialist leader Pietro Nenni – apparently invited by Zhou Enlai – as early as 1955.[15] He was extremely in favour of improving relations with mainland China and strongly supported this opening in Italy. The Chinese appeared to find more common points with the socialists than with the PCI's powerful secretary Palmiro Togliatti, who always chose to follow the Soviet line when disagreements occurred between Moscow and Beijing, such as on the occasion of the Soviet suppression of an anti-communist uprising in Poznan and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.

Meanwhile, cultural exchanges were also attempted as soon as tensions between China and the Western block eased. In 1955, French and Italian audiences were given a glimpse of Chinese traditional culture when 60 actors from the Beijing Opera and Liaoning People's Theatre toured France and for the first time Italy, receiving ecstatic reviews for their performances in Paris, Venice and Milan (Sansa, 1955, p. 3; Pecorini, 1955, p. 3; Pecorini, 1955b, p. 8; Vergani, 1955, p. 3).

With these events unfolding and its own reconstruction in progress, in the 1950s the PRC did not neglect filmmaking, which mirrored many of the policies of the new regime.[16] Although Mao Zedong himself was not particularly interested in films, other leaders agreed with Lenin's definition of cinema as "the most important of all arts" (Saunders, 1985, p. 85), and understood its propagandist and educational power. For a few years the new regime relied on the existing film industry and allowed the screening of films imported from the Soviet Union and also from

[14] Among the cases of Italians who lived in the PRC in the 1950s, that of journalist and writer Curzio Malaparte was particularly unusual. He became interested in Maoist China and spent some months in the PRC in 1956-57. Due to poor health conditions, he had to return to Italy where he died soon after. So genuine was his affection for China, however, that he willed his iconic villa in Capri to the PRC, hoping it would be transformed into "a study centre for Chinese intellectuals" (Liu, 2014, p. 26).

[15] Pini (2011, pp. 81-82) also notes that Italian exports to China increased considerably – from 574 million to 29 billion Italian lire – between 1950 and 1958, particularly when trading restrictions imposed on China by the Western block during the Korean war were eased. Major exports included iron, steel, fertilisers, machines and electrical motors (Campana as cited in Pini, 2011, p. 82). About Nenni's visit, see Pini (2011, pp. 86-88).

[16] On the reorganisation of the Chinese film industry, see Clark (2012, pp. 42-53) and Xiao (2013, pp. 120-121).

Western nations, including Italy. Carlo Lizzani reports in his memoirs that his film *Cronache di poveri amanti / Chronicles of Poor Lovers* (1954) was screened in the PRC, where the audience also enjoyed comedians like Totò and Aldo Fabrizi (Lizzani, 2007, p. 182). The existing film studios in Shanghai – the core of Chinese cinema until the Japanese invasion in 1937 – were not nationalised until 1953. In the meantime, a central Film Bureau was established within the Ministry of Culture to control production and distribution.

Censorship was also implemented, requiring at least three stages of approval from the Film Bureau. Feature films needed approval of the initial idea, the shooting script and the finished product (Xiao, 2013, p. 120).[17] In contrast to what was happening in Italy, the PRC did not spare efforts to develop its film industry, although its goals were essentially propagandist. In addition to Shanghai, other film studios in Beijing and Changchun were considered strategically important and consequently expanded. A film school was created in Beijing in 1952, and the Beijing Film Academy opened in 1956 to train a new generation of socialist filmmakers, actors, and technicians.[18] They had to "combine revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticisim" and follow the 'worker-peasant-soldier' orientation that Mao suggested for arts and literature (Clark, 2012, pp. 46, 48). Despite a growing audience the results were poor, as 70% of the films made according to this formula during the first three years of nationalised cinema did not recover their production costs. After years of war, people still preferred the pre-1949 melodramas and attended in large numbers the projections of old films which were briefly allowed during the short-lived Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1956.[19]

---

[17] Although based on a different ideological perspective, the system was not dissimilar to the Italian one. Censorship in the PRC will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

[18] It is conventionally accepted that the first two generations of filmmakers developed Chinese cinema until 1949, while the Third Generation adapted to Maoism and used revolutionary aesthetics (Zhang, 2012, pp. 58-62). Among its most prominent directors were Shui Hua (1916-1995), and Xie Jin (1923-2008).

[19] Campaign launched by Mao in 1956 to encourage intellectuals to openly express their points of view. It resulted in more complaints than expected as critiques flourished in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and *dazibao*, inveighing against economic and social politics, the distribution of power within the Chinese Communist Party, and the decisions of the leaders. As a consequence of the widespread dissent, hundreds of protests occurred in factories, and Mao had to abruptly stop the campaign through re-education in labour camps (Tomba, 2002, pp. 69, 70)

In general, filmmaking in the PRC remained heavily influenced by mainstream politics and ideology, characterised by an alternation of support for production and anti-cinema campaigns, and a variable degree of control over production and distribution. For example, the Chinese film output was deeply affected by the Great Leap Forward in 1958,[20] as the emphasis on production output also targeted the film industry and encouraged the establishment of studios in secondary cities (Changsha, Chengdu, Guangzhou and Xi'an) and a number of smaller towns. This allowed the studios to get closer to local audiences, but proved to be a waste of resources. Although the Great Leap Forward ended tragically, Mao's mass line was to be continued in the 1960s and to condition film production again.

1.2 The age of admiration and the end of PRC's isolation

1.2.1 The revolutionary 1960s

The events that shook the PRC in the 1960s deeply affected the widespread social protests that occurred in several Western countries, and particularly in Italy, in the same decade. Therefore this section will focus on those events and on the distorted perception that ostensibly most Italians developed of them. While the disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward were becoming evident, Mao created the conditions for a major change in the PRC's foreign policy. He became increasingly critical of the de-Stalinisation process started by Khrushchev in the USSR. A crisis between the PRC and the USSR became unavoidable, and in 1960, Moscow suspended all forms of assistance to China, leaving the PRC hungry and isolated. Chinese planners were able to reduce Mao's influence over the political economy, so that by 1965 overall production had recovered to the levels of 1957.

In the meantime, Mao reinforced his influence over the People's Liberation Army (PLA) through a campaign against revisionism, while his cult of personality was being built by exalting the leader's

[20] The Great Leap Forward was a social campaign launched by Mao between 1958 and 1962 aiming at full collectivisation and at the rapid transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial one. Scholars consider it one of the causes of the famine that hit the PRC in 1959-1961.

thoughts, capabilities and physical strength within the army. In 1964 a new campaign named 'Learn from the PLA' described the army as an example of a perfect proletarian organisation. Hundreds of selected quotations from Mao's speeches and writings were collected by the PLA in the so-called *Little Red Book* published in the same year, and his cult was extended from the army to the rest of society.[21] In the meantime, Mao's wife Jiang Qing, a former actress, heavily influenced the cultural field by introducing revolutionary content into traditional opera and creating a clique of radical intellectuals in Shanghai. A Cultural Revolution Group was created to work as a cultural watchdog and prevent bourgeois intellectual infiltrations into the Party.[22]

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966 after an intellectual dispute over an opera believed to criticise Mao. Meanwhile, the radicalisation of politics on extreme leftist positions matched Mao's exhortation to the education sector to create more egalitarian relations between teachers and students. This would be achieved by encouraging students to express their critiques of the contents of lessons. Thus students were openly encouraged to rebel by the party radicals who controlled the media (Tomba, 2002, pp. 106-109). Paramilitary aggregations of students known as Red Guards, which were originally outlawed, were soon acknowledged as revolutionary groups in universities and praised by the media.

Demonstrations quickly spread through society, and chaos followed. Almost every organisation and every form of established power (including the party, state and bureaucracy) was targeted by violent actions at all levels and dismantled. Important cities such as Shanghai were paralysed by general strikes of workers who organised themselves on the basis of the Paris Commune. Together with the Cultural Revolution Group, Mao remained the only undisputed source of power and his cult reached its peak when millions of Red Guards travelled to Beijing to participate in mass demonstrations in his support. By 1968 the rebellion had propagated beyond Mao's expectations, so he allowed the PLA to disarm the Red Guards in those provinces where disorder had evolved

[21] These quotations covered all aspects of Maoism, or Mao's thoughts, including the centrality of the Communist Party and the selflessness of its cadres, class struggle, the mass line, the importance of political education, internationalism, and the condemnation of liberalism.

[22] About the Cultural Revolution, see Bergère (2000, pp. 169-194), Freund Larus (2012, pp. 84-103) and Tomba (2002, pp. 106-140).

into civil war. Even tanks and artillery were used to stop the revolutionaries, and propaganda groups were sent to universities while newspapers explained that workers and the army should follow the lead of revolution. Students, it was explained, should be replaced because they still held a bourgeois vision. Within the following two years, over five million students were sent to rural areas for 're-education'.[23] Order was gradually re-established under the PLA's control, but other struggles continued within the leadership. Struggles to succeed Mao became evident in 1969 and two main factions emerged, with Lin Biao opposed to Jiang Qing and her group. In 1971, Lin died in a mysterious air crash in Mongolia (Tomba, 2002, p. 119-122).

Inevitably these events also affected local cinema. As sinologist Paul Clark (2012, p. 53) notes,

> With the start of the Cultural Revolution, feature film production stopped. In the first years Mao himself became the most widely watched movie star, in documentaries of him surveying millions of Red Guards in Tiananmen Square, for example. The studios were riven with factional disputes between rival groups, each claiming to be more loyal to Mao's views.

Features made in China between 1949 and 1966 were officially banned, with the exception of a handful of films, the dialogue of which audiences soon knew by heart. The only films approved for screening in that period were documentaries, films from Albania, North Korea and Vietnam, and some old Soviet films of the Stalinist era. In addition, some forbidden films were also projected as examples of 'negative teaching materials', though this did not imply the audiences disliked them (Clark, 2012, pp. 53-54). Cinematic adaptations of model ballet and opera performances were also attempted. The production of new feature films was resumed only in 1973 and foregrounded popular melodramas that still had to follow the Cultural Revolution liturgy, focusing on a central hero, similar to the model operas, which were a revolutionary adaptation of traditional Beijing opera.

[23] The reduction of the urban population had actually been a policy already implemented in the early 1960s as a measure to control the national consumption of cereals. After relations with the USSR deteriorated, China had been obliged to import cereals from Canada and Australia. In order to reduce this dependence, it was calculated that each person who moved from city to country would reduce the annual consumption of cereals by 75 kilograms. Thus, in 1961-1964, 26 million people were relocated from cities to rural areas (Tomba, 2002, p. 127).

The consequences of the PRC's break with the USSR and of the Cultural Revolution were to be felt soon also in Italy. Relations between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the PCI worsened when the PCI resolved to remain aligned with Moscow. Nonetheless, a few members of the PCI were still allowed to live in China for extended periods of time. In addition to *L'Unità* correspondents, the PCI sent a handful of experts to Beijing to assist Radio China International when it began broadcasting in Italian under the name of 'Radio Pechino'. All the Italian communists resident in Beijing were involved in party relations, radio propaganda and teaching Italian.[24] However, they numbered just a dozen and were kept in complete isolation, which became even stricter in 1962 when the CCP officially attacked the PCI's Moscow alignment as revisionist.[25] The CCP also forced the PCI to interrupt its cooperation with Radio Pechino, where only a few left-wing, pro-China non-PCI members remained (Pini, 2011, pp. 93-98).

The new Radio Pechino programs gave some Italians a more extended glimpse into Maoist China. That glimpse was far from a portrayal of real life conditions, but it led many students and intellectuals to form an idealised vision of Maoism and of Marxism-Leninism. Revolutionary, Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist groups began to appear in Italy as early as 1961, and after the breach between the CCP and PCI, the PRC became a model for all those Italian communists who did not approve of the PCI's loyalty to Moscow, despised both American and Soviet imperialism, and thought that a Marxist-Leninist revolution – rather than the PCI leader Togliatti's idea of a peaceful Italian way to socialism through gradual reforms – was necessary to create a better society. [26] Even though the PCI remained popular and in 1964 obtained more than 25% of votes for the first time, it would quickly lose control of these revolutionaries, who also felt encouraged to act by the delicate socioeconomic and political conditions in the early 1960s.

---

[24] A few student exchanges were also organised, starting in 1957.

[25] The breach became official at the Tenth Congress of the PCI in 1962, where the Chinese line was criticised and the Chinese delegate opposed the attacks from the PCI. A short time later, the 人民日报 *Rénmín Rìbào / People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the CCP, published an editorial entitled 'The disagreements between Comrade Togliatti and us' (Tobagi, 1970, pp. 17-22).

[26] For a comprehensive analysis of the Italian extra-parliamentary left and of the Students' Movement, see Tobagi (1970) and Vettori (1973).

Although the economic miracle allowed Italians to think that the glamour of the *dolce vita* was available to most of them, it also had serious social costs which the state was unable to control. These included the growing gap between a rapidly-developing north and a poor south, the insufficient development of public services, and a widespread reliance on cheap labour. Rather than addressing these issues, the political debate was undermined by a high level of conflict between the major parties (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 254-297; Mack Smith, 1997, p. 440; Salvadori, 1990, pp. 1468-1469). The consequences of this failure to understand the needs and problems of a rapidly transforming Italy soon became evident.

Social tensions increased, particularly among industrial workers, and culminated in prolonged strikes. Southern immigrant workers in northern cities brought into the factories their discontent with their working conditions and other problems such as poor housing and social services (Duggan, 1994, p. 264; Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 250-251; Salvadori, 1990, pp. 1228-1234). Protests also erupted among university students, similar to those in other Western countries, particularly the United States, Germany and France.[27] Increasingly dissatisfied with the political paralysis, lack of education reforms and poor conditions of universities, and influenced by events in China and Latin America and by increasing resentment of the US's handling of the Vietnam War, large numbers of students approached Marxist ideology and found their heroes in rebels and outsiders such as Camus, Sartre, Baudelaire, Pavese and Che Guevara. Their readings included texts by Marx, Marcuse and Mao, which were among the most widely read books at the time (Duggan, 1994, p. 270-271; Ginsborg, 1990, p. 306).[28] They also followed with interest the experience of the Californian communes and the Black Power movement, and found a new model for the achievement of socialism in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which was simplistically interpreted as a spontaneous mass protest against the establishment. Mao Zedong had urged the Chinese youth to destroy any form of power, and many Italians believed it was time to start a 'cultural revolution' against traditional values and established order from the grass roots in Italy too.

---

[27] See Duggan (1994, p. 264); Ginsborg (1990, pp. 250-251, 298-347); Salvadori, 1990, pp. 1228-1234).

[28]Although there are no official statistics available regarding its circulation, it is accepted that Mao's *Little Red Book,* the real title of which was *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, was printed in several billion copies distributed worldwide (Kent et al., 1977, p. 31).

The early Marxist-Leninist groups which claimed their independence from the PCI started publishing journals such as *Viva il leninismo* / *Long live Leninism* and *Quaderni Rossi / Red diaries*, and founded a publishing house in Milan called Edizioni Oriente. The latter was sponsored by China and aimed at spreading Italian translations of Chinese press articles and works by the 'Chinese comrades' through a monthly journal called *Quaderni / Diaries* and other publications (Pini, 2011, p. 109; Tobagi, 1970, pp. 20-22; Vettori, 1973, pp. 29, 34). The first news of the Chinese Cultural Revolution reached Italy in the summer of 1966. Walter Tobagi, one of the first journalists who tried to analyse the Italian Marxist-Leninist movements, gave a cogent account of Italy's early perception of those events.[29] In 1970 he wrote that Italian reporting about the Cultural Revolution was

> confused, contradictory (…). Newspapers are inclined to present it like a sudden explosion of political madness. Its profile is poorly outlined. Everything about China remained vague in the postwar period. Travelers, journalist, traders, missionaries were of little help, as their interpretations only satisfied a few curiosities and not much more. The figure of Mao remained confused too: a hero of the revolution, a great man for international communism, a strategist of mass war. (Tobagi, 1970, p. 11)

A fragmented and contentious galaxy of thirty Marxist-Leninist organisations and publications appeared – and vanished – within a few years. Among the most important of them was the 'Partito Comunista d'Italia (marxista-leninista)' founded in 1966 and led by Fosco Dinucci. This party was inspired by Gramsci, Marx and Engels, the Russian Revolution, Lenin and Stalin, and the Chinese Revolution "directed by the Communist Party led by Comrade Mao Tsetung" (Vettori, 1973, p. 30). Despite its limited number of followers, this was reportedly the only anti-Moscow party in Italy with which the Chinese chose to establish formal relations. Its members Osvaldo Pesce and Dino Dini were received by Mao during a visit to Beijing in August 1968.

Beijing did not take too seriously other Maoist organisations like the revolutionary Unione dei Comunisti italiani (Union of Italian Communists, UCI), which was led by Aldo Brandirali and comprised farmers, workers and other militants ready to "serve the people", organise political strikes and demonstrations and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat (Vettori, 1973, p. 59).

[29] Walter Tobagi became extremely involved in the coverage and analysis of the attacks that shook Italy during the years of terrorism, and was killed by a left-wing revolutionary group in 1980.

The theoretical basis of this organisation was a mix of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism, and its members had to give up any property or income. Mao's thought in particular – which for many was simplistically represented by the *Little Red Book* – had to be considered a 'universal truth', and even party weddings between its members were held in front of a large portrait of Mao Zedong (Vettori, 1973, pp. 60-74).[30] Significantly, Radio Pechino and its 'sister' Radio Tirana described the UCI as a "sect of fascists paid by international capitals and by American imperialism" (Tobagi, 1970, p. 94).

The students' actions included occupations of universities and the interruption of lectures to challenge professors' authority. As members of a purely anti-authoritarian movement, students challenged the traditional nuclear family, decided to live in collectives based on direct democracy without a central authority, and criticised the PCI, which they considered an 'integrated opposition'. Although their movement was originally nonviolent, it increasingly justified violence and began to consider it inevitable. Mainstream political parties, including the PCI, were strongly opposed to violent protest; however, this did not stop students looking for wider support. Their protest movements quickly moved out of universities into factories, culminating in the 'Autunno caldo' or Hot Autumn of 1969, when workers organised mass assemblies, strikes and even beatings to demand better working conditions and salaries. Leninism became the model for an increasing number of deeply-divided revolutionary groups, such as Lotta Continua (Continuous Struggle), Servire il Popolo (Serve the People), Potere Operaio (Workers' Power), Avanguardia Operaia (Workers' Vanguard), Il Manifesto and others, which believed social revolution to be imminent.

Prominent filmmakers such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and emerging young directors like Bernardo Bertolucci and Marco Bellocchio were strongly influenced by these events and produced some of the most notable political films of the period, which either anticipated the revolutionary movements or reflected on them from a communist perspective. These films included Bertolucci's *Prima della rivoluzione / Before the Revolution* (1964), Pasolini's *Uccellacci e uccellini / The hawks and the sparrows* (1966), and Bellocchio's I *pugni in tasca / Fists in the pocket* (1965) and *La Cina è*

[30] Ironically, in the 1980s Aldo Brandirali became a Roman Catholic integralist and a member of the Christian Democratic party.

vicina / China is near (1967).[31] Even a popular genre like the Spaghetti Western assumed political and ideological connotations, as these films were often based on allegories of peasant revolution (Bondanella, 2001, pp. 268-271). These productions were also encouraged by more lenient censorship commissions that reflected the changed socio-political context, and by a law that in 1962 allowed film industry representatives to join the commissions.[32]

1.2.2 More turmoil in the 1970s

Internationally, the 1970s were a period of extreme economic uncertainty. The devaluation of the American dollar in 1971 created financial worries around the world and was followed in 1973 by the oil crisis, which heavily affected countries lacking natural resources. Its consequences in Italy were dramatic and included mass unemployment, a high inflation rate, a stop-and-go economy, increasing public sector spending and deficit, and the expansion of the so-called 'black' economy. Popular entertainment was also profoundly influenced by this situation and by the increasing diffusion of television. Cinema began suffering heavy losses, and many movie theatres, particularly in local neighborhoods, had to close as the sudden popularity of low-budget exploitation films was not enough to compensate for their losses.[33] By 1975 the number of cinemas in Italy had decreased from the 1955 peak of almost 6,000 to 4,000, and it kept declining in the following years. Tickets sales almost halved between 1975 and 1979, but their price nearly doubled.[34] Ultimately, this drop in income was reflected in the number of films produced, which plunged from a high of 294 in 1968 to just 98 in 1978 (Bondanella, 2001, p. 319). This crisis in the Italian film industry was to become a chronic problem, which continued through the 1980s and beyond.

---

[31] Bellocchio himself was originally a supporter of Maoism.

[32] As Bonsaver notes, while censorship commissions became more permissive, an increasing number of films were subject to court cases after being accused of disrespect for public morality (Bonsaver, 2014, p. 70).

[33] Regarding exploitation films, see Section 7.1.

[34] Bondanella reports that 513,700,000 tickets were sold in 1975 and only 276,300,000 in 1979, while their price increased from 706 lire to 1,322 lire (Bondanella, 2001, p. 319).

In the same period, social unrest degenerated into the *anni di piombo* ('years of lead', referring to the quantity of bullets fired in those years). In these years terrorism was in the hands of opposing factions. On one side, intelligence-linked extreme-right forces attempted a coup and organised terror attacks to justify the need for an authoritarian government.[35] On the other, left-wing revolutionary groups, in particular the newly-formed Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades), which had the Latin American guerrillas as one of their models, began kidnapping the managers of major industrial companies. Their actions soon turned into systematic kidnappings, shoot-outs with police and the adoption of violent actions against judges, journalists and the ruling class. This culminated in the gory kidnapping and murder of DC leader and former Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978. Eventually, neo-fascist terrorism and the extreme-left revolutionary movements both lost their momentum after a bomb explosion at Bologna station in 1980 that killed 85 people and wounded more than 200.

Meanwhile, the PRC was also entering another troubled decade. The 1970s had opened with the power struggle that toppled Lin Biao. In the meantime, Beijing's foreign policy was experiencing another major change. Relations with the USSR – already compromised by the breach of the Sino-Soviet agreement a decade earlier – were worsening because of serious territorial disputes along the common border and China's aversion to the USSR's military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. As a consequence, after years of international isolation, Mao and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai decided to cautiously approach the US and the NATO block (Tomba, 2002, p. 120), which after the partial dissolution of the Communist block were also changing their attitude towards Maoist China.

This move matched ongoing diplomatic developments in Italy. Since 1964, Italy and the PRC had secretly opened trade offices in Rome and Beijing (Pini, 2011, p. 103). In 1969, Pietro Nenni, now Foreign Minister, suddenly declared in the Italian Parliament that it was time to give diplomatic recognition to the PRC. Despite the ongoing Cultural Revolution and Italian political instability, an agreement was reached at the end of 1970, and embassies in Rome and Beijing were opened soon

[35] Regarding the *anni di piombo* period, see Duggan (1990, p. 274-282), Ginsborg (1990, pp. 348-405) and Salvadori (1990, p. 1354-1364).

after.[36] Several Italian and Chinese delegations exchanged visits in the following years and some agreements were signed, although no real improvements occurred due to the complicated political situation in China during the 1970s and the political instability in Italy (Pini, 2011, pp. 149-155).

Soon after, in 1970-72, the PRC established diplomatic relations with 17 more countries and was admitted as a member of the United Nations to replace Taiwan, which until then had been considered the legitimate representative of China.[37] Once fully re-established as a sovereign state, China was also ready to resume contact with the United States, while the Italian diplomatic attempts lost momentum.

1.3 Between disenchantment and benevolence

Despite Italy being key to the re-establishment of Chinese-Western relations, the Italian approach to China remained marked by a typical 'stop-and-go' policy, with alternating periods of intense activism and substantial stasis. Relations between the two countries were soon compromised by a series of diplomatic and political accidents that occurred following the mid-1970s, which created disenchantment towards China and renewed anti-foreigner hostility in the PRC. The most serious of these incidents involved film director Michelangelo Antonioni and his documentary *Chung kuo – Cina* in 1974. As will be extensively discussed in Chapter 3, this was caused by the unsettled and confused Chinese political situation in the last years of Maoism, when factions fought for central power and the radicals seemed to prevail. In 1973–1974 a 'Campaign against Confucius' was launched to attack the progressive and increasingly powerful Zhou Enlai, who was able to resist until his death in January 1976. After that, as Mao's health also failed, Jiang Qing and her supporters (the so-called 'Gang of Four') took the lead. The eight months between Zhou's death

[36] The Italian diplomatic move occurred simultaneously with Canada's (Pini, 2011, pp. 165-166).

[37] From now on, the PRC and China could be considered the same entity, and these two terms will be used as synonyms in this thesis.

and Mao's were marked by ideological campaigns, further violence, promotions of supporters and dismissals of opponents. The arts and cinema again fell under attack.

After Mao's death in September 1976, the Gang of Four was arrested and another figure, sustained by a group of pragmatists, re-emerged from the rubble of the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping, who had been Zhou Enlai's long serving right-hand man, gradually took power. He was appointed president of the Military Affairs Central Commission. He denounced the excesses of Maoism and promoted a series of reforms to modernise industry, agriculture, science and defense. These eventuated in the "reform and opening" that laid the foundation for the longest period of uninterrupted economic growth ever experienced by a single country. Their most immediate and visible aspect consisted of an unprecedented opening to international trade and the creation of Economic Development Zones to attract foreign investors, a situation Italy was ready to take full advantage of at the beginning of its own economic recovery in the early 1980s. As soon as Deng launched the reforms, Rome and Beijing signed the first of several three-year cooperation agreements, suiting both Chinese development and Italian companies with contracts for large-scale projects.

The expansion of the market system in China and the acceleration of reforms allowed industrial production to rise, but also caused economic overheating, high inflation, and an increasing economic gap between urban and rural areas. The resulting discontent erupted in protests and demonstrations were stopped by a sudden conservative and authoritarian reaction, which made it clear that progressive market liberalisation and political reforms should follow different ways (Tomba, 2002, p. 157). Despite the increasing support for an open economy and freedom to conduct business, the state was to remain authoritarian and be guided by a technocratic leadership.

This principle reached its peak in June 1989, on the occasion of the violent suppression of pro-democracy protests in Tian'anmen Square, which shocked Western and Asian countries and showed that Deng Xiaoping was a pragmatist, but not the liberal that many thought. The US and Europe reacted to these incidents by adopting sanctions against China, but Italy was one of the first European countries to bring relations with the PRC back to normality, in less than two years (Pini, 2011, pp. 200-201).

The Italian efforts were appreciated by China, but did not survive a massive corruption scandal that erupted in Italy in 1992. The so-called 'Tangentopoli' scandal uncovered widespread and systematic corruption and collusion between political leaders, the Mafia and industrial entrepreneurs.[38] As a result, the top leaders were either pursued or fled overseas – as Craxi did – and the so-called 'first republic', as the whole political system that had governed the country since 1946 was also known, suddenly collapsed and left the state vulnerable to lethal Mafia bombing attacks across the country.[39]

Tangentopoli became a new watershed moment in Sino-Italian relations, as it affected the publicly-funded development credits that the Italian government guaranteed to companies that implemented major industrial projects in China; this situation had in the long term contributed to corruption and illicit party funding.[40] Therefore, Italy lost importance in China. Once deprived of state support, Italian companies did not have the resources to compete with large American, German, French and Japanese multinationals that started flocking to China. In spite of the expanding Chinese community in Italy, the country's attention to China seemed to fade at the very moment that the PRC was fulfilling its own economic miracle.[41]

While Italy struggled with the consequences of Tangentopoli, the Chinese economy quickly recovered from the aftermath of Tian'anmen Square. Under the leadership of two further technocratic generations comprising engineers and economists, it continued to increase without interruptions by an average of 10% per year – a pace never seen before (Baker, 2012).[42] This was to affect Sino-Italian relations in the following decade.

---

[38] See Ginsborg (2003, pp. 179-212) and Mack Smith (1997, pp. 483-484).

[39] It should be noted that there was no formal transition from a first to a second republic. These two terms were adopted by the media to create a distinction between the traditional political system dominated by DC, PSI and PCI, and the new system that emerged after Tangentopoli.

[40] Regarding the Italian development aid scheme, see Pini (2011, pp. 187-194).

[41] For a complete study of the Chinese community in Italy see Ministero dell'Interno (2008).

[42] The most important representatives were President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji until 2003, then President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, who remained in charge until 2012, when they were replaced by Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang respectively.

1.4 Second disenchantment and uncertainty: towards the new millennium and the Chinese century

For years, under a series of governments led by controversial business magnate Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's mainstream interest in China faded and was reignited only occasionally by major events such as the return of Hong Kong and Macao to Chinese sovereignty, and the SARS outbreak in early 2003. The RAI's decision to leave its office in Beijing without a resident correspondent between 1993 and 2003 was symptomatic of this attitude, and by 2000 the two or three Italian journalists (such as ANSA correspondents Francesco Sisci and Barbara Alighiero) based in Beijing were known only to scholars and diplomats. The Chinese language was taught in a few Italian universities to a handful of students.[43] Italy found itself no longer a net exporter to China, and Italian companies had to outsource production to China if they wanted to survive. Debates about whether China was a threat or an opportunity became common among industrialists, workers, and politicians.[44] Chinese competition was deemed unfair and became one of the main culprits blamed for Italian structural problems.[45]

In the decade 2001-2010, the Italian economy had the lowest GDP growth in the world after Zimbabwe and Haiti ('The man who screwed an entire country: The Berlusconi era will haunt Italy for years to come', 2011). Furthermore, a production system mainly based on small, family-owned companies with limited investment capabilities struggled to face the globalisation process and the increasing competitiveness of emerging economies such as China.[46]

Those entrepreneurs who did not shut down altogether had to react to market changes and heavy taxation. By 2008 no less than 21,000 companies with at least 20 employees had restructured and

[43] In the academic year 1999-2000, Chinese language was taught in twelve Italian universities (Turturici, 2017), the most popular being the university of Naples "L'Orientale", the University of Rome "La Sapienza", and the University of Venice "Ca' Foscari". In this writer's class at the University of Milan there were no more than twelve students.

[44] Titles of books published in Italy in the early 2000s were emblematic: *Why not to be afraid of China?*, *Il benessere indifendibile* and *Comprendere la Cina.*

[45] A significant summary of the general mood regarding globalisation, de-industrialisation and China is reported in Ratto (2006, pp. 7-24, 57-70).

[46] 4.2 million out of 4.5 million Italian firms (or 93% of them) have fewer than 10 employees (Istat, 2013).

transformed themselves into 'pocket multinationals' operating in 150 countries, with many of them choosing to move all or part of their production facilities abroad, mainly to Eastern Europe and China ('For ever espresso: Why Italy is not growing', 2011). These changes led to widespread deindustrialisation accompanied by a feeling of hopelessness and pessimism.[47]

An official wake-up call to reapproach China more positively arrived in December 2004, when the Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi – accompanied by ministers and entrepreneurs – visited Tianjin, Beijing and Shanghai. By then, the Italian delay in gaining visibility in the Chinese market had become apparent. During this visit several agreements were signed, on topics ranging from trade to culture and from food to sport. One of these established that 2006 would be the Year of Italy in China, featuring a number of cultural events (Cavalera, 2004, p. 9; Vasile, 2004, p. 9; Associna, 2006).

In the following years, Italian direct investments in China increased considerably, although not in comparison with those of other major nations. For example, Italian investments in 2011 totalled USD 381 million – only a fraction of Germany's 1.1 billion (Italian Trade Commission, 2012). Meanwhile, thousands of Italians moved to China, mainly in Shanghai and Beijing, and are currently based there.[48] Most of them are managers of Italian-invested companies or professionals (architects, lawyers, business consultants, restaurateurs) who started their own businesses there.

Cultural understanding and news coverage of China have also improved. Today there are nearly forty university campuses in Italy offering majors or courses in Chinese language and culture (Turturici, 2017), and state TV and all major newspapers have correspondents based in Beijing.[49] Nonetheless, stereotyping mixed with prejudice and a sense of superiority are still common among Italians, who often find themselves at odds with China and the rapidly expanding Chinese

[47] Even Giulio Tremonti, the treasurer of Berlusconi's government, wrote that 'We are losing hope' (Tremonti, 2008). In 2012, Italy was one of the most pessimistic countries in the world (Ipsos, 2012).

[48] Official residents have increased from nearly 2,000 in 2006 to 6,746 in 2013, and China is in the top ten preferred destinations for Italian migrants (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 2013).

[49] In 2016 China became the favourite extra-European destination for Italian tertiary students wishing to complete a study experience abroad (Pagani, 2016).

community and businesses in Italy.[50] This is a problem that needs to be urgently addressed, if it is true that in 2016 the most common surname in Milan is no longer Rossi or Brambilla, but Hu (ANSA, 2016).

The situation of Italian cinema in these decades followed the socio-economic context closely. The film industry never recovered from the crisis of the 1970s and its struggle with the incessant growth in television's popularity.[51] The audience's interest shifted away from cinemas, and despite Italy's population reaching 56 million, ticket sales dipped to 242 million in 1985 and a low point of 91 million in 1995, while the number of movie theatres fell from 4,885 in 1985 to 2,600 in 1998 (Bondanella, 2001, pp. 425-426). Although several Italian filmmakers in the 1980s and 1990s obtained international recognition and awards – for example, Gianni Amelio, Roberto Benigni, Bernardo Bertolucci, Nanni Moretti, Gabriele Salvatores, the Taviani Brothers, and Giuseppe Tornatore – this was not enough to allow Italian cinema to return to the successes of the 1960s. Political uncertainty and decreasing state support did not help to improve this situation (Cristiano, 2013, p. 4).

However, after 2000 a new generation of filmmakers began to emerge, including Matteo Garrone, Paolo Sorrentino, Paolo Virzì, Andrea Segre and other young directors who released surprisingly successful first films. The creation of regional Film Commissions to attract location filming and an Italian Film Commission for the promotion of the Italian audiovisual industry began to generate new opportunities. Despite the financial crisis, the number of films produced in the peninsula began to rise again. In 2011, for the first time since the 1960s, over two hundred films were produced in Italy and these figures have been maintained in subsequent years (ANICA, 2016, p. 5; Cristiano, 2013, p. 1). This seems to be a positive reaction to the challenges the Italian film

[50] A random example is represented by the comments posted by readers to an article talking about 'bouncing' eggs in China, of which a brief selection is here reproduced: 'In Italy we have NOTHING to learn from the Chinese'; 'import from that country shall be stopped' ('Cina - Arrivano le uova di gomma: una volta lessate, rimbalzano', 2012). Retrieved from http://www.corriere.it/esteri/12_febbraio_10/uova-gomma-cina_d9f85886-53cc-11e1-a1a9-e74b7d5bd021.shtml. Similar comments appear regularly when online newspapers publish news on problems and issues regarding Chinese immigrants, China's economy and environment, and poor-quality counterfeited goods imported from China.

[51] By the mid-1980s, the Italian television system had become a duopoly made up of the state broadcaster RAI and Silvio Berlusconi's commercial network Fininvest.

industry is currently facing, although it is still too early to say whether it is a temporary upturn or the first stage of a consolidated trend. Certainly this improvement seems to be at odds with the number of movie theatres, which has further declined to 1,069 in 2014, while ticket sales have fluctuated between 91 and 110 million, reflecting an increased reliance on domestic consumption through pay-TV and digital streaming (ANICA, 2015; CineNotes, 2016, pp. 1, 2). In this context, the Italian producers' association, production companies like Cattleya, individual producers like Sergio Pelone and Maria Grazia Cucinotta, and filmmakers like Gianni Amelio and Sandro Cecca have started to turn their attention to China as a filming location, a financial resource and possibly a market.

While Italy fell from an economic miracle into stagnation, China followed the opposite trajectory – or, it may be argued, retraced on a larger scale Italy's steps fifty years later, moving from poverty to an economic boom created by the newly-adopted market system and a full scale transition from agriculture to industry. Within three decades, large parts of the country were transformed into immense industrial districts producing anything from toothpicks to space orbiters. China has become the factory of the world, and its transformations have rapidly changed society in a way that may look familiar to Italians who grew up during Italy's own economic miracle. As happened in Italy in the late 1950s, the social impact of these transformations is characterised by an overall reduction of poverty, increased mobility (including both emigration and internal migration from rural areas to major cities and industrial areas), large-scale urban and industrial sprawl, an increase in social inequalities, and a generalised conversion to mass consumption.[52] A foreigner visiting China today may feel surprised by the degree to which everything in the country is judged on the basis of economic value and people are judged on the basis of their income, their business and the value of their properties. Competition and pressure to succeed in study, career and life have reached peaks which are hard to believe in traditional market economies.

[52] The number of people living in poverty dropped from 250 million in 1978 to 30 million in 2001 (Stiglitz, 2006, cited by Jacques, 2009. p. 162). In the same period, the Chinese population grew from 956 million to 1.3 billion. It has been calculated that after the Tian'anmen incidents at least 200 million Chinese moved from rural areas to cities (Pini, 2011, p. 209).

Communist China has quickly achieved its dominant role in the global economy by becoming a major trading partner and an investor in Western economies. Following the Western credit crunch in 2008 and the prolonged European crisis, China has reinforced its global financial standing through Chinese investors buying troubled Western companies.[53] The rise of China is changing the world so radically that some scholars provocatively propose dividing modern economic history into the periods BC (Before China) and AC (After China), with 1978 as a watershed (Jacques, 2009, p. 185).

Chinese cinema has followed the country's internal developments in terms of contents, aesthetics and market.[54] The Beijing Film Academy, closed during the Cultural Revolution, reopened in 1978. A new generation of aspiring filmmakers – the so-called Fourth Generation, including directors like Wang Shuqin and Xie Fei – laid the ground for a transformation that was to change the face of Chinese cinema.[55] They soon abandoned the socialist film language of the Maoist era, which was excessively reliant on montage, editing and a theatre-based narrative. As an alternative model, they embraced a return to humanism and supported the use of documentary style and long-take aesthetics based on André Bazin's realist theories (Clark, 2012, p. 56; Zhang, 2012, pp. 59, 62). [56] At the same time, in an attempt to acquire production expertise, China opened up more consistently to foreign film crews interested in international co-productions. During the making of Giuliano

[53] Several acquisitions caused a stir due to the notoriety of the companies sold. In 2004 Lenovo bought IBM's laptop and personal computer division. More recently, Swedish car maker Volvo was sold by Ford to the Chinese manufacturer Geely in 2010 (Welch, 2010) and Italian luxury yacht maker Ferretti was sold to Chinese investors in early 2012 (Galbiati, 2012). Further prominent acquisitions by Chinese investors in Italy include tyre manufacturer Pirelli (2015) and two of Italy's most important soccer teams, Internazionale (2016) and AC Milan (2017, ironically sold by its previous owner Silvio Berlusconi to an obscure Chinese real estate developer).

[54] See Zhang (2012, pp. 57-74).

[55] Regarding previous generations of Chinese directors, see Section 1.1.1 and n. 18.

[56] A call for a change in Chinese cinema was also made in 1979 by Li and Zhang in an essay titled 'The Modernization of Film Language', which could be considered the artistic manifesto of the Fourth Generation of Chinese filmmakers (Zhang, 2012, p. 62). Bazin defined cinema as "the art of reality" (Bazin & Gray, 1960, p. 4).

Montaldo's *Marco Polo* TV miniseries, in 1979 Beijing created a new government agency named Chinese Company for Cinematic Co-productions (or CCCC).[57]

From the mid-1980s the Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers, whose most notable representatives include Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou and Huang Jianxin, took the lessons learnt from the Fourth Generation to a new level (Zhang, 2012, 59). These filmmakers advocated for the director's subjectivity and experimented with New Wave cinematic techniques, producing an art cinema dealing with modern Chinese history and culture that quickly won international critical acclaim. Of their works, the most well-known were: Chen Kaige's *黄土地 Huáng tǔdì / Yellow earth* (1984) and *霸王别姬 Bàwáng bié jí / Farewell my concubine* (1993, winner of the Palme d'Or for Best Film at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival); and Zhang Yimou's *红高粱 Hóng gāoliáng / Red Sorghum* (1987, winner of the Golden Bear at the 1988 Berlin Film Festival), *大红灯笼高高挂 Dà hóng dēnglóng gāogāo guà/ Raise the red lantern* (1991, Silver Lion for Best Film Director at the 1991 Venice Film Festival), and *一个都不能少 Yíge dōu bùnéng shǎo / Not one less* (1999, Golden Lion for Best Film at the 1999 Venice Film Festival).

In the early 2000s, Sixth Generation directors such as Jia Zhangke – whose *三峡好人 Sānxiá hǎorén / Still life* won the Golden Lion for Best Film at the 2006 Venice Film Festival – continued to attract international audience and critics. However, like the Italian Neorealist films from which they drew inspiration, the works of this generation of directors talked about the present and past hardships of those on China's social margins, and thus did not obtain political support and attracted limited interest from local audiences.

Despite a rapid increase in the production of new films since 1979 (when only 67 feature films were made), movie attendance in China plunged from 29 billion in 1979 to just 220 million in 2001. This was the consequence of the widespread diffusion of television and the rise of the underground home video market, which gave cheap and largely uncensored access to foreign films

[57] The CCCC still exists, under a different name. At present it is called the China Film Co-Production Corporation (中国电影合作制片公司 Zhōngguó diànyǐng hézuò zhìpiàn gōngsī), or CFCC, and is the sole agency allowed by the ministerial-level SAPPRFT (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, in Chinese 国家新闻出版广播电影电视总局 Guójiā xīnwén chūbǎn guǎngbò diànyǐng diànshì zǒngjú**,** known as SARFT until 2013) to deal with foreign producers for co-production projects (CFCC, 2014; SAPPRFT, 2015).

otherwise limited by an import quota of 34 films per year. This situation was unsustainable for film studios, which were now required by the state to be financially autonomous. Attention therefore turned to entertainment films such as comedies, especially those released between December and the Chinese New Year since the late 1990s – a sort of equivalent of the Italian *cinepanettoni* – as well as action and martial arts films.

The commercial results of this change were encouraging: movie attendance surged again to over 800 million in 2014, and the number of screens increased thirteen times, from 3,034 in 2006 (almost the same number as in Italy) to over 40,000 in 2016 – an expansion unseen anywhere else in the world (Unesco Institute for Statistics, 2011; Ent Group, 2015, p. 24; IHS Markit, 2016).[58] With a box office revenue of USD 4.8 billion in 2014, which is expected to reach USD 10 billion in 2017, China is also expected to become the world's biggest theatrical film market before 2020. This is increasing international producers' appetite to access it, and also the financial importance of Chinese producers, now welcomed as investors in foreign markets.[59]

1.5 Culture and cinema. The Italian-Chinese co-production agreement and China's co-production regulations

Cultural exchanges, particularly those involving cinema, were also affected by the decade-long stall in Italian-Chinese relations between 1993 and 2002–2003. The last important event that took place before the blackout caused by the end of the 'first republic' was a grandiose multimedia festival called "Passeggiate italiane", or Italian Walks, which was organised in Beijing in September 1993 – reportedly the first foreign culture festival in the PRC. Films by well-known directors like Vittorio De Sica, Federico Fellini and Luchino Visconti were screened along with more recent works by Gianni Amelio, Daniele Lucchetti, Nanni Moretti and Pappi Corsicato (Grassi, 1993, p. 26; 'In

[58] In November 2016 the number of cinema screens in China overtook that in the US. This expansion dramatically accelerated in 2016, when an average of 27 new screens per day were opened (IHS Markit, 2016).

[59] For example, in 2016 the Wanda Group began negotiations to purchase of 49% of Paramount Pictures (Wong, 2016). A detailed analysis of the current Chinese market situation and the future implications of its transformation are discussed in the Conclusion.

Cina va in mostra lo spettacolo italiano', 1993). However, despite the international success of Giuliano Montaldo's *Marco Polo* and Bernardo Bertolucci's *The last emperor* in the 1980s, it took nine years for Italian cinema to officially reappear in the PRC. In 2002, seven Italian films were programmed at the Shanghai International Film Festival, which was founded in 1993 and soon became one of the largest film festivals in East Asia (Filmitalia, 2016). It was only in 2004, after the first official screening of Antonioni's *Chung kuo* in Beijing (see Chapter 3) and during President Ciampi's visit to China, that a film co-production agreement between the governments of Italy and the PRC was signed. At the same time, an Italian filmmaker – Gianni Amelio – began negotiations to shoot a new film in the PRC, as will be explained in Chapter 6.

To make things more complicated, the treaty was only ratified by the Italian Parliament eight years later, and became effective in April 2013. Its implementing rules were finally signed in June 2014 (Legge 25 settembre 2012, n. 173, 2012; (Agreement on Film Co-production between the Government of the Italian Republic and the Government of the People's Republic of China, 2012, pp. 4-8; MIBACT, 2014). Its text established that the co-production of films should be approved by authorities designated by the two governments, namely the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities' Department of Entertainment and Sport, and China's Film Bureau, which was part of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (Agreement on Film Co-production, 2012, p. 4, Article 2). The treaty specified that co-produced films would be considered national films by both parties, implying that they would bypass the import quotas in China, and could only be released in and out of each country after approval by both parties' authorities (Article 10). It also established that co-productions should abide by the laws and respect the culture and beliefs of both countries (Article 8) and that "the competent Authorities of both parties encourage and support their own producers and studios to make films in the territory of the other party" (Article 15). This agreement reflected the recent adoption of regulations on film imports and co-productions in China that will be discussed below.

The agreement was also a way to acknowledge that foreign productions filming in the PRC had become a common occurrence, and that Italy was to become part of this trend more systematically than in the past. Since the making of Bertolucci's *The last emperor* in 1986, at least 120 Western, Indian, Filipino and Japanese documentaries, TV series, and fiction films have been shot in China. About seventy of them have been filmed since 2000, and none of them was Italian

(imdb.com, n.d.). To standardise the massive influx of foreign producers, China adopted two major sets of regulations in July 1996 and August 2004. These established the administrative departments in charge of filmmaking and would rule the production and distribution of all Chinese and foreign films in China for over twelve years. As they were in effect when Gianni Amelio and Sandro Cecca shot their films in China, they need to be briefly illustrated.

The first set of regulations, known in English as "Regulations on Administration of Films", stated that all procedures and approvals related to filmmaking in the PRC must be established at both central and local level. In particular, it placed the administrative department of radio, film and television of the State Council – later known as State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT; in Chinese, 国家广播电影电视总局 / Guójiā Guǎngbō Diànyǐng Diànshì Zǒngjú)[60] – in charge of the nationwide cinema industry, while local governments' administrative departments for films were responsible within their regions (Article 4). The Regulations also introduced the concept of co-productions, described as films produced by Chinese film studios "in cooperation with external film producers" (Article 18). They also explained quite broadly that co-productions should obtain a Permit for Sino-Foreign Co-production, observe local laws and regulations, and respect the customs and habits of all Chinese nationalities. Another essential point of these regulations was the establishment of an examinations system: only films examined and approved by the SARFT might be "distributed, projected, imported or exported" (Article 23). The examination – which was not explained in further detail –would assess whether the film was free of forbidden content, such as content that might endanger China's unity and security, show obscenity, superstitions and violence, or insult people (Article 24).

With a constantly-growing number of foreign investors looking to the Chinese market for both production and distribution, in July 2004 the PRC established a specific set of *Provisions on the Administration of Sino-Foreign Cooperation of Production of Films.* These established that the SARFT was responsible for the administration of Sino-Foreign film cooperation (Article 4). They reviewed the definition of co-production and specified that there are three categories of Chinese-

[60] In 2013, the SARFT was renamed SAPPRFT (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television), and publishing was added to its jurisdiction. See n. 66.

foreign co-production. The first is the co-production in the strict sense, which is a film "co-financed (including funds, labor or in kind) and jointly produced by the Chinese and Foreign Sides". The second is assisted production, which is a film solely financed by the foreign producer/s and shot in China "with paid assistance by the Chinese Side by providing equipment, facilities, locations, labor". The third category is the commissioned production, a term referred to a film contracted by the foreign side to be made in China by a Chinese producer (Article 5). Additionally, the stipulation reworded the principles every Chinese-foreign co-production should abide by: not only must they respect regulations and customs, they should also help to promote a positive image of the Chinese economy and traditions (Article 6).

To further clarify the practical application of these principles, the SARFT later issued specific guidelines. For example, these stated that films shot in the PRC could not: distort or disparage the image of China, its history and its leaders; denigrate the Chinese army, public security, and judiciary system; show scenes of sexual acts, prostitution, and bad habits such as excessive drinking and smoking; contain vulgarity; contain references to the supernatural; contain scenes of violence and murder; denigrate local peoples' values and beliefs; advertise religious extremism; or advocate harm to the environment (Cain, 2011). These provisions, often criticised for limiting the artistic freedom of filmmakers, were not dissimilar to the early Italian censorship requirements to respect *buon costume*, national reputation and international relations and avoid violence. Despite the different ideological and religious motivations, the explicit reasons for censorship seem to travel in time and across cultures.

The 2004 stipulation also provided further details with regards to the so-called Permit System, both confirming and detailing the previous regulations. Under these rules the only way for a foreign individual or entity to legally access China as a filming location was to enter a co-production agreement with a local partner, and filming could begin only after obtaining a "Chinese-Foreign Film Co-production Permit" (Article 7).

The approval process was very drawn out. It required signing a letter of intent with a Chinese partner and submitting the film script for review both at provincial level and to the CFCC; once the

Film Co-production Permit was granted, the co-producers had to submit the filming plan to the CFCC (Articles 10-13).[61] A "Film Public Exhibition Permit" also needed to be sought at provincial and state levels after the completion of the film (Article 15). Without this permit, a co-produced film could not be distributed and shown "in and outside of China" (Article 16).

The implications of these regulations for the contents of the two Italian films shot in China in 2005 and 2006, and their practical application, will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, while their possible outcomes for Italian cinema will be analysed in the Conclusion.

1.6 Summary

This chapter has illustrated the context – that is, the major extrinsic factors, historical frame, relevant filming and censorship regulations, and cinema industry context – in which the films analysed in this thesis were produced, in the awareness that these factors influenced those films'production, content, and meaning. Specifically, as will be explained in the following six chapters, Carlo Lizzani shot *La muraglia cinese* in the 'age of hostility and curiosity', which coincided with the early years of the Italian economic miracle and the PRC's first opening to Western visitors, while Italian censorship was targeting anything related to communism. In 1972, Michelangelo Antonioni's documentary with its affectionate eye for China was made during the 'age of admiration', when Western students and intellectuals idealised Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution and even Italian official diplomacy began to support Beijing. However, soon after its release the seizure of power carried out by the extremist Gang of Four and the subsequent anti-Antonioni campaign caused a short period of Western disenchantment with China. Just a few years later, the works of Montaldo and Bertolucci were facilitated by a renewed and reciprocated Western – and particularly Italian – benevolent attitude to China, as well as by strong trading relations. Twenty years afterward, in the early years of the new millennium, Gianni Amelio and Sandro Cecca approached China as a filming location when Italians were generally uncertain whether to accept the risks and take the opportunities that China offered them during

[61] Regarding the CFCC, see n. 66.

the Chinese boom and contemporary Italian stagnation, and in contrast China had a very open mind about Italy. The practical effects of these contextual factors for the finished films will be explored in detail in the following chapters.

2. Carlo Lizzani's *La muraglia cinese* (1958): building cinematic bridges

"Old or new, refined or revolutionary, tender or argumentative, [China] always scares certain governments" (Ugo Casiraghi)

La muraglia cinese / Behind the Great Wall, directed in 1957 by Carlo Lizzani (1922-2013), was the first feature documentary to be shot in the People's Republic of China by a Western filmmaker. Made during the 'age of hostility and curiosity', it brought to Western wide screens the colours of a country which since Mao Zedong's takeover in 1949 had remained largely unknown to non-communist countries. This transnational film was not only the result of 10 months of location shooting using state-of-the art technology, but also the product of the institutional apparatuses of the PRC and Italy and complex negotiations in both nations. Heavily affected by extrinsic variables like the existing ideological gap between Italy and the PRC, the lack of direct relations between the two nations, the complexity of cross-cultural understanding and the overwhelming role of two ideologically opposed censorship protocols, this documentary about China inevitably also illustrates, through its production history and its contents, Italy and its own internal contradictions.

Lizzani, a declared communist who had been blacklisted by the Italian censorship system described in Chapter 1, was the originator of this project. However, his control over it was greatly weakened by countless compromises he and producer Leonardo Bonzi had to accept in order to have the film distributed. The result of their efforts was a film as rich in visual beauty as it was riven by contradictions.

As publications on *La muraglia cinese* are extremely rare, this chapter is largely based on documents, correspondence and newspaper articles produced between 1956 and 1958, and consulted in 2014 at the Leonardo Bonzi Museum in Ripalta Cremasca and the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. These sources have provided invaluable in-depth accounts of the film's production history and reception, adding precious data and information to those gathered in books and essays including the published biographies of Lizzani (Lizzani, 2007) and Bonzi (Bonzi & Soffici, 1999), as well as a chapter in the book *Reflections on Asia: essays in honour of Enrica Collotti Pichel* (2003) by sinologist Alessandra Lavagnino, whose father was the film's composer and who combines academic expertise with direct memories of the film. As *La muraglia cinese* is not commercially available, a copy was obtained on concession from the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome.

2.1 Portrait of a young intellectual

Carlo Lizzani was born in Rome in 1922 to a middle-class family, and became interested in cinema in his late teens.[1] He started writing film reviews and was called to collaborate with *Cinema* magazine. This journal, directed by Vittorio Mussolini (the second son of the Italian dictator), ironically became a contact point with the then clandestine Italian Communist Party, or PCI. In *Cinema*'s newsroom Lizzani met Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and Michelangelo Antonioni, and began his subterranean approach to Marxism. During the occupation of Rome by the Nazis, he joined the anti-Nazi resistance movement, in which communists played a major role.

In these years Italian cinema was reduced to ruins, with Cinecittà's studios transformed into a refugee camp and the National Film Library plundered by the Nazis. Filmmakers like Luchino Visconti and Alessandro Blasetti were forced to turn their attention to theatre. Lizzani became a preeminent PCI activist, but soon felt inadequate in that role and returned to work in cinema. His choice proved to be timely: according to his memoirs, the unexpected worldwide success of Rossellini's *Roma città aperta / Rome Open City* (1945) and *Paisà / Paisan* (1946) boosted the

[1] See Lizzani (2007, pp. 31-63). For a full biography, see Lizzani (2007) and Zagarrio (2010).

mood of those working in the film industry and created new opportunities for them (Lizzani, 2007, p. 68).

Documentary was – and still is – an entry point for many filmmakers, and Lizzani's directorial debut after a brief but high-quality apprenticeship with Roberto Rossellini and Giuseppe De Santis seems to confirm this. His first two films, *Togliatti è ritornato / Togliatti is back* (1948) and *Nel Mezzogiorno qualcosa è cambiato / Something has changed in the south* (1949), were politically motivated and socially oriented documentaries.[2] Lizzani's debut as a fiction filmmaker occurred in 1951, when he directed *Achtung! Banditi! / Attention! Bandits!*, recounting the story of a group of anti-Nazi partisans in a factory near Genoa. Due to the film's sensitive topic, Lizzani could not find a producer, so he funded the project through a specifically-created cooperative and subscriptions from members of the public – mostly, members of the PCI. The film was well received by critics and the public, and gave Lizzani enough confidence to prepare a new feature film (Lizzani, 2007, p. 105).

His subsequent *Cronache di poveri amanti / Chronicles of poor lovers* (1954) was produced by the same cooperative that had funded his previous film and portrayed daily life in a street in Florence where peace was suddenly disrupted by the brutality of the Fascists in the 1920s. This work met with immediate success and won several Italian and international prizes, including the Prix International at the 1954 Cannes Film Festival. That award, though prestigious, was less important than the Palme d'Or, which Lizzani was apparently denied due to pressure on the jury from right-wing Italian politicians (Lizzani, 2007, p. 108). A politically *engagé* director like Lizzani was almost a public enemy to the Italian authorities, and he soon learned that working in Italy was going to be financially unsustainable. His next film (*Lo svitato / The screwball*), a comedy with Dario Fo and Franca Rame released in 1956, was a box office failure, and soon after this his cooperative dissolved. Finding a new producer became impossible because, as he wrote in his autobiography, "The risk that the name «Lizzani» implied […] was not counterbalanced by the security, or the hope, of a guaranteed international success" (Lizzani, 2007, p. 110).

[2] For more details, see Bertozzi (2010, p. 271).

Lizzani therefore turned his weakness into an advantage, and decided to use his communist membership as a way to finance new films. When he discovered that his early films, in particular *Cronache di poveri amanti*, were successful in the PRC, he began to establish contacts with China through the PCI's links in Beijing and to plan the first Western feature documentary to be shot in the PRC. The genesis and production history of this documentary, which was to become known as *La muraglia cinese / Behind the Great Wall*, and the variables that influenced the final cut will be fully discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3.

2.2 *La muraglia*'s genesis and the role of Leonardo Bonzi

Lizzani found his producer in Leonardo Bonzi (1902-1977), a flamboyant middle-aged aristocrat born to a family of landowners in Lombardy.[3] The two men could not have been more different. The former was a young, shy communist intellectual without a stable income. By contrast, Bonzi in his youth had been a successful explorer and a decorated aviator, and in the 1950s he became an early advocate of a united Europe and a member of the Italian Liberal Party.

In 1951 Bonzi had approached documentary-making during a commercial expedition to Africa. Invigorated by the success of his first film, *Una lettera dall'Africa / A letter from Africa*, at the Venice Film Festival, he led another filming expedition in South America and produced the new documentary *Magia verde / Green magic* (directed by Gian Gaspare Napolitano) in association with Astra Cinematografica.[4] This was a small company specialising in short documentaries on Italy, but – as Alessandra Lavagnino wrote – thanks to its partnership with Bonzi, it became

> a precedent-setter for the making of the first feature length films on 'faraway places' […]. These were attempts […] to show […] faraway worlds which were by definition 'exotic and colourful'. They consisted of travel chronicles, which detailed as much as possible the fanciful aspects, glowing colours, charming, exotic music, peculiar customs and stories of those worlds (Lavagnino, 2003, pp. 106-107).

[3] For a detailed account on the figure of Leonardo Bonzi, see Soffici (1999, pp. 1-50).

[4] *Una lettera dall'Africa* was also one of the earliest Italian films to be shot in colour.

The products of this cooperation – precursors of the "mondo" documentaries, as will be explained in Section 2.4 – proved to be successful. Thanks to its spectacular colour photography, in 1953 *Magia Verde* was nominated for the Golden Palm and won the award for best documentary at the Cannes Film Festival, and was awarded the Silver Lion at the Berlin Film Festival. Two years later, in association with Astra, Bonzi co-directed and produced another technically innovative documentary, titled *Continente perduto / Lost continent* (1955), which showed daily life in remote areas of Indonesia and was the first Italian film to be screened in CinemaScope. Its cinematography earned it a Special Jury Prize at Cannes Film Festival and a Silver Lion in Berlin.[5]

Despite his success as a producer, Bonzi had been unsuccessfully trying for years to get permission to shoot a colour documentary in mainland China. Unpublished correspondence between him and Italian diplomats reveals that his attempts to open a communication channel with the PRC dated back to 1953, when he wrote to the Italian Consul General in Hong Kong about his intention to organise an expedition to the PRC focusing on its "sport and adventure aspects", and explained that

> We would be 5-6 people […] and we would shoot a […] film in colour on the natural beauties of this new China. […] Let me know if you believe it possible to obtain a permit to stay in inner [China] for two or three months, as we would illustrate all the beautiful and new things that can be found there.[6]

Three years later, after repeated refusals, Bonzi's frustrations came to an end when Lizzani approached him and introduced the new project he had been meticulously developing. Via the offices of the PCI and the Chinese Association of Friendship with Foreign Countries, Lizzani had managed to find his Chinese counterpart in the Central Office for Cinema and Documentary Studies, a Beijing-based agency under the control of the Film Bureau within the Ministry of Culture, which had to supervise all matters concerning film production (Lavagnino, 2003, p. 109;

[5] On the role of Bonzi, Astra Cinematografica and documentary in introducing CinemaScope to Italian filmmakers, see Vitella (2013, pp. 267, 269-270).

[6] Consulted at Museo Leonardo Bonzi, Ripalta Cremasca, 3–4 June 2014. Original text in Italian.

Xiao, 2013, p. 120). [7] He managed to obtain a visa and, travelling alone, in May 1956 flew to Beijing via Moscow. As reported in his diary, large parts of which are published in his memoirs (Lizzani, 2007, p. 112-173), he spent about a month observing daily life in the Chinese capital, negotiating an itinerary and a working schedule with the Central Office for Cinema and Documentary Studies, and inspecting a few potential filming locations in other cities. His goal was to obtain written authorisation to allow "an Italian private production, managed by a capitalist, to film a documentary in China" (Lizzani, 2007, p. 120). He explained that the target audience for this documentary would be Western cinemagoers, as the film was to be commercially distributed in cinemas. Therefore, it would not touch on socio-political issues – which were too sensitive at the time – but would focus on folkloric and geographical aspects that would portray a lyrical image of China. After negotiating for weeks, he obtained from the Chinese authorities a generic, non-binding letter allowing him to further discuss the feasibility of this project with a Western producer.

Back in Italy, Lizzani discussed the project with producer Dino De Laurentiis, unsuccessfully (Lizzani, 2007, p. 111). Soon after, he approached Astra Cinematografica and Leonardo Bonzi, who decided to support him because this project matched Bonzi's own long-time dream. However, the producers found that the letter Lizzani had brought back from China was too generic. He therefore flew back to Beijing to negotiate a memorandum of understanding between the Central Office for Cinema and Documentary Studies, and Astra Cinematografica in equal association with Leonardo Bonzi.[8]

Once the agreement was sealed, several other steps were necessary to make the film viable. These included obtaining visas for the crew, and above all getting the Italian authorities' approval.

[7] The Association, known in Chinese as *中国对外友好协会 Zhōngguó duìwài yǒuhǎo xiéhuì*, was a *de facto* parallel diplomacy mass organisation which maintained contacts with "important persons, organisations and institutions" which could not be liaised with directly by the Chinese Communist Party (Lavagnino, 2003, p. 109).

[8] This was what Bonzi later defined as "an ironclad contract with the Chinese government which guaranteed me the liberty to film where I wanted with my crew" (Bonzi, 1959, p. 16, cited by Lavagnino, 2003, p. 110). The contract, a carbon copy of which is available at Leonardo Bonzi Museum, was compiled in French and Chinese. This 12-point document outlines an early form of assisted production, obliging the Central Office for Cinema and Documentary Studies to provide all the assistance requested by Lizzani and his crew, and Bonzi to pay all expenses. The contract also allows the footage to be shipped back to Italy, and requires the producers to send a copy of the finished film to the PRC. Exploitation rights within the PRC are ceded to the Central Office.

If obtaining authorisations from China was a hard task for Lizzani, working with the Italian authorities was in no way an easier one for Bonzi. To overcome the authorities' suspicions and ideological reservations about a film on communist China and obtain public funding for it, Bonzi had to submit a draft of the filming schedule and promise the Italian Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo, or General Directorate for Entertainment Industry (the Agency in charge for funding and censorship commissions) that: a) the documentary would take a neutral approach to China; b) only one version of the film would be distributed in Italy and abroad, and the only film negative would stay in Italy; and c) the producers would voluntarily submit to the directorate the spoken commentary for a "preventive friendly examination" – despite pre-approval not being part of the recent censorship regulations,.[9]

Correspondence between the Italian Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reveals the total discretionary power of Italian authorities, and also how worried they were about the political suitability of the project. The same correspondence also reveals the Italian government's ideological approach to the 'new China'. Nicola de Pirro, the Director General of the Entertainment Industry section, wrote to Mario Conti, Director General of Foreign Cultural Relations that the producers were "people renowned for their ideas and their reliability" in a letter dated 5 February 1957, , but in his reply to de Pirro on 8 February 1957, Conti reminded him that it was necessary to take extreme care and to avoid celebrating the new Chinese regime: for example, the merits of the suppression of concubinage should not be attributed to the new regime.[10]

Finally, Bonzi was given the green light. This came at a price for Lizzani, however, as the film became known to the Italian authorities and to public opinion as Bonzi's project. Significantly, Lizzani's name never appeared in any part of the official correspondence with the Italian censorship board. Newspaper clippings found in archives also described this project as the "Bonzi

---

[9] Letter from Leonardo Bonzi to Nicola de Pirro, January 26, 1957, consulted at Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome on June 10, 2014; original text in Italian. 'Neutrality' implied not filming the parts on the PRC from a political perspective, thus making a mere entertainment film. The implications of this will be discussed in the following sections.

[10] Letter from Mario Conti to Nicola de Pirro. Consulted at Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome on June 10, 2014. Original text in Italian.

cinematographic expedition to China", and these are a mere copy-and-paste of a press release sent by Bonzi himself to the Italian press agency ANSA (Fig.1). Possibly this was a tactic to help the project more easily gain the acceptance of the media and the overly-suspicious Italian censors: as *La muraglia cinese* targeted a Western audience, promoting it under Bonzi's name was safer.

Figure 1. Courtesy of Museo Leonardo Bonzi

A further attempt to make the 'Bonzi film' appear harmless to the Italian censors was the balancing of a politically controversial topic with reassuring acts like the choice of Giancarlo Vigorelli as the author of the commentary and artistic consultant. Vigorelli was a prominent Catholic writer and literary critic specialising in the Romantic writer Alessandro Manzoni. Being politically acceptable was clearly more important than having any expertise on China. [11]

On an international level, Bonzi was proactive in contacting foreign media such as *The Daily Telegraph* and *Paris Match*, although he was less successful here. A short article published by *The Daily Telegraph* on 7 March 1958 pointed out that Bonzi, a "well-known non-Communist journalist and documentary producer", and the film crew, "of whom two were communist, were able to tour

[11] In 1958, at the same time as the film was released in Italy, Vigorelli published a book titled *Domande e risposte per la nuova Cina / Questions and Answers for New China.* Here he acknowledged the ignorance of his generation regarding Mao Zedong and China, as the only information he could read, at least before 1943, were André Malraux's 1933 novel *La condition humaine / Man's Fate* and news released by the fascist propaganda (Vigorelli, 1958, p. 86, cited by Pini, 2011, p. 41).

almost the whole of China". Emphasising the political orientation of crew members became both a necessity and a sales-pitch: a necessity because it allowed the director and the producer to obtain approvals both from the Italian and the Chinese authorities, and a sales-pitch because it both allowed the film to be accepted by Western countries and created the idea that the documentary *had* to be unique, as access to China was precluded to declared non-communists like Bonzi. *The Daily Telegraph* article also proclaimed the documentary was "uncensored", which was ironic given the production's history.

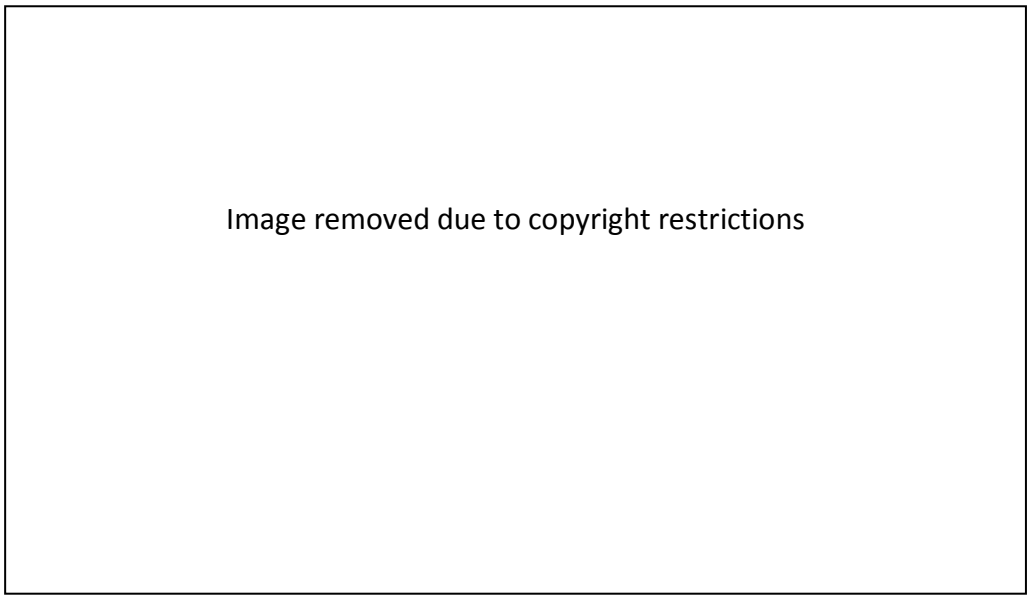


Figure 2. Courtesy of Museo Leonardo Bonzi

Overshadowed by Bonzi in the media, Lizzani and two collaborators (camera operator Alessandro D'Eva and production manager Marcello Bollero) arrived in the PRC in late February 1957 to prepare for filming. Others – including Bonzi – arrived five weeks later. Most of the crew were to spend nine months filming in the PRC. As they soon found, the shooting of *La muraglia cinese* proved to be no easier than the long preparatory work done over the previous year.

2.3 The making of *La muraglia cinese*

While Lizzani was filming, Bonzi wrote five news reports for Italian newspapers and magazines, describing China's technological and infrastructural achievements, and his belief that Chinese

people “Adorano Mao come un dio, però non sono comunisti” / “They Adore Mao Like a God, but They Are Not Communist” (Bonzi, 1957c, p. 5).[12] These articles aimed to both titillate the curiousity of the film’s potential audience and reassure the Italian liberal and Christian-democratic readers that common Chinese people were not a political threat. Later, to accompany the film’s release, Bonzi also published a photographic book titled *La muraglia cinese*. He was extremely confident regarding the international success of the project. In a letter to Eitel Monaco, the president of ANICA, he wrote:

> We shot places and characters that no Western journalists had been given permission to approach. […] China is completely unknown (except for a short and ugly documentary ‘Derrière la Muraille’ made by DEFA in collaboration with a Russian and a French filmmaker). You may deduce what international expectations there are for the work I started up with Astra […]. [I]t will be the most important documentary ever made”. (Bonzi, letter from Lanzhou, 30 July 1957)[13]

However, the producer’s enthusiasm and the director’s commitment were not sufficient to guarantee the trouble-free completion of the film. Not only were their artistic visions too different, the interests of too many stakeholders had to be satisfied. Bonzi and Lizzani soon realised that they had to struggle with the different sensitivities of their hosts at almost each step, and they found frustrating complications at every corner. For Lizzani in particular, working frustrations also turned into political dissatisfaction which later led to a crisis with his party and the Italian Left.

The problems the Italian crew had to face in mainland China can be broadly grouped under five of the sociocultural and technical variables outlined in the Introduction :

- Geographical and logistical issues: the environment, with its vastness and its tough climatic conditions, made it necessary to carefully organise each of the crew’s moves, with prior permission from local authorities.

[12] These periodicals included the *Corriere della Sera* daily newspaper, *La Domenica del Corriere* weekly magazine and *Tempo* daily newspaper.

[13] Original text in Italian. Bonzi did not mention Chris Marker’s short 16mm colour documentary *Dimanche à Pekin / Sunday in Beijing*, which was released in late 1956 and showed the life of Pekingese people on a rest day (Giraud, 2014).

- Negotiation issues: despite having signed a contract, Lizzani had to re-negotiate nearly every detail of his working plan with ever-changing departmental directors who were not informed about prior agreements made with their colleagues. The negotiating style of the Chinese was impenetrable to Lizzani, as they mainly let him talk and met his detailed requests for advice about censorship, production problems, and logistic issues with silence. For example, Lizzani knew that ice bombing was used at the end of winter to prevent floods caused by sudden thaws, and knew that such a sequence, if properly filmed, would look truly spectacular. The Chinese never showed enthusiasm for this idea. However, they never gave Lizzani an outright negative response, but tried to discourage him with a trickle of vague information, meteorological reasons, or even explanations that the trip was physically very demanding. At last, after a month, Lizzani and his crew were allowed to shoot the ice bombing scene, although the sequence they could film was extremely short. After the first forty-four days, Lizzani had only been able to expose fifty metres of film. He calculated that at that rate, it would take over seven years to shoot the film. It became vital to speed up. Lizzani found similar difficulties when he requested an airplane for aerial shots of the landscape and crowd scenes. He was always refused, but the reasons for the refusal remained a mystery to him.

- Cultural issues: these also played a major role in negotiations over the film's subject. The Chinese pointed out they did not want Lizzani to shoot women's bound feet, re-enact writer Lu Xun's short story *Medicine*, mention Genghis Khan or link Chinese medicine with Chinese cuisine. Some of these prohibitions seemed obscure to the filmmaker. Apparently, the reason for not mentioning Genghis Khan was that his role of aggressor could alarm Western audiences.[14] The ban on shooting bound feet was more complex, however. Foot-binding had been a long-lasting tradition abolished in 1912, and Lizzani considered it a thing of the past. He thought that showing women with bound feet would underline the differences between the new regime and old, cruel habits. "It is an image Chinese people

[14] Proving to what degree filmmaking is conditioned by the variations in mainstream political ideology, under the different socio-political circumstances of the late 1970s the PRC would allow Giuliano Montaldo to include Mongols and Kublai Khan in his *Marco Polo* without hesitation (see Chapter 4).

do not like […], part of a reality Chinese people are no longer interested in", was the answer he received (2007, pp. 128-130). This, he noted, was an expression of Chinese nationalism: Chinese people, "before being *Marxist*, are *Chinese* and […] *do not want to be criticised as Chinese*", particularly by visitors belonging to a different culture (2007, p. 130).

- Conflicting artistic visions: opposite aesthetic judgements created some insurmountable problems. Lizzani wanted to film a girl bathing, helped by her mother, something that to him symbolised intimacy, but this was rejected by the Chinese on the grounds that "[y]ou [Westerners] make artistic judgments. We judge contents. The 'bath' content […] represents a negligible reality, it is not important, so it is not necessary that you show it" (Lizzani, 2007, p. 142).
- Controls on set: the crew was always escorted by official interpreters and chaperons who limited their freedom and made working conditions even more oppressive.

Considering the Chinese point of view during this period of cross-cultural closeness and isolation from Western countries, Alessandra Lavagnino explains the motives behind these difficulties:

> First of all, the traditional diffidence that the Chinese officials must have felt for that group of "foreign devils" who arrived in their country with points of view and needs sometimes truly unthinkable for them. They dwelt upon traditional signs of shame and backwardness like bound feet, […] half-naked children, etc., or they asked for dangerous, risky things like renting airplanes. (Lavagnino, 2003, p. 114)

The problem was that the "dangerous" requests of the Italians

> above all, required a direct assumption of responsibility on the part of the Chinese officials concerned, who, in the event of possible difficulties or problems, would have had to answer personally and politically for anything unforeseen. (Lavagnino, 2003, p. 114).

In terms of the socio-political context, this period was crucial for the PRC, whose relations with its major ally the USSR and those who – like Lizzani and the PCI – kept supporting it were eroding. Moreover, internally, China was cracking down on the "Hundred Flowers" campaign and imposing

strict controls on intellectuals.[15] In these conditions, Lizzani became increasingly impatient and determined to shoot certain scenes as *he* wanted to at all costs. He felt compelled to complete his mission because he was in China

> to accomplish a work useful to both Italian cinema and China herself. My duty is to deal thoroughly with Chinese reality, to work also for those who will come to make other films in China after me. And also to offer the Chinese concrete proof of the unavoidable difficulties of a cooperation with Westerners, without duplicities. They ought to know what we want, how we behave, know us for our excesses and our mistakes. It is always better to put out the naked truth. (Lizzani, 2007, pp. 140-141).[16]

By November 1957, part of the crew had returned to Italy. Lizzani and those who remained were feeling increasingly exasperated. He wrote that "By now, we are as nervous as long-tailed cats in a room full of rocking chairs" (Lizzani, 2007, p. 158).[17] Still, despite these tensions, the nine months on location also had positive aspects. Lizzani's relations with his assistants and interpreters over time became humane and friendly. The filmmaker acknowledged the Chinese people's capacity to quickly forget any resentment even after the harshest discussions. Officially, the "Bonzi expedition" had been welcomed to the PRC and even invited to a reception where they were introduced to Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. However, there are no traces of this meeting in Chinese newspapers of the time, something to be interpreted as a "sign of a definite distancing, a precise desire to ignore this 'foreign project'" (Lavagnino, 2003, p. 118).[18]

The end of filming in mainland China did not mark the end of filming altogether. When the crew headed to Hong Kong to take their return flight to Italy, they received strange news from Rome: the film's producers had checked the footage already shipped back to Italy and found its content too indulgent toward the PRC. Fearing rejection by the Italian censors, they asked Lizzani to film extra sequences in Hong Kong. In a video interview released in 2009, Lizzani added that this

---

[15] See historical discussion in Chapter 1.

[16] Original text in Italian.

[17] Idiomatic translation for "Oramai abbiamo i nervi a fior di pelle e la pelle è diventata trasparente".

[18] As will be discussed in Section 2.4, this film was never officially screened in the PRC.

request was actually a sort of blackmail from the Italian authorities, whose attitude could be summarised as: "We will allow you to distribute the film if you show that China is not only the PRC, but there is also another China".[19] He described this imposition as a grotesque "censorship by addition", since he had to *add* footage instead of cutting it. He also dubbed the decision "stupid", as the sequence he shot in Hong Kong (which will be analysed in Section 2.4) showcased crime, night life, gambling and the commercialisation of women's bodies, all themes that were normally considered contrary to *buon costume* in Italy and targeted by censors, but here helped to re-establish the supposed neutrality of the film. Although he was in complete disagreement with them, Lizzani filmed these additions "just to have the film distributed worldwide and to spread my fondness of China".

The finished product was a 90-minute documentary on 2,263 metres of film – out of the total 60,000 that had been shot – filmed in widescreen TotalScope.[20] It had its first commercial screening on October 11, 1958, almost a year after filming had been completed. No resources were spared in completing it: the film cost over 220 million lire (about USD 350,000, equivalent to USD 2.8 million today, which is still a reasonable budget for many fiction films) and the best technology available was employed in its making. It *had* to be a spectacular work.[21]

2.4 *La muraglia cinese*: an analysis

La muraglia cinese opens with two animated maps of Asia and China. These are illustrated by a voiceover introducing China's prominence in terms of its cultural longevity ("the most ancient

[19] The interview was conducted by Enrico Porcaro, filmed by Chinese director Liu Haiping and broadcast by the Chinese Central Television CCTV in 2012 (Porcaro, 2013). There are two versions of the interview. The Italian version is partially available on Youtube, while the Chinese version (51 minutes, with voiceover commentary in Chinese) is fully available on the CCTV website at (http://english.cntv.cn/program/documentary/20120725/100018.shtml

[20] TotalScope was an Italian equivalent to CinemaScope, also with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio.

[21] Budget data gathered from the Cost Declaration presented by Astra Cinematografica and Bonzi to the Italian Prime Minister's Cabinet, undated (Rome, State Central Archive). As for the filming equipment, this was more typical of a high-budget fiction film production than of a documentary. It included three 35mm Cameflex cameras, anamorphic lenses, dollies, gyroscopic tripods, a remote-controlled electronic lens, two zoom lenses, tracks, and two power generators (from notes found at Museo Bonzi).

nation in Asia"), size ("thirty times Italy"), and population (600 million people). The commentary also presents the country's most remarkable man-made and natural features: the Great Wall and the main three rivers (Yellow River or Huang He, Blue River or Yangzi, and Pearl River). Next, images of airplanes, trains, boats, and camels are superimposed, and to establish its supposed objectivity the commentary adds that "for ten months we traversed China" by every possible means of transport, from airplane to camel. "We were not looking for emotions, but we wanted to gather evidence. We crossed the Great Wall […] to see, to discover, and to understand."[22] This sensationalist establishing sequence works to convey two main messages: 1) China is a special, ancient and vast country; and 2) you, the audience, must watch this documentary because we have done extraordinary things to bring it to you. In addition, this introductory sequence carries a first, pleasant surprise: its colours are extremely vivid, and the images appear sharp and crisp.

The film is then organised in sequences that show different areas of China and scenes of daily life: the opening and the closing are set in Hong Kong, while in the rest the spectator is accompanied to mainland China and shown the countryside of Guilin province, the Great Wall, Inner Mongolia and the North-Western regions, a tiger hunt, a Buddhist temple near Beijing, the Forbidden City, the Suzhou Gardens, acrobatic performances, elderly people and children, a child's funeral, some undisclosed rural villages, the story of "the last sold bride", industrial areas, Shanghai, a flooded area near Harbin, and a large parade in Beijing.

Although Lizzani was against the Hong Kong sequence and even repudiated it (Lizzani, 2009b), it is worth analysing, because it establishes both the cinematic style used throughout the rest of the film and the distance between a small, urbanised and westernised China, and the immense, still traditional parts of the PRC. Hong Kong's status as a British colony is never mentioned. The whole sequence revolves around three main stereotypes: the inscrutability of Hong Kong's Chinese background to foreigners; the colony as a transit point to mainland China as well as an escape from the repressive PRC; and Hong Kong as a place of vice, materialism, and physical and moral corruption.

[22] Who this "we" refers to remains a mystery. Members of the film crew appear in occasional shots throughout the documentary, but are never introduced. For the present work, the voiceover was sourced in its original Italian version.

The approach to Hong Kong is visually rendered with an opening shot taken from a landing airplane – a symbol of modernity and wealth at a time when few people could afford to travel by air. This is followed by the control tower which bears the writing "Hong Kong" and a series of urban shots that recreate an atmosphere familiar to Western viewers. The main urban roads are congested by cars, trucks, double-decker trams and buses; behind this façade, the traditional part of town – to use the exact words of the commentary – is characterised by "intricate, dark and low alleys" filled with street markets, traditional eye doctors, "swarms of shoe shiners", acupuncturists, rickshaws, busy men, and quick-walking women who wear tight silk dresses and high-heel shoes. Throughout the whole sequence, the commentary is keen to introduce Hong Kong as something new by wrapping it in stereotyped connotations of exotic and inscrutable 'Chineseness' already familiar to the audience. Thus, it abounds in expressions like "mystery" (twice), "mysteriously", "mysterious", "secrets", "stealthy", "enigmatic", "trick", and "reticence".[23] To introduce an element of sexiness, an enigmatic and silent girl named Pio-Li becomes a fictional guide to the secrets of Hong Kong, as the commentary explains that "the night has no secrets for Pio-Li, and all doors are open for her".

This feeling is enhanced by a dynamic, fictional action sequence which ends the Hong Kong part. Here, fast match-cut editing shots of a police boat are alternated with others of two people running along the dock, poor fishermen watching, and a man falling in the water after gun shots are heard. The police officers (some white and some Asian) recover the body and question some passive, silent Asian fishermen. The reason for this murder remains unknown, as the voiceover states, building on clichés, "foreigners shall not ask questions". The commentary implies that not only does Hong Kong appear to be inscrutable, it must remain so.

Despite its mystery, Hong Kong is also described as "one of the doors to China" and as a destination for people fleeing the oppressive mainland. The former case is made explicit by the narration itself, as the film opens in Hong Kong before leading the spectators to the border and then to mainland China. The latter case is illustrated by a fictional conversation with Walter Beaumont, an imaginary British journalist. "I spent the best years of my life in China", he explains

[23] In Italian: mistero, misteriosamente, segreti, furtivamente, enigmatico, reticenza.

in English, overlapped by the Italian translation, but "I was expelled, I could no longer express myself freely. I am returning to Europe to write a book". The dominating theme in the Hong Kong sequence, though, is that of the *dolce vita* of the rich – which Italians were beginning to enjoy in those years – as well as of materialism and moral corruption pervading this city "lost in an eternal spring atmosphere, in an endless holiday". Here children and adults are seen lazily playing cricket and golf, and enjoying horse races. All these shots are accompanied by joyful music and are followed by others showing three Asian girls wearing swimsuits at the beach: they smile at the camera and seem pleased to show off their bodies. After them, the camera lingers on photos of smiling girls portrayed on posters advertising a drink, and a further still shot shows Western and Asian pin-ups on the covers of *Confidential* and *Follies* magazines. This introduces the implicit theme of women seen as objects – implicit, because it is not stated by the commentary, but expressed through images such as fetishistic shots of dancing women's feet and legs, girls sleeping on a sofa in carefully studied positions, and surreal shots of men watching a group of naked women sitting and standing still on turning platforms surrounded by mirrors. Meanwhile, the commentary explains that ships are constantly bringing people from all over the world, and "in Hong Kong, you can dance, drink and have fun at any time". The implicit meaning of these sequences could not be clearer: in a materialistic and hedonistic Westernised society, women are exploited as sex dolls, at the mercy of adult males' attention (Figs. 3-4).

These images seem to establish an equation between sex, exploitation, and modernity. Surprisingly, they still look provocative today, although in 1957-1958 they did not seem contrary to decency to the Italian censorship, which appeared more focussed on politics than on public morality and accepted them in full. Even more surprisingly, as it was explained in the previous section, they were *added* at Italian authorities' request. Lizzani called the Italian censorship "stupid", for good reason, as after watching the whole documentary it becomes evident how backward the condition of women in Hong Kong appears in comparison to mainland China. If the goal of the Italian censorship was to compare an advanced society to a supposedly backward one, it failed miserably.

In fact, opening the documentary with a stereotyped representation of the negative aspect of a Westernised European colony creates the expectation of seeing something completely different on the other side of the border. For all its thematic differences, the mainland China sequences

showcase stylistic similarities: careful frame composition, action developing horizontally, high depth of focus, little or no use of zoom, abundant use of camera movement and continuity editing, dominant music, and an overly-stylised voiceover pretending to be poetic, though occasionally rich in statistics to gain authority. The combination of these features works to give the impression of a high-budget, entertaining feature film.

As expected, the border between Hong Kong and Shenzhen acts as the entrance to a completely different world. While the voiceover rhetorically explains that the "Bamboo Curtain" is the dividing line between "two civilisations, two worlds", a red flag, a red star and a railway disappear in the distance behind a barbed wire. The other China begins here, and the next sequence illustrates this point very clearly both narratively and visually.

The Orientalist idea of being in another world is made explicit when the voiceover states that "we immediately realised that things had a different order, a different measure here: space, time, everything had a different rhythm and a different value. […] This was already the other side of the moon". These words convey a positive, calm and peaceful concept of the PRC in contrast to the Westernised, hectic lifestyle of Hong Kong. The difference from the British colony is also visually striking. Panoramic establishing shots of the fairy-tale landscape of Guilin and poetic shots of men fishing with cormorants immediately contrast with the heavily urbanised Hong Kong and introduce the idea of an idyllic rural China (Figs. 5-6). Moreover, the Chinese fishermen appear active and full of energy, in comparison to those seen standing still and silent in the Hong Kong scenes. In this sequence they also implicitly embody a first example of the strength of communal work, which will be shown again in other crowd sequences – something not remarked on by the voiceover.

After this establishing sequence, two shots of enormous hydraulic wheels and an astronomer observing the sky through a round tool are used to convey two of the main themes of this documentary: time and space. The Great Wall ideally summarises both of them, thus the next shots are dedicated to it. First it is seen in a desert area, and then on the mountains next to Beijing, while the commentary reveals its big numbers: it is 2,000 years old and 5,000 kilometres long, and it was built by the work of 700,000 people.

Despite giving its name to this documentary and being described as part of Chinese people's cultural and physical identity ("*il muro di casa dei cinesi*") as well as "an arc suspended over time

and space", the Great Wall is only seen in four shots, for no longer than one minute. However, it is recalled several times to underline the unifying role it plays for 600 million Chinese and "sixty different nationalities", and its exclusionary role for foreign cultures.[24] Even though its function over the centuries has been far more symbolic than practical, the Great Wall remains a defining symbol of China, its cultural identity, and its separation from 'foreign devils'. The addition of an abstract, ideological Bamboo Curtain appears to perpetuate this division, and by mentioning the two walls – the real and the ideological – the narrative of *La muraglia cinese* brings this concept to the foreground. There still is a barrier that a visitor must cross to arrive in mainland China, marking what is authentically Chinese and what is not.

The sheer size of China in terms of both time and space is also remarked on by other sequences combining the landscape and man's action on a large scale (Fig. 7). These include the bombing of a large portion of the frozen Yellow River (Huang He) in an endless plain, the life of nomad shepherds in the grasslands and the desert, a few quick shots of the Forbidden City, and the flooding of a vast area near Harbin, caused by a storm.[25]

The theme of space is paralleled by that of time and history, as the documentary seems to suggest that while Hong Kong represents modernity and materialism, China's ancient history and traditions are preserved in contemporary communist China. These include hunting with birds of prey, a tiger hunt (where a tiger and her cubs are captured alive), the practice of Buddhism in a temple, elderly people gardening and practicing the five-animal *qigong* exercise, children playing and dancing at the park, acrobatic performances, the use of masks in open-air theatres, the traditional funeral of a child during which paper toys are burnt, and a dinner at a restaurant based on traditional gourmet food.

---

[24] The theme of nationalities is not mentioned further, though it is underlined by rapid shots of people dressed in ethnic costumes in both remote and urban areas.

[25] In the ice-bombing sequence, the voiceover simply states that the bombing is performed "to anticipate spring", without giving any further reasons – and the explosions seem to be caused by bombs placed on the ice, rather than ones dropped from airplanes. The addition of tense, dramatic music matches the harsh, reproduced sound of clashing blocks of ice, to emphasise the cruel side of nature and man's battle to dominate it. This is also the topic of the later inundation sequence. Here the lengthy shots of the flooded area and the numerous shots of thousands of people working to rebuild the riverbanks, accompanied by dramatic music, are emotionally powerful and effective in conveying the message of people's resilience against the odds.

These are contrasted against structural and social changes. The former include the construction of new infrastructure (represented by a large railway bridge, a massive steel plant, the busy life in the port and the streets of Shanghai). Social changes are represented by the enormous number of births – 15 million babies born each year, data that in the film are given as a commentary on images of a newborn held by his father in a picturesque water town – and improvements in women's status.[26]

The latter issue takes up a considerable portion of the documentary. The second part of the film opens with a sequence where the voiceover explains that "[half] billion Chinese are farmers" and progressively wider camera shots show four women and a man similarly dressed in dark clothes and trousers, pedalling to activate a rudimentary agricultural pump. In a rather confused statement mixing three major distinct topics – women, Christian missionaries, and agriculture – in just a few lines, the voiceover adds that

> Five Chinese people out of six find life and death on the fields, and woman is the most beautiful flower growing in the fields. Thirty to forty years ago, if too many daughters were born in the same household, they were thrown into the river. Missionaries and nuns saved and christened them. Today a woman has the right to claim a piece of land only if she works as much as a man. China is going through an industrial transformation, but its structure remains agricultural.

Further poetic wide shots follow showing farmers, children and oxen in rice fields, while the voiceover comments on the annual output of rice and wheat, and on livestock numbers. Then viewers are invited to watch the story of a country girl in order to take a closer look at the life of Chinese farmers (Fig. 8).

This proposal introduces an 11-minute fictional sequence set in an undisclosed past when arranged marriages still occurred that tells the story of Liang Qi, a twenty-year-old bride sold by her father to a family of a nearby village (Figs. 9-10). This sequence is *de facto* a short film within the feature film, completely independent from the rest of the documentary. In parallel with the

[26] In giving data about birth rates, the voiceover seems not to consider the implications of a rapid population increase on such a large scale. The idea of a demographic boom is confirmed by a further comment in another sequence, where a little boy is described as "one of the 150 million kids in China". One in four Chinese is a child.

Hong Kong sequences that feature Pio-Li as a guide to the mysteries of the colony, here another woman is the protagonist, but she has the more uplifting function of showing rebellion against an unfair social system. The sequence opens with a contract being signed by the two fathers, and a payment arranged between them. Liang Qi's mother helps her to wash her hair.[27] Dressed in red, Liang Qi reaches her new village on donkey-back.[28] She is allowed to meet her husband only when the wedding is celebrated, and her happiness suddenly turns sour when she discovers he is a ten-year old child. Treated more like a slave than a daughter-in-law, and not even allowed to share a meal with her new family, she is soon involved in hard farming jobs from cropping to milling, in addition to washing dishes and even washing her husband's feet. One night when everybody is asleep, she escapes through the fields.

The fictional nature of this sequence is evident throughout. Background noises and voices can be heard, but there is never a real conversation between the characters. All the explanations are given via mimicry, images and music, like a silent film, with the voice-over replacing intertitles. Even camera movements and the *mise en scène* are carefully studied. In indoor shots the image composition, use of panning and tilting camera movements, light and characters' movements are always arranged to give the protagonist prominence and highlight her isolation in her new family. This is not the only staged sequence in the documentary; however, it is given more prominence than anything else in the film. As in the Hong Kong sequence, a woman becomes a symbol for a social system. The voiceover states this clearly by describing Liang Qi's escape with the sentence "So ends the story of Liang Qi, the last sold bride". Arranged marriages, it implies, are a thing of the past under the new regime. In contrast with the representation of women in Hong Kong, this fictional sequence works to depict a positive image of the PRC as a socially progressive country.

This is confirmed by the next sequence, which opens with the voiceover saying: "In these fifty years, Chinese women – after many nights like that one […] – reached the same rights and duties of men, like in our country". The comparison with Italy in the last part of this statement may sound

[27] As explained in Section 2.3, Lizzani wanted to show the girl bathing, but despite his protests he was forbidden to do so for aesthetic reasons (Lizzani, 2007, pp. 130-144).

[28] The establishing sequence of Zhang Yimou's *红高粱 Hóng gāoliáng / Red Sorghum* (1987) bears a striking resemblance to this part.

either genuine or sarcastic, but is there for a reason, as the images implicitly establish a familiar similarity with Lizzani's homeland. The sequence shows numerous people arriving at the construction site for a new factory, accompanied by the explanation, "men and women attracted by the city often leave the countryside. Men and women feel like pioneers in this China which has woken up from a long sleep". They are the early migrant workers, like millions of Italians in the 1950s.[29] As in the rice fields, girls and women "do the same job" as men, and the camera follows one of them finding out which part of the site she has been assigned to. High-angle, low-angle and frontal shots show her moving carefully around the construction site and on a bamboo scaffold (Fig. 11). A male hand helps her foot to safely cross a gap, and she replaces a male colleague who throws her his hat. Everyone is smiling, and images are accompanied by slow, harmonious music.[30]

The increased freedom of women is further remarked on soon after in another sequence, where a group of female polytechnic students gather after returning from a labour camp (with the voiceover failing to add more information about labour camps). They all wear traditional silk clothes and go to a restaurant where they choose their dinner not from the menu, but directly from containers where live chicks, fish, snakes and frogs are kept. Later they are shown eating Beijing duck, egg crabs, duck stomach soup with bamboo shoots, and a long list of delicacies illustrated by the voiceover. In insisting on exotic dishes very unfamiliar to Western viewers, the commentary here appears to confirm that the distance of the PRC from the West is not only geographical, but also cultural and even gastronomical. It implies that mainland China is 'other than us' from any point of view. Served by male waiting staff, the students are also shown enjoying cups of Maotai liqueur. They look happy, relaxed, cheerful and emancipated, and conclude their night out with a series of songs and dances (Fig. 12).

The mainland China part of the documentary ends with two crowd scenes that show collectivism at work – a theme already introduced with the fishing sequence at the beginning, and the factory

[29] Regarding social transformations and migrant workers in Italy, see Chapters 1 and 6.

[30] Like other sequences already discussed, this sequence, shot in Wuhan, required lengthy negotiations. Lizzani wanted to take aerial shots of the *combinat* under construction to better illustrate its size and show the large number of people working there. His requests were in vain. He also had to convince the local authorities that the image of a man's hand holding a woman's foot in this context had a positive meaning (Lizzani, 2007, pp. 153-161).

construction sequence where hundreds of workers are involved. The first of the late crowd scenes shows thousands of people cooperating to reduce the damage caused by an enormous flood near Harbin (Fig. 13). This is followed by a 6-minute concluding sequence showing a colossal parade in a large, crowded space in Beijing, featuring a corps of dancers, acrobats, gymnasts, musicians, representatives of ethnic minorities, paper flowers and flags, all moving in perfect synchronisation. Once again, impressive numbers are cited: "Two million people attending, half million actors, an invisible direction that rehearses over and over the performance during the year". The crowd marches and stands in front of the red wall of the Forbidden City, dominated by a giant portrait of Mao Zedong just over Tian'anmen door. This is the first time a figure of Mao appears in the film, although it never becomes prominent and like the flags can be seen for just a couple of seconds.

There is no mention that this is the October 1 parade that celebrates the anniversary of the proclamation of the PRC. Quite the opposite: the voiceover uses it to summarise what the crew has seen in the months spent in the PRC, and describes it as a four-hour "exciting and depressing mass performance", "a Chinese torture that dazes the Western observer". This double oxymoron is symptomatic of an Orientalist perception of what is in front of the camera and of its depiction as 'exotic otherness'. 'Spectacular' is the exact term that Bonzi and Lizzani used before and during filming, and the documentary had to remain spectacular until its very conclusion, regardless of the real meaning of what was filmed. In addition, this sequence is highly representative of Lizzani and Bonzi's decision not to talk about politics. Before it, with the exception of the red star seen at the Shenzhen border, political symbols never appear, the Chinese Communist Party is never named, and neither Mao nor any other member of the CCP's leadership is mentioned.

However, this does not mean that the film remains politically neutral. On the contrary, in taking strong yet contrasting positions, *La muraglia cinese* suggests that objectivity is impossible, and its pursuit at all costs is a source of tension in both its production and its content. For example, the film praises the PRC's social achievements and makes them appear desirable by comparing them with a negative representation of the westernised Hong Kong. However, it also denounces the lack of freedom in the PRC: freedom of expression in the case of the fictional British journalist Walter Beaumont, and religious freedom for Christians.

The latter point is implicitly expressed through an extremely strong stance on religious freedom in a sequence showing a Buddhist temple near Beijing (Fig. 15). Here, shots of praying monks – shots which are very rare, if not unique – are alternated with others of the large building that safeguards the golden statues of five hundred Buddhas, symbolic representations of what the Chinese consider their life masters: "emperors, generals, philosophers, poets, scientists". The voiceover attempts some cross-cultural considerations and points out the connections between Chinese and Italian culture when it explains that among these figures is also Marco Polo, "whom the Chinese worship as one of them". It adds that, following Polo's tracks, Christian missionaries arrived in China, including Matteo Ricci who "is still considered one of the luminaries of ancient Chinese culture". While the camera keeps showing Buddhist monks, this comment becomes the starting point for a digression on the difficulties encountered by Christianity in China, as the local culture is "more temporal than celestial". Today temples are museums, but the religion of the ancestors still has its followers, which is "certainly the reason why the State has not shut down pagodas and allows [worshippers] to burn incense in front of idols. There are still those who become monks, although they are required to […] attend political assemblies". Contrary to what one would expect, nothing else is mentioned about Buddhism, and the discussion turns to Christian minorities, whose numbers

> have been reduced to less than four million. All missionaries have been callously expelled and the State has expropriated the belongings of mission aid societies: orphanages, hospitals, universities. The surviving Christian churches are run by Chinese priests. Even religion is a national business.

Although none of the sources consulted state this point openly, it is possible to argue that this comment paved the way for the film to be approved by the Christian-Democratic Italian censorship.[31] It is also easy to believe these comments about religion – one of the most politically

[31] Regarding relations between the Catholic Church and censorship in Italian cinema, see Sanguinetti (1999) and Treveri Gennari (2014, pp. 255-271). On Christianity in the PRC, see Uhalley & Wu, 2001. Ironically, for opposing reasons, religion was a national business in Italy also.

sensitive topics in the PRC – are one of the reasons why *La muraglia cinese* has never been screened in the PRC outside of Italian Cultural Institutes.[32]

This criticism, however, does not change the initial feeling of a positive and peaceful representation of the PRC in contrast to the frenetic Hong Kong. These impressions are supported by numbers: the average shot length (ASL) of the PRC sequences is two seconds longer than that of the Hong Kong sequences (approximately 7 seconds for the PRC and 5 for Hong Kong, excluding the lengthy air shots over the British colony).

The numbers also confirm that Lizzani's representation of the PRC is overwhelmingly rural: shots taken in rural areas accounts for 70% of the total length (about 54 minutes rural, versus 24 minutes urban or industrial). In a documentary about a country with a population of 600 million, the *absence* of cities is striking. Beijing appears only in a few quick shots of the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the unmentioned Temple of Heaven, and in the longer sequence showing the October 1 parade (which shows nothing else of the city). Guangzhou is only mentioned as a location where a crowded boat competition occurs. Shanghai is the only city where the camera shows something of the urban landscape: the busy port on the Huangpu River, the iconic steel bridge on the Suzhou Creek, the Bund and a few bustling roads where some Uighurs in traditional costumes appear in the crowd. Similarly, the space for industry and infrastructure is limited to the factory construction sequence (Figs. 16-17). Although the PRC's major cities already accounted for tens of millions residents and large-scale industrial plants were being built across the country, Lizzani's choice was a way to comment on the fact that Chinese communism had grown and developed among farmers.[33]

La muraglia cinese ends symmetrically with a second, shorter sequence shot in Hong Kong and further air shots, this time filmed from an airplane taking off. "Fabulous and baffling journey" are the words used by the voiceover to express the contrasting impressions felt by a Western traveller to China. This remark echoes other oxymoronic expressions like "exciting and depressing" used

[32] More detailed reasons are discussed in Section 2.5.

[33] Although for different reasons, in 1972 Antonioni would also underline the prominence of rural China over cities, as will be illustrated in Chapter 3.

earlier in the film to talk about mass performances. In comparison, the voiceover explains, the atmosphere in Hong Kong has already "a taste of home", and despite all the negative aspects of the colony depicted in the opening sequence, here it is possible to find again a dimension of human existence that seems missing in mainland China: the individual. Hong Kong's inscrutability is implied to be more familiar to 'us', the Western audience. In contrast with this, and playing with ideas of difference and similarity, the very last bombastic remark encourages the audience to stay united in the difference, as we all shall feel ourselves belonging to "a single, free human family".

From its inception, *La muraglia cinese* was presented as a documentary, but its place in this genre appears problematic. Do its overabundance of fictional elements and its use of uncredited actors make it possible to consider it a documentary, or are they at odds with the truth claims expressed in its opening sequence? The film was planned, produced and indexed as a documentary, and according to a definition given by the World Union of Documentary Filmmakers a few years earlier, the genre comprised

> All methods of recording on celluloid any aspects of reality interpreted either by factual shooting or by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for, and widening the human knowledge and understanding, and of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the sphere of economics, culture and human relations. (Kerekes & Slater, 1993, p. 109)

In more recent years, philosopher Noël Carroll stated that the use of re-enactments in nonfiction films for aesthetic or narrative reasons is legitimate "as long as such reconstructions are as accurate as possible given the state of available evidence" (Carroll, 1996, p. 233). More recently, Bill Nicholls defined documentary as

> a form of cinema that speaks to us about actual situations and events. It involves real people (social actors) who present themselves to us in stories that convey a plausible […] perspective on the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes this story into a proposal or perspective on the historical world" (Nichols, 2010, p. 142).

La muraglia cinese certainly fits these definitions, though it makes one wonder what type of documentary it is. It uses an expository mode, as there is a voiceover speaking directly to the viewer for about 25 minutes of its 90-minute length, but it also goes beyond this. The spectacular

photography and abundant use of music composed by Angelo Francesco Lavagnino add a remarkable poetic touch. The use of social actors, which frequently occurs not just in re-enactments but in purely fictional sequences (such as the presence of Pio-Li, the journalist and the murder in Hong Kong, the sold bride sequence, and the girls in Shanghai), is typical of observational documentaries, while the interview of the fictional Walter Beaumont and the quick shots of the film crew preparing for the tiger hunt sequence are typical of participatory documentaries. Following Bonzi's habit of filming remote and unknown places, *La muraglia cinese* can also be considered an exploration documentary, with a few ethnographic explanations of the differences between the multiple ethnicities living in mainland China. Finally, some sequences appear to use cinematic conventions borrowed from other fictional film genres: Hong Kong, with its night life and crime scenes, could be the setting for a *film noir*, and today the whole sequence shot there would be called a "mockumentary", while the sold bride sequence is reminiscent of silent cinema. Even non-fictional sequences appear to recall other fiction genres: for instance, numerous shots of nomadic cattle grazers and horse riders on the mountains of north-west China may look very familiar to a lover of Hollywood westerns.

In general, *La muraglia cinese* appears to evoke what film historian Tom Gunning called the "cinema of attractions", and at the same time – like Bonzi's previous films – to anticipate the hugely popular 'mondo' documentaries inaugurated by Gualtieri & Jacopetti's *Mondo cane* in 1962. The term "cinema of attractions" refers to early cinema's attempts to create excitement through imagery (Gunning, 1990, pp. 56-62). These were charged with exhibitionism, aiming to attract the viewer through "the sensationalism of the weird, exotic, and bizarre", and "to amuse, surprise, titillate, and shock rather than deliberate, evaluate, or commemorate" (Nichols, 2010, p. 126). The 'mondo' travelogues would later take these premises to extremes by displaying a mix of nudity, sexual taboos, primitive cultures and cruelty, as well as repulsive and shocking images from around the world.[34]

The complex mixture of *La muraglia cinese*'s cinematic modes, together with its use of montage sequences to convey implicit messages through the logical association of images, reveals that its

[34] Regarding the 'mondo' films, see Kerekes & Slater (1993, pp. 101-140) and Moliterno (2014, pp. 172-180).

final cut was made to please the censors and look appealing to the largest possible audience. Since China was a politically contentious topic, it may be argued this was the only possible way to show it on a Western cinema screen and satisfy all political sides in the 1950s. The technical efforts put into its artistic overlook – from the use of 35mm cameras and anamorphic lenses to the accurate use and mixing of sound – largely compensated for the overall weakness of its commentary. The film's generally positive reception confirms these were winning strategies.

2.5 Reception

Lizzani and his crew returned to Italy in late December 1957, but it was ten months before the film had its first public screening on October 11, 1958. The long delay was necessary in order to complete the editing in a way that would comply with the frustrating and often conflicting requests of all the stakeholders involved in authorising its release. Confirming that *La muraglia cinese* had become a case of political, diplomatic and cultural importance creating institutional panic, several individuals and organisations in addition to the formal censorship had to give their own approval of the film and/or ask for modifications before its release. These included the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Italian Communist Party and the Chinese authorities, who were briefed by the PCI (Lizzani, 2007, p. 169; Bonzi correspondence with Mario Alicata, August 9–23, 1958). Even after the film had obtained the green light from all the relevant authorities, it still needed the personal approval of Giulio Andreotti, who was no longer undersecretary with a cultural portfolio but remained a kingmaker in the field of cinema. At a private screening he reassured Lizzani of the objectivity of his work (Lizzani, 2007, pp. 169-170).

Despite being the result of endless pre- and post-production compromises, *La muraglia cinese* was extremely well received at several international and Italian film festivals. In June 1958, at the Brussels World Film Festival, which was linked to the Expo held in the Belgian capital that year, it obtained the Grand Prix for Best Film, the Grand Prix for Best Image, the Grand Prix "Fémina du Cinéma", the Audience Grand Prix, and the Prix "Office Catholique du Cinéma" – the latter, it may be argued, because of the comments on Christianity in China (Astra Cinematografica, 1958, p. 1;

Lizzani, 2007, p. 169).[35] In July 1958 it won a Golden David di Donatello Award for Best Cinematographic Production at the *Quarta Rassegna Cinematografica Internazionale di Messina e Taormina* (today known as the Taormina Film Fest). It also triumphed at the "Festival of Festivals" in Mexico City, where it was the most successful film – "acclaimed for anti-American purposes" (Lizzani, 207, p 169). Finally, in October it received an award at the Trento Mountain Film Festival.

The critics' reception of the documentary showed contrasting opinions. The film was unanimously praised for its photography, but opinions diverged on the content. Interestingly, praise and negative comments were equally distributed between liberals and leftists. For example, the liberal *Corriere della Sera* described it as "an excellent work" and praised Lizzani for effectively depicting the themes analysed in Section 2.4 ('Il lungometraggio "La muraglia cinese" presentato ieri alla "IV Rassegna"', 1958, p. 5). The *Sole* financial newspaper praised its stylistic refinement and the care put into many details, explaining that some shots could resemble artworks ('Le prime cinematografiche: La muraglia cinese', 1958). The socialist *Avanti!* wrote that "the main merit" of this film was "without any doubt, the great honesty and the admirable impartiality demonstraded by its makers" and included *La muraglia cinese* among the best films in its genre (Vice, 1958a).[36]

Among the detractors, the communist daily *L'Unità* praised "the wonderful images" but remarked on the internal conflicts between director and producers, with the former more interested in human historicism[37] and the latter in the exotic, folkloric and spectacular images of China. In addition, it considered "false" the final sequence in Hong Kong but praised Lizzani for depicting, "despite Bonzi", the evolution from the most painful and infamous aspects of Chinese traditions to the new society (Casiraghi, 1958, p. 3). The same newspaper a few weeks later attacked Lizzani for his reluctance to openly talk about China, even though this choice had been made to avoid censorship (La muraglia cinese, 1958). The moderate *Il Messaggero* criticised the film for its

[35] Lizzani noted in his diary that the Italian ambassador in Brussels believed it would be better to withdraw *La muraglia cinese* from the festival because Italy had not yet given diplomatic recognition to the PRC, and the PRC did not attend the World Expo (Lizzani, 2007, p. 169).

[36] Original text in Italian.

[37] Lee and Beck defined this concept as the belief that understanding of the present political, social and intellectual context is based on historical knowledge (1954, p. 577).

partiality and for the narrative discontinuity of the sold bride sequence (Vice, 1958b). Further criticisms ranged from its political partiality to its inappropriate commentary, excessive displays of folklore, use of stereotypes, lack of courage in talking more openly about China, the cruel use of a goat in the tiger hunt and the opinion that the documentary was made just to amaze the audience.

The critiques were so many and so heterogeneous that Lizzani felt it necessary to openly reply to them. In a letter to *Avanti!* he shifted the attention from China to Italy and explained that, for most of those who held the power of censorship, the idea of showing China on screen was already challenging enough. Self-censorship in the commentary, therefore, was a necessary choice, and he was the first to regret it. This choice had the consequence of pleasing the authorities, but also displeasing both Italian Marxist and anticommunist intellectuals, who expected more explicit information on Maoism. The filmmaker used this occasion to "underline the more general reticence and the contradictions of our [Italian] cinematography", as the cinema industry was still struggling "to enlarge the freedom that the press already enjoys". He concluded by inviting the most critical journalists to use their own prestige "to further clarify our problems to the public opinion" (Lizzani, 1958).[38]

It took a while to have the documentary distributed on the international market because China, "old or new, refined or revolutionary, tender or argumentative, always scares certain governments", and not only Italian ones (Casiraghi, 1958).[39] The producers were finally able to sell it to major markets such as Germany, France and even the United States. In the USA, it attracted attention for being narrated by Chet Huntley, a prominent TV journalist. It was also the first film projected using the new Aroma-Rama technology. This device, created by Charles Weiss, was part of a series of attempts to make the cinema-going experience more appealing as the competition from television in the USA became a serious threat. Aroma-Rama and other similar systems tested in the same period, like Smell-O-Vision, worked by diffusing scents into the theatre through the air-conditioning system. However, after the screening of Lizzani's film – which was accompanied

[38] Original text in Italian.

[39] Original text in Italian.

by 72 scents of Hong Kong night clubs, camels, tigers, flowers and food – it was short-lived, as it experienced insoluble technical problems. Since the diffusion of scents was not immediate, they remained in the theatre far longer than the images they were associated with (Lizzani, 2007, p. 168; Dirks, 2017; typed notes in Bonzi archive). The addition of Aroma-Rama confirms the positioning of this film as an exotic spectacle, rather than a politically motivated one.

As anticipated in Section 2.4, the film never reached Chinese screens, for both cultural and political reasons. Firstly, Lizzani had always intended to make a documentary for Western audiences, and it may be argued that the Chinese audience would be unlikely to appreciate its exotic perspective. Moreover, it is not hard to imagine that the voiceover references to the imprisonment of Christian missionaries were not appreciated by the Chinese censors. Other reasons that contributed to *La muraglia cinese* being ignored in mainland China could include the reference to the October 1 parade as "torture" and, following Lizzani's own opinion, the fact that a considerable addition to the documentary was shot in Hong Kong, which was not part of the original agreement between the director and the Central Office for Cinema and Documentary Studies.

Despite its success at national and international film festivals and a reasonable box office success, *La muraglia cinese* was soon forgotten. It was also Bonzi's last cinematic success, and the second-to-last film he produced. As for Lizzani, his Chinese experience had a long lasting impact.[40] As a Marxist intellectual, he believed that communism was geared toward industrialisation and urbanisation, so he was quite shocked to find that the communist revolution in China was led by farmers and based in rural areas. This seemed to him a dangerous mutation. He believed that if Marxism-Leninism was embodied by farmers, it would ultimately lead to a form of Stalinist government control. The PCI did not like his point of view, and Italian left-wing intellectuals – who in the 1960s were predominantly fascinated by the myth of Mao – liked it even less. In contrast, the filmmaker kept condemning the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution as "a horrific construction of laboratory socialism" in which real men and women were swept away by blind ideology.

[40] Regarding this, see Lizzani (2007, pp. 165-166).

Lizzani himself was not free from a certain Orientalism. He was distressed by the great difference between what he saw as the Chinese and Western perceptions of time and space (Lizzani, 2007, p. 166). This led him to think that the main issue in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would not be the clash of capitalism and socialism, but the clashes between cultures rooted in different parts of the world. Lizzani never returned to the PRC; however, he returned to work in East Asia in 1970 for another documentary (*The Orbit of China*). After *La muraglia cinese*, he made over forty films in many genres, from crime stories to Spaghetti Westerns. His Chinese experience, though, always remained in his thoughts. In his authobiography, written fifty years after the documentary was made, its making occupies 65 pages out of 320 – one-fifth of the whole book.

2.6 Conclusion

La muraglia cinese was the result of the persistence of a filmmaker and a producer, Carlo Lizzani and Leonardo Bonzi respectively, who were politically opposed but also complementary. Lizzani could strike a deal with the Chinese authorities, but was regarded with suspicion by the Italian censorship; in contrast, Bonzi had been unsuccessful in attempting to obtain permission to film in China, but was considered trustworthy by the Italian authorities. This unusual match of a self-proclaimed communist and a liberal aristocrat allowed them to shoot the first Western feature film made in the PRC.

La muraglia cinese contained another inner contradiction. Although Lizzani and Bonzi complemented each other, their artistic goals and political visions were profoundly divergent. The former aimed at giving a positive image of China to the Western audience, while the latter was more interested in exotic spectacle. Thus, even though *La muraglia cinese* was made to be politically neutral, its final cut was heavily influenced by politics and was indicative of the 'age of hostility and curiosity' in which it was made. For these reasons, analyses of its production history and of the film itself are also revelatory of the Italian context of that time – a characteristic that to different degrees will be also displayed by the other five films considered in this thesis.

Lizzani and Bonzi's work was the result of an unavoidable series of compromises, a slalom between socio-historical and technical factors that conditioned its making in both China and Italy.

This experience and the length of Lizzani's stay in China led him to what could be called a culture shock as well as an ideological crisis. Talking about China in 1957 was a difficult task, and this film proved it from every point of view. It maintained an exotic approach to mainland China as something far away, often inscrutable and very different from 'us'. It described the trip to the PRC as creating contrasting feelings in Western visitors: "fabulous and baffling", "exciting and depressing". The idyllic and vastly rural image of the country that emerges from *La muraglia cinese* hides years of cultural, political and ideological battles between multiple stakeholders. Still, despite its numerous problems, *La muraglia cinese* brought the new communist China to the screens of several European countries, as well as those of the United States and Mexico, for the first time. It was an important experience not only for Western cinema, but also for the Chinese themselves, if it is true that they made other foreign crews postpone their plans to film in China in order to let Lizzani work in peace (Casiraghi, 1958, p. 3). Despite its importance, though, this film was soon forgotten and buried by the commercial success of the 'mondo' documentaries, and by the ideological impact of events that followed its completion: the Great Leap Forward, the break between the the PRC and the USSR, the Cultural Revolution, and the cult of Mao, which were to influence also Italy.

La muraglia cinese was never commercialised outside of movie theatre circuits. In 1997, Carlo Lizzani, together with Bonzi's and Lavagnino's daughters, tried to have it restored; however the project did not go ahead for financial and technical reasons. Rome's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia holds a copy of the film, and its negative is privately owned. Other copies were destroyed, and it is still unclear how many – if any – are still available, and where. As it set several precedents (the first Western feature film to be shot in the PRC and the first film to be screened using the Aroma-Rama system, it contains extremely rare images of the pre-Cultural Revolution-PRC and of monks praying in a Buddhist temple), *La muraglia cinese* holds an important role in the history of cinema, and for this reason it deserves renewed attention and proper preservation.

3. Aesthetic and ideological conflicts in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Chung kuo – China* (1972): "You can draw the skin of a tiger, not its bones. You can draw the face of a man, but not his heart"

"I don't give a damn [about interviewing people]! For God's sake, we are here for other reasons. I want to see how the Chinese people really look like in the streets. […] I don't want to make a political documentary." (Michelangelo Antonioni)

In the early 1970s, Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007) was one of Italy's most acclaimed filmmakers. His films *L'avventura / The adventure,* (1960)*, La notte / The night* (1961)*, L'eclisse / The eclipse* (1962)*, Deserto Rosso / Red desert* (1964)*, Blowup* (1966) had created a new cinematic language that enthused European and American critics and audiences alike. However, *Zabriskie Point*, which was shot in the USA in 1968 and reportedly his most expensive film, had been "one of the biggest financial failures of its day" (Lyman 2007), and he struggled to make a new film after that. So when RAI, the Italian public television broadcaster, proposed he shoot a documentary in the PRC, Antonioni accepted enthusiastically. He went on to become one of the first non-Chinese filmmakers to witness the changes caused by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and to complete a feature documentary in the PRC a few months after US president Richard Nixon's historic visit to China. In just five weeks spent on location, he filmed enough material to produce a 207-minute documentary. One year after its release it caused a furious reaction from the Chinese

authorities, who orchestrated a long-lasting campaign against Antonioni. Only in 2004, three years before his death at age 94, did Beijing lift the ban on *Chung kuo*, though this did not clear the documentary of all controversy.This chapter will give an in-depth account of the film's production history and shooting, and an analysis of it. *Chung kuo* was a product of its time: a transnational documentary made in the 'age of admiration'. Considering the anti-Antonioni campaign that followed its release, it will also be remarked to what degree ideological matters can not only condition the production of a film, but also politicise a discussion on aesthetic perceptions, thus affecting a film's distribution and reception, and ultimately rewriting the filmmaker's intentions.

Literature on Antonioni and his existentialist films certainly abounds, and scholars like Peter Brunette, Seymour B. Chatman and Giorgio Tinazzi have dedicated an extensive part of their research to him. However, information and academic publications dedicated to *Chung kuo* and the aftermath of its release are sparse and fragmented, and do not give a complete account of Antonioni's experience in China. For example, even the recent and comprehensive *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (2011), edited by Rascaroli and Rhodes, spends less than two pages (296-297) and part of an endnote (n.7, p. 111) on *Chung kuo.* Possibly the only complete academic discussion available so far was carried out in 2016 by Marco Dalla Gassa in his *Orient (to) Express: Film di viaggio, etno-grafie, teoria d'autore*, where a chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the film and the misunderstandings that occurred after its release (pp. 173-190).[1]

In order to complete this chapter the existing, limited literature was integrated with an extensive research of oral and primary sources. These included a lengthy, unpublished interview in Italian with *Chung kuo*'s director of photography Luciano Tovoli, plus articles on and interviews with Antonioni that have appeared in the American and Italian press between 1972 and 1974. Newspapers did not cover much of the making of *Chung kuo*, but did give an extensive coverage of the anti-Antonioni campaign; for example, the *Corriere della Sera* daily newspaper published seven articles, including reports of Antonioni's trip to China and reviews of the documentary, in 1972-1973, and twenty about the controversy with China in 1974 alone. Due to the impact of the anti-Antonioni campaign, the 人民日包 *Rénmín Rìbào* editorial that started it in January 1974 has also

[1] The thesis was later published in a book: Dalla Gassa, M. (2016), *Orient (to) Express: Film di viaggio, etno-grafie, teoria d'autore.* Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis.

been analysed extensively. Extracts from video interviews with Antonioni and Andrea Barbato, the author of the commentary, were also gathered from RAI TV programs. Further video interviews with Antonioni's assistant director (and future wife) Enrica Fico, his biographer Carlo Di Carlo, and cinematographer Luciano Tovoli appeared in Liu Haiping's documentary *China is Far Away: Antonioni and China* (2005).

Antonioni's first-person account of the filming of *Chung kuo* was included in the Introduction of the homonymous book, edited by Cuccu, that followed the film's release. It included the commentary and a brief description of what actually appeared on screen (Antonioni 1974). Here the director combined his thoughts about China before and after the trip, his memories of pre-production negotiations, and his reflections on the challenges of combining truth and propaganda in documentary-making. In 2009, Di Carlo and Tinazzi published Antonioni's most recent collection of writings , which included selected interviews with him (*Fare un film è per me vivere*) and provided further essential insights into *Chung kuo*.

In more recent years, scholars have renewed the discussion of Antonioni's representation of China. In 2009, Sun Hongyin (pp. 45-59) compared Antonioni's and Yoris Ivens' different relationships with China, as well as their different motivations, cinematic styles and film languages. In 2014, issue 2(1) of the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* was largely dedicated to the relationship between Italian cinema and China, and Antonioni's work was discussed by Pollacchi (pp. 7-21) in an article on the impact of Italian cinema on contemporary Chinese film-making, by Liu (pp. 23-40) who analysed the reception of *Chung kuo* in China, and finally by my article "Italian film-makers in China and changing cultural perceptions: Comparing *Chung Kuo - China* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1972) and *La stella che non c'è/The missing star* (Gianni Amelio, 2006)" (pp. 41-58).

3.1 An existentialist filmmaker

Born in 1912 in Ferrara into a wealthy family, Michelangelo Antonioni approached cinema early as a film commentator for the *Corriere Padano* local newspaper. In 1939 he moved to Rome, where he became copy-editor of Vittorio Mussolini's *Cinema* magazine, where Carlo Lizzani also wrote.

Subsequently he attended the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, though for only three months. During World War II he managed to work as screenwriter on Roberto Rossellini's *Un pilota ritorna* / *A pilot returns* and as assistant director on Enrico Fulchignoni's *I due foscari* (1942). In 1943 he worked in France as assistant director to Marcel Carné (*Les visiteurs du soir*) and, back in Ferrara for a while, he shot his first documentary *Gente del Po* / *People of the Po*, which he could not edit because of the war. When he returned to Rome, the city was occupied by the Germans. Because of his involvement with the anti-Nazi resistance, he had to flee and was even sentenced to death in absentia (Bachmann, 1975, p. 30; Di Carlo & Tinazzi, 2009, pp. 143-144).

Only after the war, in 1947, did he manage to edit *Gente del Po*, which already contained many of his distinctive stylistic features, such as the contrast between instability (here represented by boats) and slowness (of life and events along the River Po, rendered through lengthy shots), the use of narrative ellipses rather than natural progression of events (here exemplified by the images of the storm, which cut from its beginning to its various stages of progress), and the importance of setting and environment with life flowing in the foreground (Tinazzi, 1974, p. 59). As Antonioni wrote, "Everything – good or bad – I have done after it, originated from there" (Antonioni, 2009b, p. 64).

In 1948-1950 he directed other short documentaries, the finest being *Nettezza Urbana* (*N.U.*) / *Sanitation department* (1948), about Roman streetcleaners. The film opens with a brief voiceover stating that nobody notices streetcleaners at work. The remaining ten minutes are filled by music accompanying images of streetcleaners captured in their repetitive daily lives. There is no storyline, just a juxtaposition of those who litter and those who clean the city. The unnamed protagonists seem to live in a world apart, as they interact only with each other, their families and their pigs. According to Antonioni, this work was important because of its avoidance logically-structured sequences with a beginning, a precise order and an end. He felt it necessary to break this order, and attempted a poetically free editing, characterised by isolated shots, in order to "give a more mediated idea of what I wanted to express" (Antonioni, 2009c, p. 23). Thus, if on the one hand the careful image composition and particularly the long shots are typical of Neorealist films, on the other Antonioni's treatment of the subject departs from the Neorealist style by adopting a psychological approach rather than a social one, and gestures toward more abstract works (Bondanella, 2001, pp. 75-76).

This change was more noticeable after his first feature film *Cronaca di un amore* / *Story of a Love Affair* (1950), when he became increasingly impatient with Neorealist aesthetics and themes. In a rapidly normalising post-war society and environment, bringing the psychological conception of characters to the foreground became more important to him than focussing on their social interactions. Thus, he began to show the inner thoughts of characters – contributing to create a style that French critics named "interior neorealism" (Antonioni, 2009d, pp. 7-8; di Carlo & Tinazzi, 2009, p. 145). This was also the case for his next film *I vinti / The vanquished* (1953), which he shot in three countries: France, Italy and England. *I vinti* was made in three episodes, recounting stories based on real murders committed by affluent youths, and openly condemning "the erosion of reason and morality throught society" across borders (Brody, 2011). Its violence and its connection to recognisable and disturbing crime news infuriated the censors of all three countries, and Antonioni had to heavily rework his first transnational film in order to have it distributed (Dixon, 2016).

Looking for truth, rather than logic, Antonioni's cinema evolved toward increasingly abstract works. He developed an interest in the detachment of human passions from their environment, and in the sense of boredom, inadequacy and moral incapability of the individual faced with scientific and technological progress. The emphasis on objects, geometry, emptiness, and from *Deserto Rosso* onwards the use of occasionally unnatural colours, comment on the psychological instability of individuals and their inability to adapt to an industrialised environment dominated by technology and consumerism (Bondanella, 2001, pp. 220-221). To underline individual distress and incommunicability, dialogue in his films is limited and superficial, and photography and sound prominent.

Thanks to his innovative style and to the visual quality of his works, Antonioni became one of the leading Italian art cinema directors of the 1960s, winning the Jury Prize at Cannes Film Festival in 1960 and 1962 for *L'avventura* and *L'eclisse*, the Golden Bear at Berlin in 1961 for *La notte,* and the Golden Lion at Venice in 1964 for *Deserto Rosso.* The international prestige gained on those occasions gave him the opportunity to shoot his next films abroad. His first English-language film, *Blow-Up*, won the Golden Palm at Cannes, received two Academy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Script, and grossed $20 million at the box office – ten times more than its budget (Corliss, 2007). In contrast, his next film *Zabriskie Point* (USA, 1969), was a massive

commercial failure: in the US it only made USD 900,000 on a budget of seven million (Totaro, 2010).[2] Possibly this film appeared too politically connected to the counterculture of the 1960s, or perhaps, as Antonioni himself believed, was interpreted as anti-American (Rubeo, 2009, p. 284).[3] Either case would prove to be overstating Antonioni's intentions; despite focusing on the negative impact of modernity and materialism on the human psyche, his films did not contain moral judgements. Even if he was believed to be moderately left-wing, he always remained elusive about his political point of view. Only a few years later, in a rare political statement, would he write that Maoism was the starting point of a process that led "one billion people to be protagonists on the world scene", and would describe Mao Zedong as a "master of morality" (Antonioni, 1974, p. XIV; Bachmann, 1975, p. 29). This statement, however, would not spare him from violent accusations that came from the very system he admired.[4]

In this difficult moment in his successful career, Antonioni decided to return to the genre of his early films and made *Chung kuo* (1972), the documentary on China commissioned by the Italian public broadcaster that is the focus of this chapter.

3.2 Filming *China*: history of a documentary

As Carlo Lizzani and Leonardo Bonzi had already found in 1957, Western documentary-makers' access to China had been limited by diplomatic and internal factors since the foundation of the PRC in 1949, and conditions did not substantially ease at least until the end of 1976 (Fitzpatrick, 1983, p. 87), when China began its transition to the 'age of reform and opening-up'. For over a decade after Lizzani the only other Western documentary-makers allowed to film in the PRC, on invitation from the Chinese government, were those sympathetic to the Maoist regime, such as

[2] However, *Zabriskie Point* received delayed appreciation: Antonioni discovered it was still being screened in several theatres across the USA in the mid-1980s (Rubeo, 2009, p. 284).

[3] The protagonists were played by non-professional actors. Mark Frechette, the actor playing the role of the male protagonist, was really a member of a commune and six years died later in prison where he was detained for bank robbery.

[4] This will be discussed further in Section 3.3.

the Dutch Joris Ivens (1898-1989) and the British-American Felix Greene (1909-1985) (Jenkins, 1986, p. 7). Ivens had enjoyed a long-time friendship with the Chinese Communist Party since 1939, when he shot *The Four Hundred Million* showing the fight of the Communists against the Japanese. A personal friend of Zhou Enlai, he had returned to Beijing in 1956 and 1958 as a teacher at the documentary studio, where he had supervised two documentaries. One of them, *Letters from China*, "a stunning experiment in color and […] lyricism", incorporated "many of the color techniques of ancient Chinese painting" and was distributed in Europe (Waugh, 1988, p. 151; Zhang, 2009, pp. 35-44).

Greene, a writer and journalist turned documentary maker, gave himself the "task of explaining the revolutionary societies to the Western world" ('Mr Felix Greene', 1985) p. 16) and had been in China several times since 1957. In a further four-month trip, he began filming in order to collect material for a new book, but after collecting twelve hours of footage he thought it possible to edit a film. The result was an attempt to explain the recent achievements of the PRC to the Western world (Kaufman, 2013, p. 163-164) in a 60-minute documentary titled *China!* (1965), based on black and white archival images of China during the Japanese invasion and the contrast between them and what he saw, filmed in the colours of modern Maoist China. Despite the US Justice Department's attempts to prevent its screening, the film proved to be a success: it was shown in 165 American cities, obtained positive reviews and won first prize at the Melbourne International Film Festival (Kaufman, 2013).

After the early turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution, the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the PRC and several Western countries in the early 1970s created a need for China to redefine its international reputation. This became even more urgent in 1971, when US National Security advisor Henry Kissinger secretly visited the PRC, paving the way for a later reconciliation between China and the United States. Having international filmmakers shoot in the country was a strategy chosen to support the PRC's rebranding efforts. In 1971, Zhou Enlai therefore invited Ivens to shoot another documentary with full support from the Chinese government, which provided them with an entire crew of filmmakers (Sun, 2009, p. 47). After filming on location until 1974, Ivens' twelve-hour-long *Comment Yukong déplaça les montagnes / How Yukong moved the*

mountains was completed only in 1976.[5] Similarly, Felix Greene was invited to China again to make a new documentary, and in 1972 he spent five months in China filming *One man's China*.

Filmmakers Gerard Valet and Henri Roanne also arrived in China in 1971 to shoot the documentary *Chine* for Belgian television, following the American table-tennis national team for 7,000 kilometres during their tour of China from Shanghai to Yan'an (Dalla Gassa, 2016, p. 184). However, the impact of their film was negligible: there are barely any traces of it available, and the careers of the directors did not produce more than three features in the 1970s (imdb.com).

Meanwhile, in July 1971 the Italian state broadcaster RAI contacted the recently-opened Chinese Embassy in Rome and requested permission to shoot a documentary film in China with Antonioni as the director. The request was approved ten months later (Mu, 2009). Although it was never officially confirmed, it was believed that final approval came from Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, who, as the director later explained to his crew, loved Antonioni's films (Tovoli, 2014; Pini, 2011, p. 156; Sun, 2009, p. 46). This project appeared advantageous for all of the main stakeholders. Firstly, it was consistent with China's attempt to rebuild its international image, and Antonioni's reputation would attract a larger audience than other ideologically-biased directors and fellow travellers would. Secondly, from the RAI's point of view, becoming one of the first Western television broadcasters to produce a feature documentary in the PRC was an unmissable chance in a moment characterised by the growing popularity of television and the RAI's early attempts to seek international prestige through an aggressive co-production policy in the European market (Di Chiara, 2014, p. 388). And thirdly, it came as an unexpected opportunity for Antonioni in the aftermath of *Zabriskie Point's* failure. This documentary would allow him to reconnect with his early cinematic career and become one of the very few Western directors to film in the PRC. As he felt great respect for Chinese culture and morality – and he was certainly curious to see China personally – he promptly accepted (Antonioni, 1974, p. XIV).

---

[5] Ironically, as Zhang Tongdao notes (Zhang, 2009, p. 41), Iven's four-year work was a failure. It was not allowed to be released in France, but in March 1976 some private screenings were held there and in Italy, Finland, Holland and America. In December it was also broadcast by Chinese television and screened in Chinese cinemas, but by then the Cultural Revolution had ended, and the new Chinese government, rather than supporting it, considered it a disaster. Thus, *Yukong* was attacked both in China and overseas for not showing "the real life of Chinese people" and never getting close to the problems caused by the revolution, like "the fighting, starvation, difficult labouring and educational methods" (Zhang, 2009, pp. 41, 43).

As soon as permission was granted by the PRC, a crew was frantically recruited. In my interview with him in June and July 2014, cinematographer Luciano Tovoli (born in 1936), who had never had any contact with Antonioni, recalls that one day in 1972:

> I returned home and my wife told me: «Michelangelo Antonioni called».
>
> «Well, he's definitely dialled the wrong number!».
>
> «No, he said he'd call back in ten minutes».
>
> So he called me and said: «Luciano, would you like to come to China? I'm going to make a documentary in China».
>
> I asked him: «When are we leaving? Tomorrow morning?».
>
> We left a week later. (Luciano Tovoli, 2014)[6]

Besides Antonioni and Tovoli, the small crew included Antonioni's partner and later wife Enrica Fico, who worked as assistant director, the journalist and former Far East correspondent Andrea Barbato as director of production, camera operator Roberto Lombardi Dallamano, sound engineer Giorgio Pallotta, and electrician Mario Morischini. On May 13, 1972, just a week after obtaining approval from the Chinese embassy in Rome, they arrived in Beijing via Hong Kong and Guangzhou carrying their light equipment – two Éclair super 16mm cameras, a tripod, lenses and microphones – and not much else.

Antonioni's idea of China before arriving there was more a fairy-tale picture than a politicised one (Antonioni, 1974, p. IX). He found it necessary not to be conditioned either by the exotic, fairy-tale China he imagined or by the recent political debates on Maoism and the Cultural Revolution, but instead to record what appeared in front of him, as it was. He simply wanted to give spectators the feeling of travelling to China (Antonioni, 1974, pp. VIII-XIX). He therefore instructed his crew

[6] Born of a Tuscan working class family and politically inclined towards extreme-leftist positions, Tovoli was a graduate of Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and considered photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson to be his model. Antonioni contacted him after watching *Diario di un Maestro*, a 4-part miniseries about a special class organised for 'problem' students in the Roman suburbs, directed by Vittorio de Seta and filmed by Tovoli as a reportage, on TV. The original text of the interview with Luciano Tovoli is in Italian.

about his observational goals but did not share any other information with them. According to Tovoli, they did not receive any form of script. When the cinematographer tried to take the camera out and film what he saw at the China-Hong Kong border, Antonioni asked him to put it away, as "we still have to see, we still have to begin to understand, then we will start shooting" (Tovoli, 2014).

Antonioni was aware of the technical and cultural issues that Lizzani had had to endure there fifteen years earlier, so he anticipated complexity. However, he probably did not predict that he would spend his first three days in a Beijing hotel negotiating his filming plan with representatives of Chinese television. When he presented his itinerary, his counterparts rejected it because they believed it would require six months, while the visa Antonioni and his crew had been granted allowed them to travel across China for just five weeks (RAI, 1979). Antonioni believed the Chinese had already planned another itinerary unbeknownst to him, and thus he felt it was necessary to discuss everything again (Antonioni, 1974, p. XI). During the first day, he asked what best represented the changes that had occurred in China after its liberation. The answer he obtained was generic: «Man». He had become famous for scrutinising man with the camera, and he was offered the chance to do it again in a completely new context. As he later declared,

> At least our interests on this coincided. I tried to look at man, rather than at his achievements. Let me be clear, I believe that present China's socio-political structure is a model – possibly inimitable – deserving the most careful study. However, the people are what struck me most. [7] (Antonioni, 2009e, p. 104)

Antonioni's words reveal a fundamental contradiction between his concern for existentialism and psychology, and China's willingness to show its material achievements. This contrast would be largely brought to the foreground by the 1974 anti-Antonioni campaign.[8]

While the filmmaker was busy with negotiations, his crew was forced to stay in the hotel, as their passports had all been taken by Chinese officers. They had plenty of time to observe what was

[7] Original text in Italian.

[8] See Section 3.4.

happening around them. From the window of his room on the sixth floor, Tovoli noticed that in the early morning groups of elderly people met along the road below and made strange synchronised movements. At the time he did not know what *taijiquan* was, but he decided it deserved to be filmed. Failing to convince Antonioni, at last Tovoli took the initiative and went out alone with the sound engineer and camera operator, taking some risks:

> It was absolutely forbidden at the time. We could only move when accompanied by our chaperones […]; it was inconceivable for a small group of Europeans to travel across Beijing without permission, and even without a map. But I went out [...] without Antonioni, and without telling him anything. [...] [Later] I did the same on other occasions. Thus, there is a considerable part – it might be one tenth-one fifteenth of the film – that I shot by myself without telling him. (Tovoli, 2014)

The working schedule agreed to with representatives of Chinese television was tight. Most of the time was spent in Beijing (May 13-28), four days in the rural Linxian District (today's Linzhou) in the province of Henan (May 29 – June 1), four days in Nanjing (June 2-5), three days in Suzhou (June 7-9), and finally a week in Shanghai (SACIS, 1973). In those few weeks of frenzied work, the crew travelled over 2,000 kilometres and shot up to 80 takes a day, exposing 30,000 metres of film (Bachmann, 1975, p. 27; Chatman, 2008, p. 64). On his last day in Beijing, Antonioni also held a two-hour press conference – the first of its kind held by an Italian director in China – with thirty journalists from the Xinhua agency. Here he was given the chance to talk about Italian cinema, including his own films, and to share his ideas on Kierkegaard's concept of alienation. On this occasion, he confirmed his cinematic approach to China: as everything was new to him, he tried to become 'invisible'. In his own words,

> I do not exist as Antonioni. Everything is worth filming [here], I shoot only what is possible. I am deliberately trying to make a film that excludes any technical and aesthetic research whatsoever. ('Antonioni va dai cinesi e parla di alienazione', 1972, p. 11) [9]

Antonioni believed the determination he put into this work was a reaction to the limitations imposed on him, such as always being accompanied by between eight and fourteen people

[9] Original text in Italian.

(Antonioni, 2009e, p. 104; Bachmann, 1975, p. 30). As had been the case with Lizzani and Bonzi, the Chinese requests and vetoes became a major cause of frustration for the Italians. In some cases, the official guides insisted that they film places like the 'Chinese-Albanian' agricultural commune in the outskirts of Beijing (Tovoli, 2014). In other cases, they did not want the director to film unplanned scenes, such as a spontaneous street market that they found in a rural area, a remote village they crossed by chance, or a Chinese warship they saw in Shanghai.

Although Antonioni was working in China at the same time as Ivens, the technical support he obtained from the Chinese government was much less than what had been provided to the Dutch filmmaker. His working style was also extremely different: while Ivens often interviewed people, Antonioni refused to do so. He told his crew:

> I don't give a damn [about interviewing people]! For God's sake, we are here for other reasons. I want to see how the Chinese really look like in the streets. […] I don't want to make a political documentary. It's a simple documentary, that is... simple. (Tovoli 2014)

Not only were the two directors' working styles different, their approaches to China were in opposition. While Ivens had already been there on several occasions as a fellow traveller, Antonioni was discovering the country for the first time, did not have the same level of cultural and ideological affinity with the Chinese authorities, and avoided being explicitly political. The two filmmakers even met once in Beijing:

> We saw him [Ivens]. He travelled arm in arm with the authorities. When we went to a theatre to watch a performance, he was sitting in the first row with the authorities, while we stayed in the gallery, in the last seats. […] We were nobodies. Ivens did not care that Antonioni was there. In fact, perhaps he was annoyed. That's how it went. I held Ivens in great respect because he was such a phenomenon, with his documentaries, a truly remarkable filmmaker. [...] I was also very politicised, [but] I did not believe he could make a good film by spending all that time with the authorities, or by blindly believing everything he was told, or everything he saw, or everything he believed he was seeing. By contrast, we adopted a totally [...] external gaze. (Tovoli, 2014)

The idea of the external gaze – the gaze of a first-time visitor impressed by everything he sees, including the daily life of common people – was visually obtained through the use of a super 16mm camera, mainly handheld and occasionally hidden. This kind of recently introduced,

lightweight, unobtrusive camera offered several advantages: in particular, it could be easily transported and combined with synchronous sound (Nichols, 2010, p. 30; Sun, 2009, p. 48). In the 1960s this technology had paved the way for more observational and participatory documentaries, as it allowed filmmakers to adopt a closer approach to their subjects' lives and reduce the use of voiceover commentary. It matched both Antonioni's observational goals and Tovoli's style of reportage, and was a major change for Antonioni (Antonioni, 1974, pp. VII–XVI). Though the director had previously declared that "one does not fathom facts through reportage" (Antonioni, 2009b, p. 61), here he completely relied on this style and on the spontaneity of social actors. This spontaneity could only be maintained if the crew and their equipment somehow 'disappeared'. That is why the camera was hidden when possible, such as when filming a food market and some street scenes in Beijing.

On other occasions, though, people maintained their natural behaviour even when four foreigners were openly filming them. One episode effectively illustrates this point. In Suzhou, Antonioni and his crew noticed a noodle restaurant. Thinking of the similarity between Chinese noodles and Italian spaghetti, they decided to enter and take a few shots:

> We entered with the camera, without saying anything to anyone. I started to shoot. There was the sound engineer with the boom pole, the camera assistant working on lenses, and Antonioni watching and giving me directions in one ear, so as not to disturb, while people kept eating. We were invisible. […]. But we were four or five people! With a camera, quite big [in comparison with a photo camera]! So we filmed cooks who drained noodles, and that sort of things. Absolutely no-one, not even the restaurant manager, asked us: "What are you doing? Who are you? What do you want?". […] They let us do everything! (Tovoli, 2014)

However, the gift of invisibility did not last long:

> After shooting for half an hour, we turned and [we found that] outside there were four hundred people who realised that something strange indeed was happening inside. When we went out, we received applause, like, say, at the Cannes Film Festival… They, the crowd, applauded us! (Tovoli, 2014)

Crowding on-set was an issue the crew had to face almost everywhere they shot. Andrea Barbato, the author of the commentary, wrote that the crowd was never hostile, but made it impossible to

work and the guides and interpreters had to go to considerable effort to keep people away. This is another reason why Antonioni had to conceal the camera when at all possible, or to improvise (Barbato, 1972, p. 19), with obvious benefits in terms of the spontaneity of social actors.

Despite Antonioni's intention to capture spontaneity, improvisation and the use of hidden camera could only be maintained for street shots and crowd scenes. Most scenes were planned in advance by the Chinese officials. Examples of these scenes – some of which will be further illustrated in Section 3.3 – include a Caesarean birth, primary- and middle-school student performances and sports, workers going home and preparing dinner, students marching, farmers working in an agricultural commune, a political meeting in a rural village, farmers delivering fresh vegetables to Suzhou, and former CCP officials gathering at a teahouse in Shanghai.[10] Antonioni was well aware of their unnaturalness, which made him feel uneasy (Antonioni, 2009e, pp. 106-107). However, he explained, they were not detached from the reality of the PRC and from what Chinese people did in their daily life. The risk of ending up making a propaganda film existed, but it was calculated. As the director acknowledged, "it is propaganda, but it is not a lie" (Antonioni, 1974, p. XI)[11].

Back in Italy, on June 23, 1972, Antonioni shared with journalists his new feelings about China and the experience of filming there. He described China as an extraordinary place where everything had amazed him. He also mentioned the difficulty of matching a director's need for improvisation with the Chinese preference to have everything planned in advance, but overall his official opinion on the location support was extremely positive. Andrea Barbato also talked of the friendly hospitality Antonioni and his crew received everywhere they went (Barbato, 1972, p. 19). This positive attitude, Antonioni added, confirmed the excellent relations between Italy and China (La Cina vista da Antonioni, 1972, p. 13) . It seemed that despite the above-mentioned frustrations, bringing Chinese and Western cultures closer to each other was possible.

In the following months, Antonioni developed a rosy opinion of Mao Zedong's influence on the Chinese people. As he wrote in the introduction to a commentary published one year after the

[10] Though the birth sequence was obviously real, it required preparation to set up all the filming gear – including two cameras – in the teaching room where it happened (Tovoli, 2014).

[11] Original text in Italian.

release of *Chung kuo,* he believed that their daily life was made simpler and happier by a common acceptance of what was right and what was wrong, which replaced the need for formal laws and regulations (Antonioni, 1974, p. XIV). As will be discussed in Section 3.3, this point of view would become visible in the documentary, the editing and voiceover of which he worked on frantically for months. Of the original 30,000 metres of film, only a small part was used to make three different final cuts – 207 minutes for Italy, 130 for France and 104 for the USA (Chatman, 2008, p. 64) – which were converted to 35mm. In the projection room he discovered the additional footage Tovoli had filmed without authorisation and decided to include it in the director's cut (Tovoli, 2014).

After its completion, *Chung kuo* was previewed by representatives of the Chinese embassy in Rome:

> There was the director of the New China Agency and two or three others. At the end of the screening these persons expressed themselves positively. "You," they said, "Signor Antonioni, have looked at our country with a very affectionate eye. And we thank you." That was the first reaction of certain Chinese responsible people (sic). (Bachmann, 1975, p. 29)

How affectionate was Antonioni's depiction of the PRC? An analysis of its most significant sequences will help to illustrate it and to lay the basis for an understanding of the enormous controversies that followed its international release.

3.3 *Chung kuo*: an analysis

Chung kuo is divided into three parts. The first part (72') is set in Beijing and its surroundings; the second (78') shows rural areas in the provinces of Henan and Jiangsu, and the cities of Suzhou and Nanjing; and the third (57') is entirely set in Shanghai.[12] As the documentary's visual aspects are far more prominent than its extremely concise commentary, the analysis of this film will start by

[12] This analysis of *Chung kuo* was carried out using the Italian DVD edition (2007), which is the same as the documentary broadcast by RAI in early 1973. The analysis is based on Bona (2012, pp. 31-51) and Bona (2014, pp. 41-58).

considering what appears on the screen; this will later make it possible to combine visual aspects with a discussion of the commentary, the film's contents, and their meaning.

The five-minute-long opening sequence in Tian'anmen Square condenses Antonioni's cinematic techniques, establishes the documentary's set of ideas, and makes visually explicit the director's intention to behave as a simple observer (Figs. 18-19). Here the camera alternates between close-ups of people and panning shots showing a quiet crowd of workers, peasants, and soldiers (each category wearing a different uniform) and children strolling peacefully and taking photos in front of the Forbidden City walls dominated by Mao's portrait. Comparable shots – close-ups and zoom-ins on people's faces, and wide shots over large spaces – taken in other contexts will recur in the rest of the film. The camera also reveals that Tian'anmen Square is surrounded by portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and this establishing sequence ends with a brief shot of the Chinese flag.

Once the political and ideological context has been visually established, the film begins focussing on specific topics: children and education, people and the health system, people's daily life at work, at home and during their spare time, and the omnipresent cult of Chairman Mao. This structure is broadly replicated in the other two parts, although it appears tighter in Part One and becomes progressively looser in the others, where the voiceover is increasingly thinned-out.

As Part One continues, the camera cuts between Beijing street scenes of people practicing *taijiquan* and relaxed traffic made up of bicycles, buses, trucks and donkey-pulled carts. Then a visit to a school shows disciplined students doing their morning exercises under teachers' guidance and marching, perfectly regimented, so as to show the difference between the perfect order of China and the social turmoil that characterised the lives of many Italians in the early 1970s. Children are the physical starting-point of society, so the next sequence shows a Caesarean birth in a modern operating theatre where the mother – a common worker, implying that the public health system is available to everyone – is anaesthetised using acupuncture, does not show any sign of pain during the operation, and finally gives birth to a healthy child (Fig. 20).

To show that universal public welfare is not limited to health, but accompanies Chinese citizens through their life, the birth sequence is followed by shots of happy and simply- but well-dressed

children at a kindergarten as they stage a song and dance performance, accompanied by their teachers (Fig. 21).

From children, the focus then shifts to adults and the widespread veneration for Mao Zedong: in the next sequence, a couple of factory workers return to their modest apartment, and after showing husband and wife in the kitchen, the camera moves through the flat, and pauses on a bust of Mao and his *Little Red Book*.

Then a new sequence opens with the framing of the grey façade of a factory, surmounted by a slogan in large red characters on the roof ("毛主席万岁!", "Máo zhǔxí wànsuì / Long live Chairman Mao!", Fig. 22). Inside the factory, long rows of perfectly-aligned cotton-reeling machines recede to the horizon. Here, some workers are attending to the looms, and everyone looks relaxed and at ease.

Workers – men and women – are then shown at a political meeting and during their visit to the Great Wall and to the tombs of the Ming emperors (Figs. 23-24). Later, the camera continues to show a vast area on the outskirts of Beijing, focusing on the 'Chinese-Albanian' model Agricultural Commune, where people are seen working in fields and feeding geese and pigs, and there are few or no signs of mechanisation. Back in the city, the hidden camera shows the crowded Xidan food market, continuing with shots of the new and historic parts of Beijing, and Part One concludes with a puppetry performance in a theatre.

Despite the presence of important infrastructure like the Red Flag Canal, life in the rural areas seen in Part Two is visibly harder. Small villages and their inhabitants almost disappear in a vast, arid environment in mountain areas, and in the green and more hospitable plains. In a remote village, people are so isolated that they appear surprised to see a foreign crew and do not know how to react. Buildings and schools are extremely basic, and adults and children are not dressed as accurately as their peers in Beijing (Fig. 25). Farming is exclusively physical work.

Even in cities the living standards appear different from those in Beijing, and closer to those Antonioni had shown in his first documentary, *Gente del Po.* This similarity becomes striking during the river sequences set on the Yangzi and nearby waterways, where the camera follows farmers delivering vegetables to a market in Suzhou and shows the monumental scale of the Nanjing

bridge. Despite the difference from Beijing, in these provinces people are also united by the cult of Mao Zedong: the leader's portrait dominates the walls of a villager's home where a meeting with the village chief takes place (Fig. 26), and children in a Nanjing kindergarten sing the same political songs as their peers in Beijing – although those in Nanjjing are visibly tired and not at ease in front of the camera. Other forms of cult and religion are only memories, shots of two visitors entering an empty Buddhist temple in Suzhou seem to imply.

Signs of overwhelming mass politicisation are also evident in Shanghai, where the third and last part of the documentary was shot. However, the first few shots of buildings and streets give the feeling of a very different city. There are shops with large windows, and semi-automatic machines are used to clean the crowded streets. People are better and more carefully dressed. The camera tracks dozens of faces in a series of tele-zoom close-ups, apparently showing the confidence and pride of those who transformed the then second-largest city in the world within a generation. A perfectly-organised group of students runs across the road, reminiscent of students already seen previously in other parts of China.

In this environment, Mao's cult of personality seems to reach its extremes. First, the house where the first congress of the Chinese Communist Party was held in 1921 is shown. In one of the next sequences, set in a teahouse at the ancient Garden of Mandarin Yu, several close-ups of retired party officials reveal that each has on their shirt a pin with a drawing of Mao's head (Fig. 27). There are also several portraits of Mao in the room, and revolutionary statues in the old garden. Numerous shops in the area look very busy, adding a touch of 'normality' following a crescendo of ideological abstraction.

Later, the camera moves across the city through former colonial districts and 'accompanies' the viewers to an oil refinery. Zoom-ins on pipes, tanks, steel structures and chimneys – the epitome of alienation in Antonioni's previous *Deserto Rosso* (1964) – show a pale and dusty environment where workers always appear to be in control.

Following this, in another river sequence, the busy, heavily-navigated Huang Pu – the river that crosses Shanghai – is followed up to its mouth in the Yangzi, ideally to connect this city to the rest of the world, where China still has a lot to show (Fig. 28). This seems to be reiterated in the thousands of people shown in the final part going to work in a factory, or practicing *tàijíquán* and

qìgōng. The final sequence is entirely dedicated to a group of revolutionary acrobats' circus-like performance in a theatre, and creates circularity by linking itself to the first part's theatre sequence in Beijing (Fig. 29).

The slow rhythm of *Chung kuo* is underlined by editing that makes extensive use of long takes and the camera lingering over people's actions and expressions, which is typical of both Antonioni and the canons of *cinéma vérité*. They seem to adapt the film's rhythm to the pace of the Chinese people as observed by the filmmaker.[13]

In the absence of detailed commentary or an explicit storyline, the editing also takes on the main narrative function. *Chung kuo* proceeds through several ellipses – from Beijing to Henan province, from Henan to Suzhou, and from Nanjing to Shanghai –and also through cuts that connect a sequence to the following one by a cause-and-effect relation or logical association. Several examples of these cuts are evident in Part One, and the succession of some sequences is worth repeating. Children in a kindergarten and a school are shown immediately after the eight-minute birth sequence. Then the sequence where two workers go home is followed by shots of a large textile factory and a political meeting of workers who, sitting in the factory yard, keep repeating political slogans learnt by heart. Similarly-dressed workers are then shown visiting the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs. These sequences are followed by students marching to the countryside, shots of the large Chinese-Albanian agricultural commune and – back in urban Beijing – the Xidan food market scene.

The editing of these sequences in this order has implications for the film's meaning, as it seems to ideally sketch the biography of the 'new men' from birth to adulthood and to convey the idea that the state cares for them at every stage of their lives. This is why political education – which today we would call ideological indoctrination – is also an essential component of the daily life that we see throughout the film: at school, children learn to sing their love for Mao; at their workplaces,

[13] One sequence in Part Two, also analysed in detail by Sun (2009, pp. 52-53), perfectly illustrates this point. Two long takes – 73 and 40 seconds respectively – show two farmers slowly and repetitively compacting the soil with shovels next to a wall, while three other farmers manage some donkeys that move in circles around them, dragging stone rollers to crush grain. According to Sun, this sequence reveals the "monotony and tediousness" of rural work (2009, pp. 52-53). It certainly implies alienation, one of the themes that Antonioni had often explored in his previous films, and that Maoism appears not to have fully eradicated.

adults join political meetings and discuss Mao's slogans; and the chairman's portraits are omnipresent. There is no distinction made between family, work, political meetings and spare time, and no separation between rural and urban life. Visiting historical monuments, which are considered symbols of previous imperial exploitation, is a way to learn how unfair farmers' lives were under imperial rule and how much the living standards have improved under Chairman Mao. In Maoist China not only do farmers have better working conditions, but revolutionary students marching and carrying shovels like rifles are sent to help them, to learn about the strategic importance of agriculture in feeding the urban population – represented in the film by the Xidan market. The strategic importance of agriculture to urban areas is also emphasised in Part Two, where the camera follows farmers delivering their vegetables to Suzhou markets. With this, the viewers are reminded of the rural origins of Mao Zedong's idea of communism.

As already mentioned, the brevity of the voiceover is a major characteristic of *Chung kuo.* It requires close scrutiny for at least two reasons. First, its dry prose, which is almost devoid of adjectives – underlined by the speaker's calm, indifferent voice –gives each word both considerable weight and a large margin of ambivalence. And second, this ambivalence became a crucial point in the 1974 anti-Antonioni campaign, when statements about the austerity of daily life or comments referring to the largest oil refinery in Shanghai as "made of poor, almost waste material" were used by the Chinese establishment to accuse Antonioni's work of denigrating China and its people (see Section 3.4) – ignoring the fact that this could also be meant as a praise for the ingenuity of the Chinese people, able to build technically complex structures using simple means.

The original version of the commentary, written by Andrea Barbato, was lengthy and detailed. Although Antonioni liked it – Barbato's writing style was notoriously plain and clear – he chose to include only part of it in the film (RAI, 1979). This decision suited the director's cinematic style, and more specifically it conformed to the documentary's predominantly observational mode. As a result, in a film with a total length of 207 minutes, the voiceover lasts only about 32 minutes and is almost completely absent from Part Three, giving a ratio of one minute of commentary to 6.5 minutes of film. This is almost double than of Lizzani's *La muraglia cinese*, where the commentary – running for 25 minutes out of the total 90, or 1:3.6 – aimed to explain the spectacular and mysterious aspects of China and Hong Kong. Seven years later Barbato acknowledged that this choice had allowed *Chung kuo* not to age in terms of content (RAI, 1979).

The voiceover immediately declares Antonioni's observational intentions in the opening sequence, and also states his frustration with the Chinese authorities, for example by saying that "China is still largely inaccessible and forbidden" and "[…] [O]ur chaperones made us cover only limited itineraries." These statements match the concluding comment in Part Three, which introduces the above-mentioned sequence of the acrobats' performance. This comment is also an honest reflection on the representation of reality as well as an acknowledgement of the conflict between the material world that China wanted Antonioni to show and his interest in human psychology, and implicitly expresses regret at not having been allowed to see more:

> China opens its doors, but is still a largely remote and unknown world. We only had the opportunity to take a glimpse of it here. There's a saying from ancient China: "You can draw the skin of a tiger, not its bones. You can draw the face of a man, but not his heart."[14]

Sometimes the commentary becomes informative, and adds general details about the organisation of society and the historical monuments shown on screen, or translates a few songs, banners, and slogans. In general, similar to Lizzani's *La muraglia cinese,* it maintains a neutral approach, balancing praise and critique. Like Lizzani's documentary, it praises communist China by evoking the sins of the pre-Maoist era, for instance by celebrating the ability of major cities like Nanjing and Shanghai to rise from a dark past of "crime, drugs, and corruption", and by listing the achievements of collective society in agriculture and in infrastructure. However, unlike *La muraglia cinese,* it never uses emphatic pitches and off-topic arguments to express praise and critiques; for example, the observation that "Temples […] are often deconsecrated and transformed into factories" may contain a hint of disappointment, but it does not express open judgment. On other occasions, the commentary assumes a reflexive tone, giving hints of cross-cultural comparisons. Talking about contacts between Chinese and Western people, it states that "[W]e remain to them [the Chinese] like unknown objects and are maybe even a bit ridiculous", and that "It is a serious blow to our pride as Europeans: for a quarter of humanity, we are so unknown that we become frightening…".

[14] This is exactly the same proverb mentioned in Carlo Lizzani's *La muraglia cinese.* According to Luciano Tovoli, though, this is a coincidence (Tovoli, 2014). Original text in Italian.

As for sound, the use of live recording reveals traffic noise, millions of bicycle bells, people chattering and clearing their throats, students reading and singing, and ubiquitous loudspeakers playing revolutionary songs and *The Internationale*.[15] The widespread presence of political songs diffused by omnipresent loudspeakers makes ideological uniformity acoustically pervasive. Ironically, as will be further illustrated in Section 3.4, the recording of these songs was later used by the Chinese authorities to attack *Chung kuo*.

It may be argued that the film's overall meaning is contained in the final sequence, which for this reason will be scrutinised in detail. Its length – thirteen minutes, showing the acrobats' performance without any commentary – is striking, particularly in comparison with the total length of Part Three (57 minutes). The reasons for this choice are hard to interpret, because Antonioni was not lacking extra footage which could be included in the documentary if he needed to extend its running time. Questioned about this sequence, Luciano Tovoli expressed his belief that Antonioni may have intended to celebrate, in his own way, the importance of culture, the performing arts and recreation in a heavily controlled context. To use his own words,

> Well – this is something that was never talked about, it's the first time I've been asked about it! – I believe that Antonioni was fascinated by artists. He was from Romagna, the same region as Fellini. He kept his emotions in check, at least in his films. In his daily life, he was an extremely normal person. He had a child-like fascination with Chinese jugglers' abilities. We were aware we were facing the Cultural Revolution – which despite its name was a revolution to kill culture, or to kill those who produced or somehow preserved it, so, who knows, this was perhaps a way [Antonioni used] to say: "In the circus and in theatrical performances these people express an extraordinary refinement, which possibly one day will still be conceded to them. They are not thinking just about work, work, work." This is my current interpretation, obviously very much *a posteriori*. […] Actually, I had never really thought about it. (Tovoli, 2014)

Sinologist Danilo Soscia sees in this sequence an allegory of China and the metaphorical acrobatics it skillfully practiced to combine poverty and dignity, unity and differences (Socia, 2014). Film critic Marco Dalla Gassa gives a more nuanced interpretation, reading in this sequence the

[15] One of these songs, *我爱北京天安门Wǒ ài Běijīng Tiān'ānmén / I Love Beijing's Tian'anmen*, is performed live by children, and is also used as the documentary's signature tune.

representation of what the Chinese regime expected from of people (sacrifice, athletic capabilities, organisation, aesthetic beauty), but also the director's intention to focus attention – through close-ups on faces and expressions – on the individual acrobats and their distinctive characteristics. Signs of the effort they are putting into their performance become visible only in close-up (the indididual level) and not from a distance (the collective level, where the performance is visible only in its entirety). Jugglers, tightrope walkers and acrobats become a symbol of the precariousness felt by the Chinese people after years of revolution, or even a metaphor of a collapsing political leadership (Dalla Gassa, 2016, pp. 188-189).

Another possible interpretation connects this sequence with the puppet show that ends Part One and insists on Antonioni's main interest: man.[16] The socialist new man is a puppet in the hands of Mao, as well as an acrobat on the stage. Only Chinese people know what it means to be mere instruments in the hands of their leader during a revolution, and only they know the effort required to prepare the performance and reach an almost impossible balance point (the progress of their country and their fellow citizens using the simple means seen previously in the documentary). Antonioni, as a foreign spectator interested in human psychology, can only guess at this aspect – confirming the proverb reported in the comment immediately before this sequence states: "You can draw the skin of a tiger, not its bones; you can draw the face of a man, but not his heart" – as his only certainty is what he can see: true mastership of fine skills, and the apparent harmony and simplicity of a perfect, impossible balance. The performance is fascinating and perfectly executed. Certainly it is all a set-up, but in a society where everyone appears to be performing (children in schools, students marching, adults attending political meetings, people at work, doctors operating a patient) it is also reality, and in this sense, authentic. It can be debated whether Antonioni considered this a tacit reminder to his audience that China during the Cultural Revolution was a large-scale perfomance, a critique of a man without his own will, or exactly its opposite – a praise of the selfless Maoist man. The final answer was left to the viewer. However, Antonioni's later declaration of genuine appreciation for Mao and Chinese society (Antonioni, 1974, p. XIV) corroborates the idea that he was sincerely praising the utopia he filmed. Even a

[16] This connection is also remarked on by Dalla Gassa (2014, p. 382), who insists on the metalinguistic conflict between the Chinese regime's intentions and Antonioni's.

utopian society, though, could not be perfect, and its shortcomings did not go unnoticed by Antonioni and his scrutinising camera. If in Beijing everything seemed to be working in perfect harmony, the isolation of small communities in remote country areas, where people showed a resigned attitute to repetitive work in the fields as well as a mix of inquisitive and fearful attitudes towards foreign visitors, revealed that something in that paradise was still unsettled.

So how does China look like through Antonioni's gaze, and how is this gaze similar to, or different from, Lizzani's? Firstly, it is important to remember that Antonioni put on the screen what he was allowed to see, and therefore what China wanted to show of itself to the Western world. Its major cities, surrounded and fed by an enormous rural inland where people worked hard but in harmony with the environment. Life, in its peaceful slow-pace. China's apparent social unity, in sharp contrast to the social unrest in many Western countries at the time. Its 'new man' (and 'new woman'), who seems to have found his place in society, and who contrasts even more with the distressed men and women struggling to cope with the modernity portrayed by Antonioni in his previous films.

While the director had previously taken to the screen a Western man dominated by materialism and traumatised by modernity, in *Chung kuo* he unveiled a new man at ease with Chinese modernity and away from a quest for personal wealth. Despite the self-evident differences between people living in the main urban areas and those based in remote rural areas – with the latter appearing to have a harsher life – the new man has no class or gender distinctions: people are marked by equality, both in their dress and in their daily actions, and women are fully involved in political discussions. The new man has a simple life and works hard, relying on physical work, as mechanisation seems almost non-existent in rural areas (Figs. 30-32). The new man is dominated by portraits and slogans of Mao, whose cult has replaced other forms of religion such as Buddhism. The new man considers historical monuments to be a memory of a feudal past, but is proud of traditions that help him to maintain his mental and physical balance like *taijiquan*. The Maoist man has created monumental and strategic infrastructure such as the Red Flag Canal in Henan and the bridge on the Yangzi River in Nanjing, and also large-scale industries. Finally, the many happy children and young people seen throughout the film underlines the idea that Chinese society has a bright future ahead. Still, despite an overwhelmingly positive and affectionate depiction of a man who has found his balance in a selfless, utopian society, Antonioni suggests an

underlying tension between what appears on the surface and the individual sacrifices that people made behind the scenes to create this show. From this perspective, Antonioni's approach is opposite to Lizzani's, as the former aimed to show common people's daily life without expressing moral judgments, while the latter aimed to show the exotic, unusual, spectacular and eye-catching sides of the PRC, and his film was filled with a moralizing tone.

However, a comparison between the two documentaries also highlights representational similarities, despite the two directors' different directorial styles and approaches and the fact that they filmed in different historic moments. Firstly, they both underlined the vastness of China, rendered through crowd scenes and with wide-angle shots and pans over endless rural – and, in Lizzani's case, natural, desert, icy – areas. Then they remarked on the presence of a 'good past' and a 'bad past'. They represented the former with sequences of traditional gymnastics and medicine, to symbolize the fact that the PRC was keen to maintain and encourage ties with the healthier parts of its millennial culture. By contrast, the latter was represented by both directors by landmarks and symbols of a despicable heritage: thus, Lizzani showed the ruins of the Great Wall, while Antonioni filmed it as a tourist attraction remarking on its practical uselessness; and both were allowed to film parts of the Forbidden City as an empty place, a memory of the past. Likewise, both filmmakers implicitly praised the communist regime for correcting the sins of the past: feudalism, materialism and corruption.

Finally, a further technique that both directors used to talk about China was to compare it to Italy. This was more explicit in Lizzani's film, the commentary of which put side by side the size of the two nations and the role of women in each, and more contained in Antonioni, who filmed people eating "spaghetti and fettuccine" and let the audience draw its own conclusions on the difference between Chinese people leaving in peace and the weakening effects of capitalism in Italy, which were producing social unrest, political factionalism and terrorism in the same years.

A comparison of the two documentaries, which were filmed fifteen years apart, also makes it possible to notice changes that occurred in the PRC in that period. Surprisingly, these did not appear traumatic, and no traces of the widespread issues and unrest caused by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution can be found in Antonioni's documentary. In 1957 the PRC appeared to be overwhelmingly rural, but in transition toward an industrial future. People were

working hard in the fields, but also contributing to the construction of new factories. This transition seemed to have been fully accomplished in 1972, when industries and strategic infrastructure such as the Nanjing Bridge and the Red Flag canal had been built and were a matter of national pride for China. In 1972, China had also accomplished its transformation into a fully communist nation united by the cult of its leader. The Buddhist temples that Lizzani showed still full of monks were empty when Antonioni visited them. Possibly because he was not allowed to travel as extensively as Lizzani, Antonioni filmed more than half of his documentary in urban areas, although he pointed out to what extent these were sustained by the produce of the vast rural inland. Antonioni appeared to appreciate the fact that the new man had adapted well to Maoist rule and appeared calm, industrious, and even pure in his Maoist faith. His film, though, was a truly affectionate representation of China that was to cause him major headaches in the years to come.

3.4 Victim of circumstance

Chung kuo was the first Western feature film shot in China by an internationally-known star-director to be released after Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing, Hangzhou and Shanghai. This may explain why it had its world premiere on the American ABC in December 1972 with a positive reception, and only later, in January and February 1973, was broadcast by the Italian RAI. [17]

In Italy, the three episodes were watched – in black and white, as Italian TV was not yet broadcasting in colour – by an average of about six million spectators and obtained an approval index of 74 out of 100 (RAI, 1973, p. 112; RAI, 1973b, p. 128).[18] In quantitative terms, considering that C*hung kuo* was a cultural film rather than an entertainment program, it had a very positive

[17] In the US, *The New York Times* included *Chung kuo* in its list of the ten best films of the year (*Corriere d'Informazione*, 1974, p. 13).

[18] RAI started its opinion service in 1954, when television was introduced in Italy. To know the number of spectators following each program, 220 interviewers were dispatched daily to different geographical areas to ask a sample of 1,000 people chosen from electoral rolls what they had watched on TV the night before. In addition, 1,200 volunteers selected on the basis of demographic data were sent a questionnaire or contacted over the phone each week to notify RAI of their opinions on the programs they had watched (Lubrano, 1972, pp. 43-44)

reception. Everything seemed to work well and the documentary was sold to several European countries and Australia.

One year later, on January 30, 1974 –, ironically, as the book in which Antonioni praised Maoism was being printed – the *人民日报 Rénmín Rìbào / People's Daily,* the official newspaper of the CCP, published an editorial entitled *恶毒的用心卑劣的手法——批判安东尼奥尼拍摄的题为《中国》的反华影片 (Èdúde yòngxīn bēiliède shǒufǎ – Pīpàn Āndōngníāoní pāishède tíwèi «Zhōngguó» de fǎnhuá yǐngpiàn) / A vicious motive, despicable tricks – A criticism of M. Antonioni's film* China.[19] The editorial stated that the release of Antonioni's documentary was "a serious anti-China event and a frenzied provocation against the Chinese people" (*Rénmín Rìbào* Commentator, 1974, p. 1). It asserted that the director "came to China as our guest", but was "[h]ostile towards the Chinese people, he took the opportunity of his visit for unspeakable purposes; by underhand and utterly despicable means he hunted specifically for material that could be used to slander and attack China" (p. 2). In addition, it explained that the film "lumps together a large number of viciously distorted scenes and shots to […] insult the Chinese people", and that "Any Chinese with any national pride cannot but be greatly angered on seeing this film" (p. 2).

The critique starts from the very beginning of the documentary. It is intolerable that "a series of reactionary scenes" be shown just after the shots of Tian'anmen Square, "distorting the new China beyond recognition" (pp. 3-4). The film is accused of ignoring the great achievements of the PRC. In the industrialised Shanghai, for example, it claims that instead of focussing on large modern factories, Antonioni "concentrated on pasting together a medley of scenes of poorly equipped hand-operated enterprises" and asserted that "the biggest oil refinery in the city is a poor factory practically built with scrap" (p. 5), using "very despicable means to take shots that distort the working people".

Antonioni's representation of rural areas, the editorial continues, is no better. Instead of showing the prosperity of the country, he prefers "a tiresome succession of laboured shots of small plots,

[19] This editorial was soon printed also in booklets published by Beijing Foreign Language Press, translated in several languages, and widely circulated worldwide. The original English translation was used for this chapter.

lonely old people, exhausted draught animals and dilapidated houses", depicting present-day China as a living hell. He "vilifies China's socialist construction in a variety of ways, from municipal construction to the people's life, […] sparing not even the kindergartens" (p. 6). The filmmaker is accused of overemphasizing and mocking the poverty of the Chinese people on numerous occasions (pp. 6-7), and worse, of using this voiceover to criticise the Chinese revolution for "throwing the system of production into confusion" and for trying to abolish old traditions like *taijiquan*. (p. 7). His attack on the Chinese people is described as by every means terrible: "Antonioni describes [them] as a mass of stupid, ignorant human beings […] who are dirty and gluttonous, and who muddle together without any aim" (p. 8), and to this purpose, his camera insists on the grotesque expressions of people in tea-houses and restaurants, and on people "blowing their noses and going to the latrine".

If this is not enough, Antonioni is accused of suggesting that the Chinese people are not free: workers' discussions, to him, are "not true discussions". He "slanders Chinese children's singing of 'political' songs praising Chairman Mao and the Communist Party as doing something incompatible with their innocence" (pp. 9-10). All this, to the anonymous author, is nonsense, as in the PRC "we people are the masters, the political situation is lively and vivid, the masses enjoy real democracy and have boundless ease of mind" (p. 10).

Not only is the film considered despicable, so are the cinematic techniques that Antonioni used to make it. The editorial asserts that none of the scenes in the director's cut includes modern industries or machinery, and that while filming the bridge on the Yangzi River in Nanjing (Fig. 33), "the camera was intentionally turned on this magnificent modern bridge from very bad angles in order to make it appear crooked and tottering. A shot of trousers hanging on a line to dry below the bridge is inserted as a mockery of the scene" (p. 11).[20] The representation of Tian'anmen Square is alleged to be even "more disgusting", as Antonioni just photographs the people on the square, instead of concentrating on its panorama: "These shots are intended to make Tien An Men Square look like a boisterous market place. Is this not aimed at defaming our motherland?" (p. 12). The use of "secretly filmed" scenes ("like a spy") and hidden cameras, as well as the fact that

[20] This was to become a long-standing issue for other foreign filmmakers too. For example, in 2006 shots of laundry hanging out of windows in Shanghai created censorship issues for *Mission: Impossible* III (Kokas, 2017, p. 77).

Antonioni “even asked people to fake a fist-fight scene” or “got people to change clothes to suit his purpose” are also considered evidence of his hostility to China (p. 14).

Even the editing is alleged to be “arranged for a vicious purpose”. The sequence of the ‘Chinese-Albanian’ commune where a member is seen “wiping the sweat from her brow” is “intended to show that ‘life in the fields means daily hard labour’, [and] the director obviously” uses it “to suggest that the condition of the Chinese peasants today is little better than it was in feudal society” (pp. 12-13). The use of light and colour is said to emphasise “grey, dim […] and chilling tones”, making places appear to be “enveloped in smog”, and conveys an overall “forlorn, gloomy, melancholy and sombre impression” (p. 13).

According to the anonymous commentator, though, Antonioni’s most despicable act is the “[p]articularly venomous use of musical accompaniment to reinforce the aim of vilification”, as he “unscrupulously ridiculed” arias from model revolutionary theatrical works. One of these, “Raise your head, throw out your chest”, sung by the heroine of the revolutionary opera *Song of the Dragon River*, “is used in the film to accompany the scene of a pig shaking his head” (Fig. 34): “This was pure concoction because in fact no such music was being played when the scene was shot, the organization concerned has pointed out” (pp. 13-14). The editorial concludes with a propagandistic statement that Antonioni’s documentary is part of an international attempt to discredit China, led by the USSR. His work, then, “is released to deceive people” and is “completely against the will of the Italian and Chinese peoples to develop their friendly relations” (p. 17).

This first attack was followed by attacks in other publications and by a full-scale anti-Antonioni campaign. Locals who had been involved in the film were forced to appear as Antonioni’s victims and publicly denounce him, and more than forty articles with similar content to the *Rénmín Rìbào*’s editorial were published in 1974 and later collected into a 200-page anthology titled *Chinese People Are Not Allowed to be Insulted – Repudiating Antonioni’s Anti-China Film* (Liu, 2014, p. 24; Mu, 2009). Despite the large-scale campaign, however, only a few of the Chinese people involved in the film were punished, among them the deputy director general of the Chinese Broadcasting Authority Jin Zhao, Antonioni's interpreter Zhang Wenrun, and the Chinese diplomats in Italy – including the then ambassador Shen Ping – who had been involved in organising Antonioni’s trip to the PRC (Yang, 2010, as cited by Liu, 2014, p. 29). “For months they

were forced to attend a study group, denounce the film and write self-criticisms" (Mu, 2009). As the film was banned in China, the majority of people had to criticise it without having a chance to watch it.

This campaign can be attributed to internal, international, and cultural factors, all recently analysed by Xin Liu (2014, pp. 25-31) and Dalla Gassa (2016, pp. 181-185). Internally, the radical Gang of Four had taken power and in 1973 launched a campaign called "Criticise Lin, Criticise Confucius" aimed at denouncing Lin Biao and eradicating Confucianism's influence on society. Moreover, the Gang's attacks often involved Premier Zhou Enlai because of his efforts to change the PRC's foreign policy by establishing contacts with Western countries and even the USA. As Lin had been a self-declared admirer of the Italian director ('"Offesi" i cinesi con Antonioni. Violento e inaspettato attacco del "Quotidiano del Popolo". Una dichiarazione del regista', 1974, p. 3) and as Antonioni was believed to have been invited to China with Zhou's approval, criticising the Italian director became a way to attack the real targets of the campaign. On the international side, relations between China and the USSR had reached their lowest point since the split in 1960 and a border conflict in 1969. The Soviet Union began producing anti-Chinese documentaries, and in 1973 used parts of Antonioni's documentary as evidence to support its own stance against Mao, behaviour which was not acceptable to the Gang of Four.

Cultural misunderstandings added up to ideological issues as possible motives for this campaign. There were reports that Jiang Qing became extremely upset when she saw the 'Chinese-Albanian' commune pig sequence during a private screening (Pini, 2011, pp. 156-157). As Luciano Tovoli has repeated on several occasions, including during the interview I had with him, no-one in the crew or during the editing realised what song was coming from the loudspeakers when they were filming the pigsty (this contradicts the unlikely declaration in the *Rénmín Rìbào*'s editorial that "no such music was played when the scene was shot"). Moreover, Antonioni only filmed that agricultural commune because his guides insisted that he do so (Tovoli, 2014). Even a consultant from the PRC failed to notice this issue at the Moviola and inform Antonioni about it (Eco, 1977, p. 11).

News of the anti-Antonioni campaign reached Italy immediately and was reported by the national media. On January 31, the *Avanti!* daily newspaper published a summary of the editorial that had

appeared in *Rénmín Rìbào* the day before, along with Antonioni's first reaction. The director offered two hypotheses to explain the Chinese line: a) a remarkable difference in interpretation of images or facts that appeared touching and tender to him, but were considered offensive or counter-revolutionary by the Chinese; and b) an internal struggle within the Chinese Communist Party, where a "more sympathetic and liberal group (which had followed and approved Antonioni's work) could have been replaced by a harder and more intolerant one" (*Avanti!*, 1974, p. 3). Diplomatic relations between the PRC and several Western countries were put at risk by the campaign when the Chinese government tried to stop screenings of the documentary in Sweden, Greece, France, Germany, Australia and of course Italy (Bachmann, 1975, p. 30).[21] In April the MIFED film market in Milan refused to screen it ("Cina" di Antonioni rifiutata dal MIFED, 1974, p. 15, and later in the year when it was programmed at the Venice Biennale, China's protests saw screening moved from the main venue to a small private cinema. After it was screened, a group of Italian 'Chinese' (the Italian Maoists) began insulting Antonioni, who reacted angrily.[22]

Several prominent Western intellectuals came to Antonioni's aid. Umberto Eco wrote that *Chung kuo* was "a work that manifested, from the start, an attitude of warm and cordial participation in the great event of the Chinese people; an act of justice on TV's part which finally revealed to millions of viewers a true China, human and peaceful outside of the western propagandistic schema" (Eco, 1977, p. 9). Although Eco acknowledged that the documentary was a victim of the anti-Confucius campaign, he also believed that this was not enough to explain why *Chung kuo* had become a *casus belli*. He suggested watching this work from the Chinese point of view instead of the Italian perspective. Where Antonioni emphasised poverty as a synonym for simplicity, the concept was considered equivalent to "misery" and "failure" by the Chinese (p. 10). The sequence commenting on the simplicity of a factory in Shanghai was meant by the director as a symbol of ingenuity, but to the Chinese it might appear to be an example of inferior industry, at the very

[21] *Chung kuo* became a serious worldwide diplomatic case from the very beginning of the campaign against Antonioni. A confidential cable titled "People's Daily attack on Antonioni film" was sent on February 1, 1974, from US diplomatic representatives in Hong Kong to the China United States Liaison Office in Beijing, the Commander in Chief of the US Pacific Command, the US Department of State, the Secretary of State, and other state agencies. It said that "We are struck by [the *Renmin Ribao* editorial's] sharp nationalistic flavour" and analyses the possible impact of the attack on the American ABC for showing the documentary in 1972 ('People's Daily attack on Antonioni film', 1974).

[22] Carlo Di Carlo, interviewed in Liu Haiping's documentary *La Cina è lontana: Antonioni e la Cina* (2005).

moment when they were attempting to show the world their achievements. The apparent docility of the people filmed by Antonioni could also be disturbing for the Chinese. To put this in perspective, Eco asked "doesn't it occur to us Italians to feel betrayed when a foreign film depicts us with the faces of southern immigrants or Sardinian shepherds in costume, while we tend to identify our country with freeways and factories?" (p. 10). People's suffering, which for Antonioni was part of the human condition, was seen by the Chinese as a social ill.

Eco also commented on visual aspects of the film, underlining differences between Chinese and Western aesthetic judgments. To the Chinese the Nanjing bridge sequence was

> an attempt to make it appear distorted and unstable, because a culture which prizes frontal representation and symmetrical distance shots cannot accept the language of western cinema which, to suggest impressiveness, foreshortens and frames from below, prizing dissymmetry and tension over balance. (p. 11)

The Italian scholar seemed to defuse the crisis without criticising any party to the dispute. He believed that Antonioni was not to blame for these problems. However, he also stated that there were so few films shot in China for Western audiences that a new one could not be considered merely an artwork. And the extremely 'dry' commentary made of few, isolated words, which would suit an art film, would inevitably create issues in *this* documentary, as every word mentioned in it would have acquired "the weight of a diplomatic note – where each word is fraught by ambivalence" (p. 11).[23] Using some points raised by Eco, Susan Sontag also considered the anti-Antonioni campaign a remarkable case of cultural conflict between China and the West (Liu, 2014, p. 25).

In the heat of the debate, Antonioni took the critiques very personally and his reaction was strongly negative. He could not accept being considered an enemy of nearly a billion Chinese. On the night of the unfortunate screening in Venice, he spent hours polemically debating with a Chinese critic (Eco, 1977, p. 12). Interviewed by Gideon Bachmann in 1975, he expressed his disappointment again, not only with the criticism of his film, but also the personal attacks he

[23] Eco (1977, p. 11). Some approximation, however, was probably due to the short amount of time Antonioni was given to complete the work and to the lack of information available at that time.

received, such as the accusation of being a fascist (Bachmann, 1975, p. 30). Antonioni saw the attacks as politically motivated and manifestly groundless. The criticism of the Nanjing bridge sequence (Figs. 30-32), described by the *Rénmín Rìbào* as "intentionally angled to make the bridge appear crooked and tottering" (*Rénmín Rìbào* Commentator, 1974, p. 11), was not supported by evidence. The reason for that particular framing was explained by Antonioni, and even more extensively by Luciano Tovoli, who said that on one misty morning the crew was taken on a boat tour on the Yangzi, where

> Antonioni told me: «Do what you want». Suddenly, I saw a bridge appearing […], so I started filming it. When it passed over me, I tilted the camera and I saw the bridge disappear. We filmed this thing, the most ordinary thing one could do – and even in the most ordinary way – and we forgot about it. (Tovoli, 2014)[24]

As for the use of light and colour, which according to the editorial conveyed an appearance of places "enveloped in smog" and an overall "forlorn, gloomy, melancholy and sombre impression" (*Rénmín Rìbào* Commentator, 1974, p. 13), Tovoli remembered that

> [Light] could often be a bit shrouded. It is also what some Chinese painters do, isn't it? I mean the mist over lakes and rivers… Humidity creates it. However, at the same time, we [also] stayed in arid rural areas. There is a bit of everything. […] At that time I was camera operator and reporter, so I had to film in every condition. I could not choose the conditions. When I arrived in a place, I had to shoot. (Tovoli, 2014)

The editorial argued that for Antonioni "the condition of Chinese peasants today is a little better than it was in feudal society". This is the exact opposite of what was shown and commented on in the sequence of a visit to the Ming tombs, where a group of statues represents the hardship of life under feudal rule and the peasants' rebellion, which occurred in 1582, is used by a local guide as an example to illustrate Mao's statement that "where there is oppression, there is resistance" and show the visitors the improvements to living conditions under communist rule. The list could be

[24] To point out that during shooting, the atmosphere with the locals was often friendly and very different from what happened later, Tovoli likes to remember that a few hours after filming this sequence the crew found a surprise prepared for them by the local authorities: wonderfully-cooked fettuccine with bolognaise sauce.

longer, but these examples are enough to illustrate the degree to which political motives can distort an artist's intentions.

Certainly some of the film lacked accuracy. For example, there are historical inaccuracies about the Great Wall (according to the commentary, it was built by slaves 2,500 years ago, while its construction took centuries) and the Forbidden City is described using the words of Marco Polo even though it was built a century after his visit to Beijing. Interestingly, none of these were criticised. Some of the issues, as well as unfortunate coincidences like the background music in the pigsty sequence, could have been easily avoided if Antonioni had worked with a sinologist or if any of the Chinese officers who previewed the documentary in Rome had pointed them out to Antonioni. However, the filmmaker did not want sinologists, while the Chinese officers did not point out anything and even thanked Antonioni (Tovoli, 2014). It is unlikely that they did not notice these issues. However, the reasons they did not mention them to Antonioni will probably remain unknown. A couple of hypotheses can be proposed, though. Either they were, as a result of being based in Italy, closer to Antonioni's point of view than to that of their compatriots based in mainland China and therefore might have considered certain inaccuracies innocent or even tender, or they thought that Antonioni's peaceful representation of the Cultural Revolution was part of the construction of a positive image of their country.

3.5 After the storm

The anti-Antonioni campaign lasted nearly a year. Its consequences were felt for much longer. After Mao's death and the arrest of the Gang of Four, the Chinese government acknowledged in 1978–1979 that *Chung kuo* had been used by the Gang to attack Zhou Enlai. As a consequence, Antonioni was soon rehabilitated, though the film was not (Liu, 2014, p. 31). RAI resumed contact with the PRC and started negotiations with Chinese television to co-produce a miniseries on Marco Polo. There was discussion about showing *Chung kuo* in China (RAI, 1979, p. 20). However, it remained banned until November 2004, when a retrospective on Antonioni was organised at the Beijing Film Academy. Its reception on that occasion was highly positive and has remained so over the years. In 2015, the film was rated four stars or higher by 87% of users of the Chinese social network Douban.com (Douban.com, 2015). An article appeared in the online English version of the

Rénmín Rìbào on August 27, 2009 asserting that the old criticism of Antonioni seemed excessive to the generation of Chinese born after the Cultural Revolution (Mu, 2009). However, some Chinese intellectuals continued to criticise the film for being offensive, while others believed that the camerawork was excessively aggressive, if not voyeuristic (Liu, 2014, pp. 35-36), and – to prove that the controversy is not over yet – in 2017 any reference to *Chung kuo* has disappeared from Douban.com.[25]

Despite the controversies, Antonioni certainly inspired some Chinese filmmakers. In 2004 Pan Jun produced *变脸：致安东尼奥尼的一封信 Biànliǎn: Zhì Āndōngníāoní de yī fēng xìn / Mask Changing: A letter to Antonioni,* an independent documentary juxtaposing the places visited by Antonioni with the same places seen in the present day, to show China's achievements over thirty years (Liu, 2014, p. 35). A few years later, Liu Haiping, an independent filmmaker, completed the production of a documentary titled *China is Far Away: Antonioni and China*, in which Antonioni appeared, Enrica Fico, Luciano Tovoli and Antonioni's friend Carlo Di Carlo were interviewed, and some locations where *Chung kuo* had been shot were revisited. A shortened version of this work was shown on Chinese Central Television (CCTV) to approximately seven hundred million people in 2008, and the full version was screened in 2009 at the Broadband International Cineplex in Shanghai (Liu, 2014, p. 36; Mu, 2009; Tovoli, 2014). In 2010, Golden Lion winner Jia Zhangke made another documentary, *海上傳奇 Hǎishàng chuánqí / I Wish I Knew*. His film recalls the recent history of Shanghai and showcases an interview with Zhu Qiansheng, who had been Antonioni's guide in the PRC and was subsequently punished for this, as an example of the suffering of common people during the Cultural Revolution (Liu, 2014, p. 37).

Because of their criticism of the spiritual poverty caused by the Italian economic boom, Antonioni's films are still relevant to contemporary China during its own, long-lasting economic miracle with its consequent social disparities and individual distresses. Thus it is not surprising that his films, along with Neorealist films, inspired further Chinese filmmakers of the Sixth Generation and other young independent filmmakers like Li Ruijun and Wang Bing. According to Elena Pollacchi, these filmmakers consider *Chung kuo* in particular to be a model because here

[25] References to other films by Antonioni and monographs about him are still available, however (Douban.com, 2017).

"Antonioni managed to visually put at stake the contrasting forces at play in Chinese society of that time and created a style that could make images of remote areas travel internationally (Pollacchi, 2014, p. 14). Paradoxically, the implicit meaning of this documentary – which appears to have gone beyond Antonioni's own intentions – is one of its more long-lasting legacies.

3.6 Conclusion

Made with affection, then the cause of vehement internal and international controversies, and finally considered a model by some Chinese scholars and filmmakers, although a controversial one: not many films have had a reception and history filled with as many opposites and extremes as *Chung kuo*. This documentary showing a peaceful, industrious 'new man' in a country where rural and urban areas seemed to blend in a perfect balance remains a very prominent example of the degree to which ideology and political struggles can overpower the interpretation of artworks. *Chung kuo* is also a major example of the difficulty in interpreting and representing another culture. The causes of Antonioni's troubles were essentially political, but – in good faith and also due to his extremely tight working schedule – he may also have overlooked differences between Chinese aesthetic tastes and his own. These differences lay in what, by contrast, Lizzani had noticed in 1957: China was a collective country, while Western culture is based on individualism. When Antonioni was asked to represent 'man', he did not do so according to the tenets of socialist realism, glorifying the Chinese people and their collective achievements. Instead, following his own style that found cinematic beauty in human existentialist distress, he focussed on single persons and zoomed in on individuals, showing their differences (of expression, behaviour and attitude) and suggesting the level of sacrifice hidden in the making of a utopian society where individuals had given up their own will and were manipulated by their leader – or, metaphorically, their puppet-master. Despite being fascinated by that society, therefore, he ultimately, and maybe unconsciously, implied the impossibility of engineering the perfect society.

Fundamentally, *Chung kuo* was born out of a major misunderstanding. Each of the two parties involved in pre-production negotiations (China and Antonioni, with whom the producer did not interfere) had a different idea of *how* to look at man, and each took their own idea for granted. In psychological terms, they did not create a shared meaning, and this had painful consequences

when the anti-Antonioni campaign exacerbated the contradiction and used it for political motives, hiding the cultural layer behind the ideological one. It may be argued these issues were an unavoidable part of cultural negotiations occurring during a lengthy contact between two different mindsets. From this point of view, *Chung kuo* became a tough but precious lesson for both Italy and China. In the late 1970s, when China inaugurated its reform and opening-up policies and early discussions over the feasibility of making *Marco Polo* started, something had been learned by both sides, and as will be discussed in Chapter 4, the new cooperation was considerably smoother, as the director of the new series Giuliano Montaldo soon found.

4. Riding the 'Dragonda': Giuliano Montaldo's *Marco Polo* (1982) and the beginning of co-productions

"Unlike Mao's, Deng Xiaoping's China allowed herself to be seen from a short distance". (Tiziano Terzani)

Giuliano Montaldo's 1982 miniseries *Marco Polo* opened a new era in Chinese-Western cultural and cinematic relations. For a long time, the figure of Marco Polo had been the symbol of intercultural understanding between China and the West. Thus, the adaptation of his story for Western and Chinese TV and cinema screens – which occurred as the PRC was starting its economic opening reforms and Italy was in its early 'age of benevolence' toward China – sent a clear political message. What makes this production particularly relevant to this thesis, however, is its openly transnational and transcultural format, saturated with symbolic and diplomatic implications that are reflected in its colossal size. *Marco Polo* was shot on three continents and its making required four years of work and negotiation. It involved four hundred actors and four thousand extras, and cost USD 28 million (approximately USD 78 million in today's terms). The miniseries was an early example of global co-production and the first fiction production to be shot by a foreign crew in the PRC. It was also the first co-production between the PRC and a group of foreign producers, led by the Italian state broadcaster RAI and supported by the US-based multinational Procter & Gamble (P&G) in association with NBC television, the Japanese advertising company Dentsu and broadcaster TBS television, and minor contributions from France and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The project had political origins, as it was proposed during an Italian minister's visit to Beijing at the very moment that the PRC became willing to show its genuine change in attitude toward Europe, America, and Japan. China was now ready to cooperate with them, and to show that unfortunate cases such as the previous campaign against Michelangelo Antonioni would not be repeated. Beijing therefore provided all the assistance Montaldo needed to film *Marco Polo* on location, and even created a specific organisation to deal with international co-productions.

Diplomatic good will, though, was not sufficient to avoid major problems. The making and circulation of *Marco Polo* were affected by a series of political, organisational, cultural, technical, logistical, financial and even judicial issues. Nevertheless, once completed, the miniseries was sold to over seventy countries, had an audience of hundreds of millions, and won two Emmy Awards. It was also dubbed into Mandarin and screened in China in 1985.

After an analysis of the production history of Montaldo's *Marco Polo*, this chapter will discuss how the idea of China that this miniseries presents differs from those presented by Lizzani and Antonioni. In Montaldo's eyes, China is very much open to contact with the outside world. It is a land of opportunities, eager to reveal its traditions to respectful foreign visitors and ready to share its fortunes with them for mutual benefit.

Despite its prominence, this miniseries has left few traces in the literature since the 1980s, while the vast majority of publications used as sources for this chapter appeared at the time of its production. Understandably, RAI gave the project full coverage. Its publishing house ERI distributed short monographs on its making, and about forty articles on it were published in the fortnightly magazine *Radiocorriere TV* between 1979 and 1985. To avoid a one-sided recount of facts, these were cross-checked with other articles that appeared in Italian and American newspapers such as the *Corriere della Sera* and the *New York Times*. References to the miniseries have also been found in two recent volumes (Crespi, 2005; Montaldo & Taricano, 2013) on the life and *oeuvre* of Giuliano Montaldo, in an essay by Di Chiara (2014) who analysed the transnational aspects of *Marco Polo*, and a two-hour long interview I conducted with the director in 2014. Given the lack of further academic reviews, this chapter will reconstruct the fragmented steps of *Marco Polo*'s production history, illustrating how this influenced its making. The following critical analysis

of the miniseries is based on these findings and aims to create the basis for further research in this field.

4.1 Tackling intolerance and injustice

Giuliano Montaldo was born in Genoa in 1930. At the age of fifteen, like Lizzani, Antonioni and other filmmakers, he joined the Resistance guerrillas just before Italy was liberated from the Nazis. He also began supporting the PCI, although he never became a member.[1] After the war, he took casual jobs and occasionally performed in theatre productions (Crespi, 2005, p. 47). In one of these, he was noticed by Carlo Lizzani, who engaged him as an actor for his own first fiction feature film, *Achtung! Banditi! / Attention! Bandits!* (1953). Montaldo also appeared in Lizzani's next film, *Cronache di poveri amanti / Chronicles of Poor Lovers* (1954). In the following years, he worked as a script writer/supervisor with prominent filmmakers such as Gillo Pontecorvo, Elio Petri, and again Carlo Lizzani. After a brief experience as an assistant director and second unit director, in 1961 he directed his first film. *Tiro al piccione / Pigeon shoot* was co-produced by Italy and France and set in in the last years of WWII. It recounted the uselessness of battles fought by the army faithful to the dictator, and the cruelty of anti-fascist partisans. In so doing, it created numerous controversies, as it reopened wounds that had just started to heal within Italian society.

Subsequently, for three years Montaldo struggled to find another producer and even considered ending his cinematic career. As soon as he turned to a less *engagé* topic, however, he found commercial success with a conventional crime story set in Brazil (*Ad ogni costo / Grand Slam*, 1967), which was also the beginning of his long term collaboration with composer Ennio Morricone, who was to write the scores for eleven more films directed by him. Thanks to this success, Montaldo gained the opportunity to make another film in America. *Gli intoccabili / Machine gun McCain* (1969) was one of the earliest movies on the Mafia, a precursor of a film genre that became extremely popular in the 1970s. In that decade, Montaldo turned to a different genre and made three of his most distinctive films. These were: the Italian-Yugoslavian co-

[1] See Crespi (2005, pp. 20-59).

production *Gott mit umns / The fifth day of peace* (1970), about two German deserters arrested by the Canadians at the end of World War II and executed for cowardice by their fellow German prisoners in a POW camp; *Sacco e Vanzetti* (1971), about two Italian anarchists unjustly sentenced to death by a US court in the 1920s for murder and robbery; and *Giordano Bruno* (1973), which follows the life of the sixteenth-century philosopher up to his execution for heresy. Film scholar Francesco Di Chiara has included them in the 'political film' current, which became popular in a period of political turmoil like the early 1970s (Di Chiara, 2014, p. 392). Di Chiara observed that these films often featured real cases, and used stylistic and technical characteristics of mainstream 1970s cinema (2014, p. 391). Montaldo's trilogy featured the narrative structure of a courtroom drama in which the protagonists were sentenced to death and executed. All of them contained what became one of Montaldo's most characteristic features: his "intolerance for intolerance" in different social, geographical, and historical contexts (Montaldo & Taricano, 2013, p. 9).

To elude the problems already incurred on *Tiro al piccione*, Montaldo carefully avoided touching on contemporary politics by setting these films in the past (Di Chiara, 2014, p. 391). In other words, he learned to use a sort of 'historical diplomacy'. And diplomacy was a key issue for a project like *Marco Polo*, which was to follow a similar pattern similar to the trilogy, but unlike the previous three films would exclude a tragic ending and contain a positive message of mutual understanding prevailing over intolerance. Not only was this work extremely delicate for political reasons, as will be discussed below, it was also of paramount importance for the RAI, which sought to continue its ongoing production policy aiming to obtain international exposure and prestige (Di Chiara, 2014).

Since the late 1960s, the Italian broadcaster, which enjoyed a broadcast monopoly in Italy, had been producing or co-producing high-budget miniseries with international partners. Some of these miniseries were adaptations of very well-known literary works, like *Odissea / Odyssey* (directed by Mario Bava and Franco Rossi in 1968) and *Eneide / Eneid* (Rossi, 1971).[2] Others were biographies of historical and religious personalities: *La vita di Leonardo da Vinci / The Life of Leonardo Da Vinci*

[2] Both miniseries were co-produced with France's ORTF and Germany's Bavaria Film TV. TV adaptations from literary works were known in Italy as *sceneggiati*, a term which here is considered equivalent to the concepts of "drama" and "miniseries". Montaldo preferred to speak of his *Marco Polo* as a film.

(1971, directed by Renato Castellani and co-produced with Spanish TVE), *Mosè / Moses the lawgiver* (1974, directed by Gianfranco De Bosio, co-produced with British ITC, with dialogue in English), and even a highly successful *Gesù di Nazareth / Jesus of Nazareth* (1974, directed by Franco Zeffirelli and also co-produced by ITC and P&G). New co-production projects under consideration in the late 1970s included a miniseries on Columbus and, of course, *Marco Polo*. Both projects were proposed to Montaldo, who chose to direct the latter, as he admired the tolerance of the young Venetian and his capacity for travelling, dreaming and reporting (Montaldo & Taricano, 2013, p. 134; Montaldo, 2014).[3] A long, complex work was about to begin.[4]

4.2 Why Marco Polo?

The story of Marco Polo (1254-1324), the Venetian traveller who allegedly spent seventeen years in China and became acquainted with the Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan (1260-1294), has been read by millions over seven centuries. This may seem surprising, because certainly Marco Polo was neither the only European nor the first one to arrive in China and leave a description of what he saw. It is even debated whether he actually reached China at all, or simply collected stories he had heard from other travellers, though some descriptions he provided were too accurate in their detail to be a figment of someone's imagination.[5] Several missionaries before and after his alleged journey left notes and wrote about China, or Cathay as it was also called. Even Marco's travel companions, his father Niccolò and uncle Matteo, had already visited that part of the world. During their previous trip, they had even been entrusted by the Great Khan with an important mission: to request the Pope to send him one hundred learned Christians in order to start a religious debate at the imperial court. To accomplish their mission, Niccolò and Matteo returned to China, accompanied by the young Marco.

---

[3] Originally, China requested that Sergio Leone direct *Marco Polo*, as he revealed in a 1978 interview (Porro, 1978, p. 15). However, at the same time he was also working on the pre-production of *Once Upon a Time in America*, and thus *Marco Polo* was offered to Montaldo instead.

[4] The reasons for Montaldo's *Marco Polo* being described here as a film, a television film and a miniseries are outlined in the Introduction.

[5] For this, see Bertuccioli and Masini (2014, pp. 42-47).

What made Marco unique – and what Montaldo wanted to point out – was his open-minded approach to the blend of Mongolian and Chinese cultures, as well as his adaptability and the apparent naturalness he showed in his relations with them. The Khan entrusted him with missions across China, and Marco even claimed to have governed the city of Yangzhou for three years. After his return to Italy, in 1298 he was captured during a skirmish between the Venetian and Genoan navies and imprisoned in Genoa for two years. Here he dictated to a fellow inmate, the writer Rustichello da Pisa, a detailed account of his trip to Cathay along the Silk Road and his return through India. Although there is no consensus among scholars as to the authenticity of this book – which had to be handwritten, as printing was still unknown in Europe – Marco Polo has often been praised and even mythologised for his ability to adapt to other cultures, his curiosity, his admiration for the grandiosity of Chinese cities and palaces, and his wonder at the prosperity and industriousness of China. His story has repeatedly inspired artists, explorers, and inevitably also filmmakers.

The story of the Venetian traveller had attracted the attention of filmmakers since the 1930s. It was recounted as early as 1938 in *The Adventures of Marco Polo*, directed by Archie Mayo and starring Gary Cooper, and again in a 1956 TV movie of the same title directed by Max Liebman.[6] Five years later, a French-Italian co-production titled *Marco Polo* (also known as *L'avventura di un italiano in Cina*) was directed by Piero Pierotti and Hugo Fregonese. Later film productions became increasingly ambitious. In 1965, Denys de la Patellière and Raoul Lévy directed *La fabuleuse aventure de Marco Polo* / *Marco the Magnificent*, a high-budget French-Italian-Afghan-Egyptian-Yugoslavian co-production shot in Yugoslavia, starring Anthony Quinn as Kublai Khan. This film showcased stunning photography, eye-catching sets and panoramic views, but it was a huge box office flop (Travers, 2000).[7] In 1973, explorer Carlo Mauri led and filmed a horseback expedition from Venice to Beijing along the ancient Silk Road to commemorate the seven hundredth anniversary of Marco Polo's journey, although he was not allowed to reach his destination, as he

[6] Archie Mayo's film became a bizarre censorship case in Italy. The fascist censorship found the representation of Marco Polo disrespectful, so it changed the traveller's nationality to Scottish and approved the Italian release under the title *Uno scozzese alla corte del Gran Khan / A Scotsman at the court of the Great Khan* (Bonsaver, 2014, p. 67).

[7] It is believed that this flop led Lévy to commit suicide in 1966 (Travers, 2000).

was stopped at the Chinese border. Designers Giulio Gianini and Emanuele Luzzati also created a cartoon adaptation of the Venetian traveller's journey. This was broadcast by RAI Channel Two in early 1978 with the title *Le avventure di Marco Polo / The Adventures of Marco Polo*. By the late 1970s, the 'Marco Polo' cinematic brand was particularly in vogue.

Certainly this popularity played an important role in convincing RAI to consider a new series on Marco Polo. The driving force, though, was political, and consisted of events unfolding in the relationships between Italy, China and the USA in 1977-1978, when a new 'age of benevolence' toward China began. These relationships had been compromised in the 'age of disenchantment' by the spike of political fanaticism under the leadership of the Gang of Four, and by the controversial anti-Antonioni campaign in 1974-1975. However, the death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of the Gang of Four in late 1976 gave way to a new political climate. In the aftermath of those events, the PRC was quick to lay the foundation for an unprecedented opening of its economy to foreign investors, and to prepare for the normalisation of diplomatic relations with the USA.[8] In this context, the Italian Foreign Minister Arnaldo Forlani showed a remarkable pro-Beijing activism. In June 1977, he visited Beijing and met his counterpart Huang Hua before any other European representatives, who were still considering how to interact with post-Maoist China (Pini, 2011, pp. 170-172).

Strengthening cultural relations was important in the new diplomatic climate, and the name 'Marco Polo' was the right card to play in that moment. The Venetian traveller was not well-known to ordinary Chinese citizens, but he was highly regarded by the ruling class (Gambetti, 1980, p. 47; Pisu, 1982, p. 46; Andalini, 1985, p. 38); the Lugou Bridge near Beijing has been known as the 'Marco Polo Bridge' among foreigners for a long time, since the Venetian described it in his book as "a magnificent stone bridge, truly the finest in the world, and without equal" (Polo, 1931, pp. 167-168). More recently, the voiceover of Lizzani's 1957 documentary *La muraglia cinese / Behind the Great Wall* (1957) explained that the Chinese considered Marco Polo to be one of them. A few years later, in 1964, RAI journalist Gino Nebiolo heard the Chinese foreign minister Chen Yi referring to Marco Polo as "an old acquaintance, a useful friend" (Nebiolo, 1980, p. 9).

[8] See Chapter 1 and also Section 4.3 below.

According to other Chinese officials, he was “a symbol” and “a great messenger of peace and culture”, because “he did not travel to conquer or colonise, but to discover, understand, think, and report” (Zhao Wei, cited in Bocconetti, 1980, p. 29).

On these preconditions of Marco Polo as a well-known diplomatic and cross-cultural tool, the Foreign Ministers Huang and Forlani discussed the possibility of making a film about the Venetian traveller. The idea was warmly supported by the PRC, which was also seeking the right occasion to restart its cinema industry after the Cultural Revolution.[9] A film about Marco Polo could become a great opportunity for Italy too, as Rome was functioning “as a mediator of the political and industrial relationships between China and western countries” (Di Chiara, 2014, p. 388). It became a mutually convenient choice, and China prioritised this co-production over 180 other film projects from several Western countries and Japan (Gatti, 1981, p. 22).[10]

The reciprocal show of goodwill between Italy and the PRC brought immediate benefits to RAI. Ties between the PRC and the Italian state broadcaster were strengthened in November 1977 when the *Marco Polo* project was confirmed and RAI broadcast both Wang Ping’s 1965 film *东方红 Dōngfāng hóng / The east is red* – a propaganda musical feature on China, the Communist Party and Mao’s leadership – and Joris Ivens’ documentary *Comment Yukong déplaça les montagnes / How Yukong moved the mountains* (1976). The feasibility of showing Beijing opera live from China on Italian television was also discussed (RAI, 1977, p. 147). Since an important door had been opened, all possible efforts were now needed to keep it open. Certainly no efforts were spared for *Marco Polo.*

[9] See Chapter 1.

[10] Among these was a proposal from France that consisted of the adaptation of André Malraux’s novel *La condition humaine / Man’s fate* (1933), set among Chinese revolutionaries in early 1930s Shanghai. A few years later, this was also one of the options that Bernardo Bertolucci considered when he planned to shoot a film in China (see Chapter 5).

4.3 The making of a co-production

The *Marco Polo* project and the idea of shooting the first Western fiction in China was a great achievement for the Italian broadcaster (and in particular for its Channel One, which was chosen to produce it), but the complexity of the project soon became apparent at all levels: cultural, logistical, technical, and above all financial. To track the route followed by Marco Polo along the Silk Road, filming would need to occur in a dozen countries, and hundreds of actors and thousands of extras be employed. The first budget of ten billion Italian lire, prepared in early 1978, was repeatedly overrun: it grew to twelve billion in 1979 and fifteen in 1980, doubled to thirty in early 1982, and reached an eventual total of thirty-four billion (equivalent to approximately USD 28 million at the time, and USD 78 million in the present day).[11] In this situation, finding other production partners became imperative. Help materialised in New York, where the RAI's local branch received a proposal from P&G, in partnership with the NBC TV network. The US-based multinational corporation's film production branch had already bought the RAI-produced *Gesù di Nazareth / Jesus of Nazareth* (Franco Zeffirelli, 1977), which had been successfully broadcast by NBC in April 1977. Based on this positive experience, P&G offered support to co-fund *Marco Polo* (Andalini, 1982, p. 42). The character of the Venetian merchant acquired another layer of symbolic importance as a Western-Chinese bridge in the context of US diplomatic and economic strategy as the US was normalising its diplomatic relations with the PRC – a process formalised on January 1, 1979. [12] The American involvement in the project turned *Marco Polo* from a bilateral relations exercise into a global-scale project.

Its globalism became even more evident when RAI obtained further funding from Japan, where the Dentsu advertising group, in partnership with the Tokyo-based TBS television network, was

[11] See Agostini (1979, p. 19); Agostini (1982, p. 40); Bocconetti (1980, p. 55); Brancati (1984); RAI (1979, p. 20). It should be noted that between 1978 and 1982, inflation in Italy rose by over 84% and the American dollar appreciated over the lira by nearly 60%. This instability made it difficult to keep costs under control. However, a 340% cost blowout showed that multiple variables – from inefficient production outsourcing to logistical issues – had been underestimated in the first budget.

[12] Moreover, China was an enormous potential market for P&G's daily consumption products, which ranged from biscuits to batteries. It was also attractive for NBC, for the same reasons that the RAI was already experiencing. Being the first, or among the first, to enter there was undeniably a competitive advantage.

equally interested in accessing the Chinese market.[13] RAI obtained USD 12.5 million from the USA and 1.7 million from Japan (Brancati, 1984). In addition, RAI's *Radiocorriere TV* magazine mentions funding from West Germany, and there are also reports of French funds (Di Chiara, 2014, p. 387). However, these remained uncredited.

As for Chinese support, a co-production contract between RAI Channel One and the Chinese Vice-Minister of Culture in December 1979 ruled it to be exclusively operational (Gambetti, 1983, pp. 101-102).[14] The newly-created Chinese Company for Cinematic Co-productions (or CCCC) was to provide all necessary assistance to find locations, actors and extras, build sets and solve local logistical issues, and was paid 3 billion lire for its assistance (Montaldo, 1980, pp. 13-37; Bocconetti, 1980, p. 29; Brancati, 1984).[15]

With these events unfolding, Montaldo agreed to direct the miniseries after an attempt to involve Sergio Leone did not succeed (Porro, 1978, p. 15). He also prepared the script in collaboration with writer Vincenzo Labella, who became the executive producer. The pair later worked with screenwriter David Butler to refine the English dialogue, as this was the language to be used in the film. Overall, the scriptwriting process took over two years (Gambetti, 1980, p. 48). One year was taken up with preparatory work such as source selection (Gambetti, 1980, p. 49; Agostini, 1979, p. 18) and with the complex work of adapting *Il Milione / The Travels of Marco Polo*. This had to overcome the problems of the lack of dialogue and a plot, and almost any information on Marco Polo, in the original text. Characters had to be created and the story given a narrative structure organised around a trial in which members of the Inquisition ask Rustichello da Pisa to read his writings, to decide if their content is acceptable or demonic – a theme that Montaldo had already explored in his previous *Giordano Bruno*. The protagonist emerging from the 1,300-page screenplay was a tolerant, pure and resilient young man, willing to discover places and cultures away from his native Venice (Agostini, 1979, p. 21). This portrait matched the director's artistic interest in the theme of tolerance and, more prominently, the depiction of Marco Polo that China

[13] The PRC and Japan signed a private trade agreement in 1978.

[14] Details of the negotiations are reported in Andalini (1985, p. 38) and Crespi (2005, p. 111).

[15] Regarding the CCCC, see Section 1.4.

and Western countries needed to celebrate their renewed friendship and boost their relations in the late 1970s.

Another year was needed to have the script translated into Mandarin and checked by Chinese historians (Gambetti, 1983, p. 102), so the final English version could only be completed by mid-1980 (Pisu, 1982, p. 45; Ying, 1982, p. 51-52). Once the co-production negotiations and scriptwriting were in progress, an executive team was formed in Italy. Besides Montaldo and Labella, its members included architect Luciano Ricceri for sets, and Enrico Sabbatini for costumes. Cinematography was put in the hands of Pasqualino De Santis, and the score was commissioned from Ennio Morricone.[16]

The initial selection of locations had to be reduced, as the unfolding Islamic revolution in Iran, the outbreak of the Soviet war in Afghanistan and unrest in the Middle East made it impossible to track Marco Polo's original route in full (Gambetti, 1980. pp. 47-48; Montaldo, 2014). Ultimately it was decided to shoot only in Italy, Morocco, Nepal and of course China. Italy was chosen for the first part of the series. Marco's childhood – unmentioned in the original book – was set in Venice where the thirteenth-century San Marco Square had to be completely rebuilt, and a few other sequences were shot in Tarquinia and Fossanova. The Middle East sequence was shot in the Moroccan towns of Elfoud and El-Jadich, and the mountain sequences were filmed in Nepal (Biamonte, 1981, pp. 20-23; Bocconetti, 1981a, pp. 23-25; Montaldo, 2014). About two-thirds of the series was shot on multiple locations in China (Bocconetti, 1980a, p. 55), and this chapter will focus on this part.

During his location inspection trip to the PRC in September–October 1979, Montaldo realised that his original plan of filming in the places described by Marco Polo was untenable, as it had been conceived without understanding the vastness of the country. Thus, he accepted the locations proposed by the CCCC instead (Bocconetti, 1980a, pp. 50-51): interiors would be concentrated in

[16] Most of these professionals had already worked with Montaldo. Sabbatini spent an entire year in 1978 accessing museums and consulting books all over the world to find out how people from different social backgrounds used to dress in Venice, Genoa, Jerusalem, Persia, Afghanistan, Mongolia and China in the thirteenth century (Agostini, 1979, p. 19).

Beijing, while exteriors were to be shot in nearby Chengde, where the old city was well-preserved, although it had been built centuries after Marco Polo's journey. More exteriors were located in the Gansu province and Inner Mongolia, and other locations in the South, particularly Guilin (Bocconetti, 1980a, pp. 53-55). Montaldo was favourably impressed by the local actors, although they could not speak English – a problem shared by most of the Italian actors. As the technical equipment available in China was outdated, the director decided to bring all necessary filming gear from Italy (Montaldo, 1980, p. 34; Crespi, 2005, p. 111).

The Chinese approach to foreigners in the 'age of reform and opening-up' seemed to be a complete reversal of what Lizzani and Antonioni had experienced. especially in the northern and rural areas, people showed great curiosity and friendliness toward the *Marco Polo* team. For instance, at a market in Beijing "everyone came to touch us, to look at us", and they seemed more accustomed to foreigners in Shanghai, which had already been "invaded by Japanese, Americans, French and small groups of Italians" (Montaldo, 1980, p. 24).[17] According to journalist Tiziano Terzani, who lived in the PRC from 1980 to 1984, "unlike Mao's, Deng Xiaoping's China allowed herself to be seen from a short distance" (Terzani, 1998, p. 14).[18]

Montaldo's approach to China, however, was both pragmatic and orientalist. He found it necessary to avoid conflicts between "the neurosis of the Europen filmmaker and the typically Chinese feeling of slowness" (Montaldo, 1980, p. 21). The awareness of Carlo Lizzani's precedent and the changed behaviour of the Chinese undoubtedly helped Montaldo to overcome culture shock and adequately brief his actors and crew about what they would find in China: in such a large scale production, organisation was not a merely logistical issue, but also had a mental and cultural component.

One of the main problems faced by *Marco Polo*, though, had nothing to do with China. In Italy, the RAI chaotically subcontracted production services to a succession of three external companies. The first, Iter Film, proved too small for the scale of the project and consequently was excluded

[17] Original text in Italian.

[18] Original text in Italian.

(Brancati, 1984). Soon after, the second company, Sky Cinematografica, experienced unsustainable budget problems despite being paid 12.5 billion lire, and had to pull out, stopping production for over two months (Bocconetti, 1981b, pp. 29-31; Brancati, 1984; Di Chiara, 2014, p. 390; 'Rai, ecco perche' tre dirigenti vanno processati', 1989). At last, another company, Franco Cristaldi's Vides Cinematografica, stepped in to produce the longest and most challenging part of the miniseries.[19] For this, it received 16 billion lire from the RAI (Brancati, 1984), an amount that exceeded all budget projections. Montaldo acknowledged that the arrival of Cristaldi rescued *Marco Polo* from a massive production failure whose consequences would have been catastrophic for both Italy's diplomatic image and RAI's international prestige (Montaldo, 2014). Since *Marco Polo* had become a global affair, it could not be stopped.

Another challenge that Montaldo had to overcome was casting, as this was connected to a further issue: language. Marco, accompanied by his father and his uncle, travelled across several countries where the languages spoken included Venetian, Arabic, Persian, Mongolian and Chinese. How could this be rendered on the TV screen? For simplicity, for market purposes, and because of the American co-producer's weight, it was decided that the film should be shot in English (Montaldo, 2014). From a linguistic perspective, this choice signalled an acknowledgement that English had become a global language due to the US's economic and cultural supremacy, and that the US involvement in the production was essential to give the cooperation between China and Italy global visibility. This certainly restricted the number of Italian and Chinese candidates for the numerous roles available and increased American control over casting. P&G wanted Montaldo to sign well-known American and British actors in featured roles. Thus, US actors Leonard Nimoy and Murray Abraham were recruited to play Achmet, a powerful and corrupt official of Kublai Khan's, and Jacopo, the Polos' servant, and Britons Denhom Elliott and Tony Vogel became Marco Polo's father and uncle. Anne Bancroft, an American-born Italian, had a small part as Marco's dying mother, and Burt Lancaster was cast as Pope Gregory X. Actors of other nationalities were chosen on the basis of their fluency in English. Thus, Kublai Khan was played by Ying Ruocheng, one of the most prominent Chinese actors, a translator of Shakespeare and the future Vice Minister of

[19] Cristaldi was one of the most respected film producers in Italy. His credits included Pietro Germi's *Divorzio all'italiana / Divorce Italian Style* (1961) and Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), both Academy Award winners, and many of the films in which his ex-wife Claudia Cardinale had performed.

Culture.[20] The Japanese actor Junichi Ishida played Kublai's son Prince Chinkin. Only a few, little-known Italian actors appeared in minor roles.[21]

For the role of the protagonist, Montaldo shortlisted a few names after 160 auditions in the USA, but did not disclose his choice until the very last minute (Montaldo, 1982, p. 42). On November 7, 1980 he announced that the Canadian actor Michael Ontkean would play Marco Polo. Montaldo had found him perfect for both his skills and his warm, almost Italian gaze. However, just a few hours after the announcement the actor was diagnosed with hepatitis and had to give up the part. With shooting scheduled to begin in Venice in a week, a replacement had to be found instantly (Bocconetti, 1980, pp. 28-32).

Montaldo immediately chose Mandy Patinkin, whom he had appreciated as Che Guevara in the musical *Evita*. Patinkin was 28 and had been on stage since the age of 15, but he did not know anything about Italy or Marco Polo (Bocconetti, 1980e, pp. 30-37). As soon as he arrived in Venice from New York, filming began in the presence of all producers, including a delegation from CCCC, and was broadcast worldwide. The protagonist, though, was to deliver another surprise: after two weeks, Patinkin suddenly left the set for personal reasons (Bocconetti, 1980f, pp. 29-30; Montaldo, 2014).

A final replacement was found in Ken Marshall, a young American actor extremely familiar with Italian culture. He was already in Italy, as he had just worked on Liliana Cavani's *La pelle / The Skin* (Bocconetti, 1980f, pp. 29-30; Crespi, 2005, p. 126; Montaldo, 2014). Montaldo found him "strong, willing, generous, the ideal travel companion" (Crespi, 2005, p. 126). At last, filming could really start.

The first shot in China was taken at the Great Wall near Beijing on July 12, 1981, after filming had been completed in Venice and Morocco and the unexpected interruption caused by the Sky debacle resolved. A few days later, the production reached Xilinhot in the Chinese Mongolian

[20] He was also to play an important role in Bertolucci's *The last emperor.*

[21] Montaldo explained that the set of *Marco Polo* became a sort of dialogue coach festival, in the attempt to conform actors' accents to "Shakespearian" English as much as possible (Crespi, 2005, 126-127).

steppes, where it was based for three weeks. From mid-August until the end of September, filming continued in Chengde, which was used as a set for some Beijing street scenes and where the summer residence of Kublai Khan was rebuilt. After returning to Beijing for a few weeks, the group moved to southern China, in Guilin, where it remained until the end of November (Gatti, 1981, pp. 20-23).

Of the extrinsic technical variables that positively influenced the location filming in China, Montaldo was pleased to notice the solid relations that the actors, Italian crew and Chinese technicians were able to create and maintain on set despite the language barriers. The technicians were humble, supportive and willing to learn on the job. The filming in China was therefore completed without delays.

The editing was done in Rome by Nino Baragli, an experienced editor who had already worked with Pasolini, Sergio Leone, and Giuliano Montaldo. Final editing was then completed in the USA by John Martinelli, as the American co-producers believed the director's cut to be too slow-paced and lacking in action sequences. As Montaldo explained in his interview, he maintained supervision over this phase and successfully defended his work:

> [Marco Polo] did not travel on a Maserati! He travelled on horseback! […] [H]ow can you ask someone to perform lots of action if he is crushed by an avalanche and travels on horseback or walking? […] At last I won because they did not touch even a single frame. (Montaldo, 2014)

4.4 Film analysis: meaning is more important than accuracy

Like Antonioni's *Chung kuo,* Montaldo's *Marco Polo* was not broadcast in the same number of episodes in all of the countries that bought it due to different programming needs. In the USA, for instance, it was divided into four episodes, of which episodes 1 and 4 were longer than episodes 2 and 3. In other countries, it was shown in 6 episodes. In Italy, it was split into 8 episodes. In 2008 a 451-minute, 3-DVD collection based on the US version was released, and this is what has been used for this analysis.

Episode 1 (approximately 136 minutes) opens with Marco being defeated in naval combat and imprisoned by the Genoans in 1298. In prison, Rustichello begins to read his story, which in a flashback covers Marco's youth in Venice, as well as his and his companions' journey to Palestine, where they meet the new pope Gregory X and take with them a bottle of oil from the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to deliver to Kublai Khan. They cross Persia and are taken prisoner by a group of Arab warriors. Episode 2 (approximately 89') follows their liberation and journey to Kublai Khan's summer court. Episode 3 (90') is set both at the summer and Beijing courts, and ends with Marco travelling to southern China as a delegate of the Khan. Finally, Episode 4 (136') shows an attempted rebellion by oppressed Chinese farmers which leads to the murder of the treacherous governor Achmet, Marco's farewell to Kublai Khan, and Marco's eventual release from prison in Genoa and return to Venice.

The part filmed in the PRC, which will be analysed here, accounts for about 251 minutes out of the total 451, or 56% of the film's total length. It begins with the arrival of Marco, his father Niccolò, his uncle Matteo and their companion Jacopo at the arid steppes, where they are surrounded by a group of Mongols led by Bektor Khan. The Venetian travellers later reach the Khan's summer residence, which is made of canes and tents, in Chandu (present day Shangdu, in Inner Mongolia). The travelers present the Khan with the gifts they obtained from the pope, and Marco is asked to bring to Empress Chabi the holy oil he has carried from Jerusalem. His private meeting with her, and her interest in the Church and in Rome, are the prelude to an increasing familiarity between Marco and the imperial family. Soon he befriends Kublai Khan's eldest son Chinkin, becomes accustomed to court life , and is given the role of imperial counsellor. Finally Marco tries unsuccessfully to convince Kublai Khan not to attack Japan.

Stylistically, the film is characterised by a slow rhythm and an ASL of approximately 7.6 seconds, as if to underline the point that life in the late thirteenth century moved at a different pace. Elaborate camera movements with numerous dollies and crane shots are used to give prominence to what appeared to have become a common theme, and had already been noted by Lizzani and Antonioni: the scale of China, where landscapes and massive crowd sequences convey a feeling of grandiosity and vastness. Montaldo and his cinematographer Pasqualino De Santis took full advantage of filming in colour in order to point out the different social context. The hairstyles and costumes of Mongol women in the steppes therefore stand out for their shapes and the rich

colours of their finishings, and the imperial court is dominated by several shades of yellow, red, purple and blue, and by the glare of light on silk dresses. By contrast, merchants and peasants appear almost monochromatic, and the presence of imperial delegates among them is easily detectable.

Colour and lighting are also used to add implicit psychological and cultural information. For example, *chiaroscuro* is used for the brief flash-forwards to the prison where Rustichello da Pisa is being questioned by the Inquisitors (Fig. 35). Here, faces are given prominence as the dark clothing of the characters merges with the background, as if to imply that there were no mid tones for Christianity, reflecting the belief that it was only possible to be with or against God – a technique already used by Montaldo in his film on Giordano Bruno.

In China these lighting contrasts are not so evident, and it could be argued this difference visually underlines another approach to life and religion (Figs. 36-38). While in Christian countries there appears to be only salvation and evil, Chinese culture – even under the rule of the fearsome Mongolian dynasty – seems to be more open-minded, accepting the co-existence of Mongol, Han, Middle-Eastern, and even European habits, as a Buddhist monk and a Muslim officer are the most trusted counsellors at the imperial court. These religions are flanked by traditional Mongol deities and divination practices, a reliance on astrologers and shamans, and the Khan's and his wife Chabi's curiosity about Christianity. Chabi wants to know more about Rome and the Pope, but she also uses traditional divination practices to foresee the future when the emperor asks her opinion about making war on Japan. Folk religion also appears in a sequence where a wedding is celebrated by the families of two children who have died, and their paper statues are burnt in order to let their souls unite in the afterworld.[22]

There is only one remarkable case of chromatic contrast in China, and this is used to give visual evidence of a major component of Chinese culture: Taoism. In one sequence, Marco and Monica search for Marco's uncle Matteo, who has gone missing. They are caught by a storm and take shelter in a cave. Here, they declare their love for each other and replace their wet clothes with

[22] This sequence appears to recall that of the child's funeral in Lizzani's *La muraglia cinese*. Questioned about this, Montaldo described it as just a coincidence (Montaldo, 2014).

two vests: Monica wears a black vest and Marco a white one. This sequence encapsulates, without directly mentioning them, the opposite and complementary Taoist principles of *yin* and *yang*, respectively the feminine and the masculine, shadow and light, moon and sun, which have been part of Chinese philosophy for over two thousand years (Figs. 39-40). These principles had previously been explained to Marco and Matteo – and the audience – by a so-called "immortal", an old hermit living in another cave on a local mountain, known for his willingness to stay in close contact with nature.

Another pillar of Chinese tradition is Buddhism. This is discovered by Marco on his way to China, when he is rescued from an avalanche by Buddhist monks. During his recovery in an isolated lamasery, he sees a monk meditating and even levitating. He learns to appreciate the feeling of peace that pervades the lamasery and the monks. Montaldo's depiction of this religion, though, employs Western stereotypes about monks' mental skills, as one of them explains that Marco survived because his *karma* has not been accomplished yet, and predicts that he is to have a long future as a traveller.

The religious discourse is present throughout the entire film, and Montaldo seems keener to support Buddhism than any other religion (Figs. 41-44). For example, Phax Pa, one of Kublai Khan's key advisers, is a Buddhist monk who is initially unhappy about the disruptive influence of Christianity as encapsulated by the young Venetian. However, his uncertainty turns into straightforward friendship with Marco in the last part of the film, when Phax Pa is entrusted by the Khan with the task of dealing with the aftermath of Achmet's murder and corruption in the empire. Buddhism, then, is shown as a religion of peace, preservation of tradition, severity when necessary, and strong condemnation of moral and material corruption, but one that never makes use of force to prevail over other religions even when they are perceived as superstitions. This is not the case with either Christianity or Islam, which the film depicts as affected by violence and corruption on several occasions. The sequences set in the Genoan prison show the pervasiveness of the Church in Italian society, since it pretends to judge whether Marco's story shall be condemned for blasphemy. On their way to China, Marco and his companions also witness the atrocities committed by crusaders in the Middle East. In Mongolia, Kublai Khan has to fight against a relative who has converted to Christianity and is threatening to make war against him. As for Islam, a corruption ring at the imperial court is controlled by Muslim officials, who in another

stereotyped representation always appear to behave ambigously, pretending to help Kublai Khan and Marco on the one side while pursuing their own self-interest on the other. In contrast, Buddhism and Chinese traditional philosophy are seen championing a healthier, more balanced and more desirable approach to life.

Besides depicting Chinese traditional religious and philosophical aspects as more tolerant than Western Christianity, the film also takes the occasion to remark that in the late thirteenth century, China's technology was ahead of Europe's. At the imperial court Marco and his companions marvel at inventions that are new to them, but commonly used in China. These include fireworks, stones (coal) used to light fire, water clocks that measure time, printed books containing advanced knowledge of astronomy, and navigational compasses. By contrast, Marco and his party do not carry any form of technology with them from Venice. They rely exclusively on their trading, diplomatic and travelling skills. In particular, Marco shows a complete absence of prejudice and an unlimited intellectual curiosity. Local people, be they Mongol or Chinese, the imperial family or simple farmers, are caring and welcoming (Jacopo decides to stay in China after being disfigured by fire). The same cannot be said of Venice, which is heavily influenced by the Church, whose presence is constantly represented by grim, dissatisfied priests. Of course, to be welcomed in China, it is necessary to understand its culture and to adapt to it; thus, Marco and his companions wear local clothes and pay great respect to local habits and traditions. We can assume they even speak some form of Mongolian and Chinese, as they never need interpreters to speak with any of the people they meet – but since the film is spoken in English, this remains an hypothesis.[23] If it is hard to know what language Marco Polo and the Kublai Khan really used to communicate, certainly the choice of English – unknown to them in the thirteenth century – made it possible to turn this film into a roadmap for late-twentieth-century globalisation.

Montaldo's *Marco Polo* also contains a number of socio-political references that suit the PRC's ideological framework when it shows the Chinese being discriminated against by foreign rulers. Marco's servant Chen Pao is not allowed to touch a bow and arrows because, as he says, "I am Chinese", and the rural population is oppressed by corrupt governors and tax collectors. However,

[23] In his book, Marco Polo does not explain how he interacted with people speaking other languages, nor does he mention that the Chinese wrote in characters.

a group made up of farmers and intellectuals (a poet, an actor) finds a way to rebel against this situation and uncover a corruption ring. This seems to be a celebration of the PRC's official historiography, and strengthens the central message of a monologue by Prince Chinkin. During a visit to the Great Wall, the prince tells Marco that when he succeeds Kublai Khan, he intends "to teach us all that we are one nation" and hopes that one day "we Mongols […] think of ourselves as sons of the same mother: China", thus conveying the PRC's official policy for ethnic minorities, which proclaimed the unity and equality of all ethnic groups. It may be argued that the inclusion of these messages in the film was a necessary choice to obtain full support from Beijing.

Overall, however, Montaldo's message is clear: China has an ancient, rich culture that must be approached with respect, as it used to be a more advanced civilisation than Europe. Foreigners who understand this – and who are willing to serve some of its needs, as Marco and his companions did with Kublai Khan – will be rewarded in terms of life opportunities.

The film depicts China as a vast country rich in both natural and architectural beauty. There are numerous wide shots of landscapes including the endless Mongolian steppes, idyllic mountains and the rivers of Guilin (Figs. 45-46). China's grandiosity, though, is also manifest in its buildings, such as the Great Wall – unmentioned in Marco Polo's book – and the Forbidden City, which China was keen to propose as its most remarkable visual identifiers since they had also appeared in Lizzani's and Antonioni's documentaries (Figs. 47-49). Even if the latter monument was built only after Marco Polo's journey, it was the best sample of an imperial palace available when the film was shot, and – as Montaldo candidly confessed – was known to only few Westerners (Montaldo, 2014).

As well as revealing China's philosophical and technical superiority over thirteenth-century Italy, Montaldo's *Marco Polo* also aims to point out similarities between the Italian and Chinese cultures. This is made clear by the scenes set in Beijing, where the camera shows busy street life and simple but eye-catching markets and restaurants, creating a link with the sequences in the first episode set in Venice's San Marco Square and implying an ideal similarity between the lives of common people in the two places. In another sequence, Jacopo serves Marco and a group of Mongol chiefs a bowl of noodles, something Marco is apparently seeing for the first time, but is extremely familiar to all viewers. Jacopo is a major player in this game of cultural proximity and

the search for symbols from each culture, which he epitomizes in a drawing of what he calls a "Dragonda", blending a Chinese dragon and a Venetian gondola (Fig. 50).[24] Marco's romantic involvements with two girls also appear to carry a similar message. He faces the same experience both in Venice and in Yangzhou, where he takes a girl of humble origins (Caterina in Venice, Monica in Yangzhou) on a boat ride. On both occasions, he is caught by a storm which obliges him to return the next day, and he is separated from both girls soon after these trips.[25] And of course the figure of Monica, the orphaned daughter of a Venetian traveller adopted by a Chinese farmer, also encapsulates this unity.[26]

Montaldo promotes the plot and the film's meaning over its historical and geographical accuracy. Although the historical research carried out by the director and his team was extensive, the inclusion of sequences set in the Forbidden City and in Guilin – the latter a clearly recognisable landscape, which is vaguely introduced as Hangzhou and Yangzhou, two cities located hundreds of kilometres apart and over a thousand away from Guilin – is eye-catching, but seems to address the wider audience's vague knowledge of China rather than the experts' one. What appears to be a generalising, orientalist stylistic choice recalls the vagueness of certain descriptions in Marco Polo's book, and reminds us that this film is fiction, and not a documentary like its two predecessors.[27]

This consideration also makes it possible to talk about the social and psychological characterisation of fictional characters. Here, the relations between Marco, Kublai Khan and Chinkin are one of the driving forces of the story. The Khan is capable of extreme cruelty and is not afraid of sentencing his enemies and those who fail to accomplish his orders to death – including his nephew Nayan among the former, and among the latter the generals after they are defeated in

[24] The Dragonda will be further discussed in Section 4.5.

[25] However, there is a significant moral difference between the two events. In Venice, Caterina's father strongly opposes her relationship with Marco, openly threatens him and asks for compensation for what Marco has done. In China, no one sees anything wrong in letting Monica accompany Marco on a boat, alone.

[26] This character – based on a name found on a tomb in China – was created for the film, and is never mentioned in Marco Polo's book.

[27] This was confirmed by Vincenzo Labella's claim that "the film is neither a history nor a geography lesson: [t]he intention of all this is to entertain and stimulate, not to teach" (O'Connor, 1982).

their attempt to invade Japan. However, he is also an open-minded, careful listener, attentive to what is new and extremely tolerant of religious debate. In a sequence set at court, he explains that five prophets shall be worshipped within the empire: Confucius, Buddha, Christ, Moses and Mohammed. He trusts his collaborators completely, enjoys long conversations with Marco, seeks his counsel, and ultimately regards him as a foreign son. This paternalistic role is accepted by Marco, who is never afraid of expressing his point of view to the emperor. To Marco, the Khan seems more important than his own father and uncle, and after their arrival at the imperial court, Niccolò and Matteo are often absent from the scene.

Marco's long stay in China is an essential part of his personal development. Here he becomes an adult who learns to bear separation from the people he loves – Monica, Jacopo and Chinkin. He also learns other tough lessons, such as the fact that it is not possible to mix love with *raison d'état* and that the latter will always prevail over the former. For instance, Kublai Khan orders his nephew Nayan to be executed for treason, and Marco has to give up Monica after she is involved in the farmers' rebellion. Marco also discovers that power corrupts people, either for personal convenience (as in the cases of Achmet and Talib) or for reasons of prestige, to the point that any show of weakness becomes a stigma to be avoided by any possible means the Khan orders all of the servants who witnessed Chinkin's epileptic attack to be executed. And finally Marco learns that there is no society without inequality, even when the leader is highly capable. However, he never gives up his quest for tolerance, and his ability to talk in the same straightforward way to everyone, from the most powerful emperor to a blind Japanese potter, remains unchanged throughout the film.

Marco's physical appearance changes only slightly during the film (he grows a slightly longer beard), in contrast with his father, his uncle, and Kublai Khan, who all look progressively older, more frail and more insecure. Ultimately, Marco is not so much a character as the symbol of relations without barriers between Europe and China, West and East. His role remains that of a bridge between two civilisations, and this is how we are supposed to remember him. In a rather sad final sequence, when he returns to Venice after being released by the Genoese, no one is waiting for him. He is alone, and Venice seems to no longer be his home. There is no place for him here. He has completed his function.

4.5 An epic flash in the pan

For contractual reasons, Montaldo's *Marco Polo* was first broadcast in the USA by NBC over four consecutive nights, on May 16-19, 1982. Its screening was preceded by a massive marketing campaign, which included a costume exhibition in Washington, gala nights, a full preview for the press at the Explorer Club in New York and an extensive range of Marco Polo-themed clothing (RAI, 1982, p. 44).[28] Marco was presented as a superstar, and NBC programme manager Susan Baerwald referred to him as a superman, an explorer who has the courage to say: "I will succeed" (Capretti, 1982a, p. 43). The NBC distributed four million copies of a guide to Marco Polo to schools, and Stanford University published a 200-page volume focussing on the thirteenth and forteenth centuries to recreate the historical context. The mayors of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati even proclaimed the May 16-20 to be "Marco Polo's Week" (Labella, 1982, p. 50).

Critical reception was mixed. Some reviews were enthusiastic, while others found the miniseries boring and historically inaccurate. Howard Rosemberg wrote in the *Los Angeles Time* that the use of English as a common language was unrealistic, although he later acknowledged that having characters speak in ten different languages would have been unfeasible, and the importance of ideas prevailed over linguistic accuracy (Labella, 1982, pp. 51-54). John O'Connor in *The New York Times* questioned the candor of *Marco Polo*, "especially when the script was also being closely scrutinised and altered by Chinese officials interested in propagating their versions of the Mongol empires and Kublai Khan" (O'Connor, 1982). Despite the doubts of American critics, however, *Marco Polo* was a success with audiences. It was viewed by 130 million people, and was the most watched program on each night it was broadcast (Labella, 1982, p. 54). The miniseries also received multiple nominations at the 1982 Emmy Awards and won two for Outstanding Drama Special and Outstanding Costume Design.

The 'Marco Polo frenzy' also spread to Italy, where a gala preview of two episodes was organised in Venice in May and – perhaps coincidentally – in July a new, very common 1,000-lire banknote

[28] The RAI invested approximately 2 billion lire in the global campaign (Agostini, 1982a, p. 43).

was introduced featuring a portrait of the Venetian traveller ('Da domani le nuove mille lire', 1982 , p. 4) The launch of Montaldo's drama – which in Italy was to be broadcast on one day a week starting in December – was accompanied by a large number of editorial, commercial, and cultural initiatives. These included the publication of a version of Marco Polo's *Il milione* in modern Italian, curated by writer Maria Bellonci, a theme train travelling across Italy, board games, and contests giving participants the chance to win a trip to China. The Dragonda logo became the ubiquitous symbol of *Marco Polo*'s merchandising and began to appear on billboards in all major cities in early 1982, in order to build anticipation for the drama (Agostini, 1982a, pp. 40-43). In terms of audience, *Marco Polo* was extremely successful, as its first episode was watched by 26 million people ('"Marco Polo": 26 milioni di telespettatori', 1982 , p. 11) , and Giuliano Montaldo remembers that restaurants were empty on the nights his *sceneggiato* was broadcast (Montaldo, 2014).

In 1983 the miniseries was shown in Japan and in dozens of other countries. In January 1985, it had also its official Chinese premiere in Beijing, and a crowded gala in Shanghai (Montaldo, 2014; RAI, 1985, p. 36). Dubbed into Mandarin, it was first screened in cinemas, then aired on TV. The Chinese version was reduced to two three-hour films, as Montaldo was asked to cut the part set in Palestine, which he was told was unintelligible to the Chinese audience (Montaldo, 2014).[29] The director was never notified of critical reviews from the PRC (Montaldo, 2014).

Despite its success, it remains unclear whether the RAI fully recovered the costs of the miniseries. Some sources, citing RAI executives, reported that the Italian broadcaster broke even in early 1982 (O'Connor, 1982), while others say it lost almost 10 billion lire (Brancati, 1984). Due to the lack of transparency around payments of public money to subcontractors, and particularly the 12 billion lire payment to Sky Cinematografica, a 'Marco Polo' scandal erupted and some RAI executives were tried for misappropriation, but acquitted of all charges in late 1989 ('Prosciolti i dirigenti della RAI', 1989). The Italian broadcaster never produced anything so ambitious again. Despite the financial controversies, however, the project gave RAI an entry ticket to China and allowed it to enjoy good relations with Beijing for a few years. In 1984 it obtained world exclusive rights to

[29] It may be argued that the main reason for this request was the sensitive issue of the Catholic Church in the PRC, due to long-lasting tensions and a lack of official relations between the PRC and the Vatican.

make a one-hour TV program on the terracotta warriors discovered in Xi'an ten years earlier (Fiore, 1984, pp. 20-21). However, despite this promising start, dust fell quickly over *Marco Polo* and no traces of further remarkable Italian-Chinese TV cooperation in the following years can be found, for both internal and international reasons –RAI's history, on a smaller scale, is almost as tumultuous as China's.

4.6 Conclusions

Giuliano Montaldo's *Marco Polo* was the first multinational co-production to be shot in the PRC. Bringing to the screen the 700-year-old story of a Venetian merchant travelling to China was an extremely suitable enterprise at this time due to the diplomatic and economic needs of the countries involved, namely Italy, the USA, Japan, the PRC, and – on a smaller scale – Germany and France. China had just launched its economic opening reforms and formalised diplomatic links with the US, and most major industrial countries were extremely keen to explore new market opportunities in an immense country which was still untouched by mass consumerism. Unsurprisingly, the Italian broadcaster RAI, which had started the project, was partnered by a consumer goods corporation (the American P&G) and by an advertising and public relations company (the Japanese Dentsu).

This was the first time China had hosted a foreign film crew of 150 people, and the largest production it had ever authorised to be carried out on its soil. It may be argued this project helped China to restart its own film industry and paved the way for new international co-productions.[30] The protagonist of the miniseries was represented as a champion of tolerance and intercultural understanding, suiting both Giuliano Montaldo's well-known contempt for intolerance and the generalised need to promote China as an extraordinary country open to new ideas and foreign expertise. So much had changed since the experiences of both Lizzani and Antonioni, where the filmmakers were mere foreign observers working on national productions who aimed to study

[30] For example, the Japanese Asahi TV shot a miniseries titled *Genghis Khan*, which was started after *Marco Polo* but broadcast earlier. In Italy it was shown on RAI Channel 2 in six episodes, starting on February 6, 1982 (Barile, 1982, p. 44-46).

China but not interact with it. Their China was seen as secretive and mysterious, whereas Montaldo's China was eager to tell the world it was ready – and very willing – to welcome Western visitors. This *Marco Polo* assumed a parallel between the ancient China ruled by Mongols and the new China ruled by a new political leadership. The latter, unlike the Maoist leadership which in 1957 had forbidden Lizzani to talk about Genghis Khan, appeared keen to accept the Mongolian dynasty as an important part of its history, despite the Mongols being foreign conquerors in China. Kublai Khan, played by a Manchu Chinese actor, is shown as an emperor who, despite his nomadic background, chooses to rule the country from a sumptuous, sedentary court, thus appearing more similar to his Chinese predecessors and successors than to his own ancestors and relatives. In this way, he appears to have assimilated Chinese culture, or better, to have been assimilated by it.

Since all parties involved in the production had their own agenda, *Marco Polo* ended up being the result of at least three major factors: compromises to please all parties, Montaldo's efforts to complete an enormous task in conditions of extreme financial uncertainty, and Montaldo's own artistic goal of celebrating tolerance. Despite receiving mixed critical reviews, the miniseries drew a large audience worldwide and brought a genuine curiosity about China into tens of millions of homes. The real winner in this operation was clearly the PRC, which was represented in a positive light, had the chance to learn about modern filmmaking techniques, and was paid for its support. Cinematic interest in Marco Polo did not vanish with Montaldo's *sceneggiato.* His story has more recently become a 4-hour American television film directed by Kevin Connor in 2006, and a new high-budget series produced by the Weinstein Company and Netflix on-demand television, the first season of which was released in early 2015. [31]

[31]The former was entirely shot in China (Hengdian studios and three other locations), while the more recent drama did not obtain permission to film in the PRC.

5. Bernardo Bertolucci's *The last emperor* (1987): the sudden maturity of Western filmmaking in the PRC

"You have to become a Taoist if you want to survive in China. […] And also a Confucian. You have to be three things, Confucian, Taoist, and Marxist." (Bernardo Bertolucci)

The last emperor was an independent, transnational production that replicated some of Hollywood's and Cecil B. DeMille's epic film canons away from Hollywood. Contrary to what was reported by newspapers and some academic articles, it was not the first Western fiction feature shot in the PRC. According to the Italian press of the time, since the beginning of the 'age of reform and opening-up' in 1979, about ten foreign productions had been approved by the Chinese government within the PRC's territory, starting with *Marco Polo* ('Bertolucci è vicino', 1986, p. 17). However, this was indeed the first time a non-Chinese director – the Italian Bernardo Bertolucci – was allowed to shoot, in China, a film with a Chinese protagonist, set against the backdrop of sixty years of contemporary Chinese history. Of course, that protagonist, Pu Yi, was unique: emperor at the age of three, he lost his power at six when China was proclaimed a republic, and twenty years later became the puppet emperor of Manzhouguo, the state created by the Japanese after their invasion of Manchuria in 1931. After Japan's surrender in 1945, he was captured by the Russians and handed over to the Chinese Communists five years later, and re-educated to become a common citizen. He died in 1967, at the age of 61. The last eight years of his life were the only ones he spent outside of some form of confinement.

To represent the complex character of Pu Yi, Bertolucci used a Freudian approach, further developing his artistic view, which had long been grounded in psychoanalysis. Taking Freud to

Beijing was an experiment that worked extremely well. The cooperation with the PRC was smooth, although it required long negotiations and still needed political backing. The film's results were extraordinary in terms of the global box office, as well as critical reception in Western countries: a recepient of nine Academy Awards, *The last emperor* remains in the top seven Oscar-winning films of all time. This chapter will provide a close-up of what may be considered a case study in the commercial feasibility of postnational art cinema.

The last emperor has been extensively analysed from multiple perspectives, from psychoanalytical readings to feminist critiques, both in the West and in the PRC. Many of these analyses were collected in a book edited by Sklarew, Kaufman, Handler Spitz and Borden in 1998, titled *Bertolucci's* last emperor: *multiple takes*. This was the result of a project that included Bertolucci himself. More works published by Chinese scholars were analysed in 2014 by Stefano Baschiera, who focused on the film's transnational implications. These sources have here been integrated with published interviews with Bertolucci, his director of photography Vittorio Storaro, the film's producer Jeremy Thomas, articles from Italian daily newspapers (*La Stampa, Corriere della Sera*) and periodicals such as *Radiocorriere TV* published in 1984–1988 reporting on the film's production, reviews, Oscar awards, and Chinese distribution. My attention here will mainly focus on Bertolucci's explicit and implicit representation of China through the eyes of Pu Yi.

5.1 From poetry to cinema, via Marxism and psychoanalysis

Bernardo Bertolucci, who was born in Parma in 1941, is one of the most artistically complex and highly regarded Italian *auteurs*. Like the directors analysed in Chapters 1 to 4, he worked overseas for a considerable part of his career, with the support of both Hollywood and independent producers. Son of an Italian poet and of an Australian teacher, Bertolucci experienced cultural 'contaminations' from childhood, and began using a camera at the age of fifteen, when in 1956-1957 he shot two 16mm amateur short films. Meanwhile, Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was a frequent visitor of the Bertoluccis, became his artistic mentor, and in 1961 offered him work as assistant director on his own first feature film, *Accattone*. The following year, at the age of 21, Bertolucci had his directorial debut with the feature *La commare secca / The Grim Reaper*, the story – conceived by Pasolini – of an investigation into the murder of a prostitute. In the same year,

introducing himself as an all-round artistic prodigy, Bertolucci won the prestigious Viareggio literary prize for a collection of poems, *In cerca del mistero* / *In Search of Mystery*.

In search of his own cinematic style, Bertolucci turned his attention to France, the New Wave cinema and in particular Jean-Luc Godard. In the 1960s he was so persuaded of the importance of the *Nouvelle Vague* that he began releasing interviews in French, which he considered the language of cinema (Gerard et al., 2000, p. xi). The Italian director's cinematic extremism was also connected to his political views and his choice to embrace communism at an early age. Bertolucci's second feature film, *Prima della rivoluzione / Before the Revolution* (1964), centres on the dilemma of growing up as a Marxist in a bourgeois family. After this film, *Cahiers du cinéma* hailed Bertolucci as the Italian symbol of the *Nouvelle Vague*, and *Prima della rivoluzione* was acclaimed by French students and became a symbol of the May 1968 student uprising (Gerard et al., 2000, p. xviii). However, Bertolucci immediately felt at odds with the student movement and its idealisation of Maoism, which to him seemed to question the existence of all leftist parties and particularly the communist party. In opposition to what he called the movement's "violent anti-communism", he joined the PCI (Gili, 1978/2000, p. 125), which favoured a gradual transition to socialism.[1]

Italian broadcaster RAI and the state-owned oil and gas company Eni commissioned Bertolucci to make a three-part documentary tracking the route taken by oil from its extraction point in Iran to refineries in Europe. Shot in 16mm, *La via del petrolio / The Oil Route* (1966) was Bertolucci's first experience of filming experience, as well as his first attempt at shooting sync sound. This was uncommon in Italian cinema, which privileged dubbing in post-production, and allowed Bertolucci to get closer to his *Nouvelle Vague* theories. A clear Godardian echo is present in his next film *Partner* (1968), which features a fragmented structure, visible and aggressive editing, extremely long takes, 360-degree panoramic shots, and political references.

Bertolucci's next three films – *Strategia del ragno / The Spider Stratagem* (1970), *Il conformista / The Conformist* (1970), and *Ultimo tango a Parigi / Last Tango in Paris* (1972) – established his international reputation. The latter film was highly controversial because of its graphic sexual

[1] Regarding the PCI's ideological line and the years of collective action, see Section 1.2.

content, which in Italy was deemed pornography. The Italian Supreme Court obliged Bertolucci to destroy all copies of the film, gave him a four-month suspended sentence and deprived him of civil rights for five years. In 1976 he completed *Novecento / 1900*, a 5-hour-long epic drama set in a north Italian farm during the first half of the twentieth century. Featuring an international cast including Robert De Niro, Gérard Depardieu, Stefania Sandrelli and Marlon Brando, this film portrays the impossible friendship between the son of a landowner and the son of a socialist peasant. Bertolucci described this work as his most militant film, in which he had to adopt "a capitalist mode of production in order precisely to emphasize the contradictions that govern the work of a filmmaker", and he was able to "achieve a harmony […] between Marx and Freud" (Gili 1978/2000, p. 128). Although it received mixed reviews, *1900* remained an important filming experience, which found later echoes in *The last emperor* for its intermingling of psychoanalytical and political theories, its epic size, and its multicultural cast.

Bertolucci made two more films in Italy, *La luna / The moon* (1979), and the all-Italian *La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo / The tragedy of a ridiculous man* (1981), a reflection on father-son relations on the background of the late *anni di piombo*. This film was a symptom of the growing malaise Bertolucci was feeling for his country. In the years of the new economic boom, he could not stand seeing the results of what Pasolini called "cultural homologation", or loss of local and national culture, and the spread of non-culture via television in an increasingly uneducated country (Rondi, 1983/2000, p. 168; Nowell-Smith & Halbelstadt, 1997/2000, p. 247).

Once he re-obtained his full civil rights, Bertolucci left Italy again. First, he approached Hollywood, where a project to film Dashiel Hammet's 1929 novel *Red Harvest* seemed imminent. However, when the director moved to Los Angeles to start production in 1982, the project was dropped. As a result, Bertolucci turned to discovering cultures new to him. He travelled to Japan and began to read the autobiography of Aisin Gioro Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, which his friend Franco Giovalè had brought to him on returning from the PRC where he had been an assistant to producer Franco Cristaldi on *Marco Polo*.

5.2 The making of a masterpiece

While reading Pu Yi's autobiography, Bertolucci also received from an American producer the screenplay of an adaptation of André Malraux's novel *La condition humaine / Man's Fate*, which is set in Shanghai in the aftermath of the 1927 massacre in which Chiang Kai Shek violently suppressed local Communist Party organisations. These readings, along with Franco Giovalè's enthusiasm and connections in Beijing, convinced Bertolucci to try the Chinese option (Agosti, 2011). Fascinated by the striking aspects of Pu Yi's life, the director, screenwriter Mark Peploe and film scholar Enzo Ungari wrote a treatment based on the autobiography. Then he took both proposals to the Chinese Film Co-production Corporation (Agosti, 2011; Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35; Pisu, 1984, p. 12).[2] After long negotiations, the CFCC suggested that it would be better to work on Pu Yi than on Malraux, and an official agreement to produce a four-hour television miniseries was signed in 1984 (Hendrickson, 2008; Pisu, 1984, p. 13). The topic of *Man's Fate* was deemed too sensitive, as it dealt with the defeat of communism (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35).[3]

Soon after this trip, Bertolucci met Jeremy Thomas, a young but experienced British film producer who was a friend of Mark Peploe's, and who had just completed a film that the Italian director appreciated: *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1983), a British-Japanese co-production (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35; Lyanga, 2012). Born in London in 1949, Thomas came from a family of film directors and had worked in all areas of the film industry, from editing to production. As he liked the story of Pu Yi and admired Bertolucci, he took on the challenge of supporting an English-language film about a Chinese emperor made by an Italian filmmaker[4]. Several trips to the PRC were necessary to obtain a contract with the CFCC, find locations, and deal with competition, as Bertolucci soon discovered that he was not the only Western filmmaker interested in making a film about Pu Yi.

---

[2] The film industry is often a family affair. Mark Peploe and his sister Clare wrote the screenplay of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970), and Mark also wrote the screenplay of *The Passenger* (1975). Clare began to work with Bertolucci in the 1970s, was his assistant director in *1900* (1976), and co-authored the screenplay of *La Luna* (1979). She married Bertolucci in 1978.

[3] On this point, see Section 5.5 below.

[4] In the case of *The last emperor*, the choice of language was related to the producer's nationality. In addition –as with Montaldo's *Marco Polo* – the use of English was a very practical necessity: to appeal the global market, this film needed international stars, who were more likely to be fluent in English than in Italian.

While he was dealing with the CFCC, Chinese television signed another agreement with the American writer Alex Haley, who planned to produce a 12-hour TV miniseries titled *The last emperor: history of China* ('L'ultimo imperatore cinese scatena la guerra dei film tra Bertolucci e Alex Haley', 1984, p. 23). Ironically, this impasse was solved through the intervention of one of the filmmaker's most hated institutions: the Italian government. In meetings with the Chinese Minister of Culture Zhu Muzhi in late 1984, the Italian Minister of Entertainment Industry and the Minister of Foreign Affairs were assured that the PRC would give Bertolucci priority, as his proposal had arrived first ('Bertolucci, stretta finale per l'imperatore', 1984, p. 19).

While this problem was being solved, Bertolucci, Peploe and Ungari began reworking the screenplay. Ungari's sudden death in early 1985 caused a major rethinking of the project, and the idea of a TV miniseries was put aside in favour of a feature film (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35; Hendrickson, 2008). It took a year and several trips to the PRC to complete the screenplay, which was then cross-checked with Li Wenda, the ghostwriter of Pu Yi's autobiography, and with Pu Yi's brother, whom Bertolucci was able to consult as advisors. Two versions of the screenplay were discussed in two different meetings with the Chinese Ministry of Culture, and eventually one of them was approved with only minor alterations (Bertolucci, 1987; Koch, 1987/2000, p. 188). The budget was calculated at approximately 25 million USD. In the final co-production contract, the Chinese agreed to deal with the People's Liberation Army to find the 19,000 extras required for crowd scenes. In Thomas' words, this was "a $25 million cultural and business joint venture" (Knoedelseder, 1988). The contract replicated the arrangements for the *Marco Polo* project: the support offered by China was exclusively administrative, technical and logistic. For these services the Chinese requested a payment of "a few hundred thousand dollars" and the distribution rights in China (Knoedelseder, 1988; Koch, 1987/2000, pp. 190-191). The PRC's fully supportive attitude had economic, political and promotional reasons. Bertolucci explained that "China wanted the hard currency, the prestige of the director, and the high international profile the film would bring them.[5] It helped, too, that the subject was politically acceptable" (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35).

[5] Bertolucci's words appear to echo the fact that China had invited Antonioni in 1972 for a similar reason: to lift its international profile via a film made by a prestigious director.

The importance of political understanding in authorising this production was underlined by the description of the director in the co-production contract: “Bernardo Bertolucci, member of the Italian Communist Party”. The crucial importance of an intrinsic variable like a filmmaker’s and producer’s political and intercultural awareness in dealing with the Chinese authorities was confirmed by the troubled production of a Hollywood film at this time. Daryl Duke’s *Tai-Pan* was set during the British victory over China in the first Opium War. This recreated what the Chinese perceived as the beginning of their national humiliation in a way that was “historically accurate and not unfriendly to the people of China”, as the PRC required. The director and production company (Hollywood-based De Laurentiis Entertainment) signed a contract with their host institutions (China Central Television and Guangzhou Film Studios) in May 1985 and began filming in the PRC in early 1986. However, during the three months of filming on location, executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis grew exasperated by the Chinese negotiating style, her counterparts’ requests for money and their vetoes on the use of certain locations. She released an interview in Hong Kong harshly criticising the Chinese authorities. In reaction, China obstructed filming in every possible way, including pulling hundreds of Chinese extras and crew technicians off the set during a complex and costly shot (Burns, 1986). Unsurprisingly, *Tai-pan* ended up a critical and box-office disaster.

With the *Tai-pan* situation unfolding, the co-production contract signed by the CFCC and Thomas was instrumental in securing financial support for *The last emperor*. This task was achieved by Thomas’ bank Hill Samuel which, besides co-funding the film, also agreed to take the lead in raising the rest of the money needed. No major Hollywood studios supported the project, as they did not believe that making an expensive feature film in China would be profitable. Therefore, other European banks were contacted. Four of them (Pierson, Heldring & Pierson in Amsterdam, Standard Chartered Bank in London, Gota Banken in Stockholm and Creditanstalt-Bankverein in Vienna) understood the project’s potential, which they saw as a vehicle to access the Chinese market (‘Un film epic, colossal e bancario’, 1986, p. 25), and agreed to invest equal shares to cover the budget. Moreover, before production began, $20 million was already covered by guaranteed distribution agreements in several countries (Knoedelseder, 1988).

Another major breakthrough came in September 1985 when Bertolucci obtained the official permission to film extensively in the Forbidden City and in previously off-limits areas of Manchuria.

The director also obtained the Beijing Film Studios to recreate the interiors of the Forbidden City ('Bertolucci va nella Città proibita', 1985, p. 7).[6] Filming in the PRC had to be completed in sixteen weeks, with a shorter segment to be shot at Cinecittà Studios in Rome, where the prison set was built.

Casting was particularly delicate as it was not easy to obtain permission to use actors from outside of China actors for the main roles. Ultimately, however, the CFCC had to accept that the film was in English and that only few actors born in the PRC were fluent in that language. Thus, thousands of auditions had to be organised with English-speaking actors of Chinese background from Hong Kong, the USA, the PRC and Singapore (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35; ('Bertolucci è vicino', 1986, p. 17). In particular, Bertolucci declared that he used Chinese-American actors with confidence, as "I love contaminations, and I love contradictions" (Koch, 1987/2000, p. 194).[7] And indeed this film was both a result and a representation of cultural contaminations, as will be argued later in this chapter.

Four actors were needed to play Pu Yi at different ages. Unknown actors played Pu Yi as a child and a teenager. To play the adult emperor, Bertolucci chose John Lone, a Hong-Kong born, US-based actor who had just achieved international fame for his role in Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* (1985). For the role of the emperor's tutor Reginald Johnston, the only major non-Asian role in the film, Bertolucci selected of the most acclaimed stars of Western cinema: Peter O'Toole, who was still extremely popular for his leading role in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). The role of Pu Yi's first wife Wan Jung went to Shanghai-born, US-based Chong (Joan) Chen, who had just won a part in *Tai-pan.* Wu Junmei (later better known in the West as Vivian Wu) had her debut on the big screen as the emperor's secondary consort Wen Xiu. Ying Ruocheng, who had already played Kublai Khan in Giuliano Montaldo's *Marco Polo* and in the meantime had become Vice Minister of Culture, was given the part of the Governor of War Prisoners Thought Control Centre. Chen Kaige, whose film *黃土地 Huáng tǔdì / Yellow Earth* (1984) had drawn international attention to the

[6] Permission to film in Forbidden City was granted only for outdoor areas, as indoor filming ran the risk of setting historic buildings on fire.

[7] Visiting the land of their ancestors for the first time was also a discovery for these actors, worthy of a film itself (Kock, 1987/2000, p. 194).

forming Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers, also played a small role as an officer of the imperial guards who appeared in one of the early sequences.

Filming began in the PRC in July 1986, and the production was based there until October.[8] Bertolucci considered his Chinese experience tiring but extremely positive. He arrived in Beijing full of admiration for the millennial Chinese culture and history, aware that the excesses of the Cultural Revolution – which he had not supported – were now part of the past and that the new Chinese leaders had distanced themselves from the excesses of Maoism. The filmmaker revealed his surprise at the speed of changes occurring in the PRC, which he considered a unique laboratory where everything was being tested, adjusted and adapted to ancient habits (Robiony, 1986, p. 23). He admired the energy he found there, and when he returned to Italy he was shocked by the realisation that despite the good economic conditions at that time, his own country, in comparison, looked static.[9]

In the PRC, Bertolucci made an effort to avoid applying his own Eurocentric cultural and philosophical categories to the local environment, and tried "to be invaded by Chinese culture" as much as possible. He declared, "You have to become a Taoist if you want to survive in China. […] And also a Confucian. You have to be three things, Confucian, Taoist, and Marxist. This is the incredible thing. The Chinese cultural river never stopped, so China never dropped Taoism and Confucianism" (Koch, 1987/2000, pp. 191-192). However, he was also aware that the idea of setting oneself free from one's cultural background is an illusion. By his own admission, he could not forget Freud, and had to apply psychoanalysis to a collective culture, obtaining surprising results, as will be argued in the following sections.

[8] This was a great logistical challenge, not only because of the size of the crew and cast, but also because – as Thomas later remembered – "everything had to be brought in" (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35).

[9] This became an extremely common feeling among travellers in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. It was also one of the main factors pushing hundreds of Italian professionals to move to the PRC. For the last part of this section, see Koch (1987/2000, pp. 188-199).

5.3 A cinematic psychoanalysis of Pu Yi – and China

To maximise the box office, television and home video returns in the markets where it was sold, *The last emperor* was released in multiple cuts and formats. The original 163-minute widescreen theatrical cut was a shortened version of a 219-minute edition for television which – despite earlier intentions – was kept. These were followed twenty-five years later by a further edition converted to 3D and presented at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.[10] Other, slightly different versions were made available for the home video market. The theatrical cut has been used for this analysis.

The film's narrative structure was completely re-elaborated in comparison to Pu Yi's autobiography, and was reportedly the largest challenge faced by Bertolucci and Peploe when they wrote the screenplay (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 36). While the book progresses in chronological order, almost like a diary, the film narrative follows a circular pattern, making it – like Montaldo's *Marco Polo* – a dialogue between past and present. In an alternation of flashbacks and flashforwards, the nine years Pu Yi spent in the re-education camp are used as a framing device. The repetition of similar episodes at different stages of his life (which will be illustrated below) not only has psychoanalytic implications but also seems to recall China's cyclical history. Using these narrative techniques – and despite the spectacular grandeur of the sequences set in the Forbidden City – Bertolucci offers a view of China which appears more conceptual than visual. An analysis of some key sequences will better illustrate this point. However, for a better understanding of the film's structure, first it is necessary to scrutinise its plot.

The film opens in 1950, when a train full of war criminals arrives at a station in Manchuria. The adult Pu Yi – whom the spectator does not know yet – is among them. The only man dressed in a Western-style suit, he gets off the train and locks himself in a storeroom near the waiting hall, where he attempts suicide by slitting his wrists. A first flashback brings the story to its very beginning in 1908, when the nearly 3-year-old Pu Yi was taken away from his mother, brought to the Forbidden City and crowned emperor of China. Returning to 1950, he is saved and conducted

[10] For details about the two-year-long conversion process, see Kaufman (2013a).

to prison. Here, he and his fellow prisoners are told by the governor they will have to write their memoirs in order to reflect on the mistakes they made in their past.

The rest of the plot develops following the model of the opening sequence. Several narrative devices are used to gradually introduce Pu Yi's past and to show his development from child emperor to adult puppet emperor of Manzhouguo, until his capture by Russian soldiers. These devices include his encounters with other prisoners familiar to him (including his brother Pu Jie), ellipses inserted between flashbacks and flashforwards, readings given by the prison governor, Pu Yi's interrogation by an angry official who repeatedly yells at him when he is not happy with his answers, and his thought-reforming process. The use of flashbacks and flashforwards allows Bertolucci to build parallels between Pu Yi's 'disease' – being a puppet emperor for most of his life – and its analysis, until his final healing, represented by his discharge from the camp.[11]

In 1959, once the past is completely unwound, Pu Yi obtains a special pardon. After a further ellipsis, the narration in the final part of the film becomes linear. Pu Yi is shown as an ageing man working in a garden in Beijing in harmony with his co-workers, witnessing a demonstration of the Red Guards in 1967, and visiting the Forbidden City, where he lived for sixteen years in his youth, as a paying tourist. Here, he magically disappears. One last ellipsis leads the film into the concluding sequence, where a tour guide brings foreign tourists into the same hall where Pu Yi was crowned in 1908.

Thanks to these choices, Bertolucci was able to describe Pu Yi's life selectively and also to film almost in sequence both in the PRC and in Rome. As he declared, "when you shoot a movie about a man's whole life, you have to see and *feel* him growing up" to get the correct development of the character (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 36). This structure emphasises Pu Yi's reflections on his past and – in Freudian and Bertoluccian terms – the progress of his psychotherapy by showing to what degree the traumas he received in his childhood conditioned his entire life. These include the forced separations from his mother and wet nurse, his confinement within the Forbidden City, and

[11] The inclusion of ellipses between flashbacks works to bring time forward: for example, the first flashback shows a baby emperor, the second an older child and the third a teenager, and further ones show him as an adult, his expulsion from the Forbidden City, the years he spent in Tianjin, and his years as emperor of Manzhouguo.

the realisation that he was not omnipotent and that he lived in an artificial world. In addition, Bertolucci insisted on Pu Yi's lack of a clear sexual identity due to his being surrounded only by eunuchs and high consorts – the former concubines of the previous emperor – during the years of his psychophysical development.

These traumas resulted in a man suffering from omnipotence syndrome, or power addiction, where power is assimilated as a form of drug (interview with Bertolucci cited in Brunatto, 1986, 23'28"). Therefore Pu Yi *needs* to be an emperor again, and becoming a puppet in the hands of the Japanese is the only chance he is given to do so. The traumas also condition Pu Yi's private life, leaving him sexually impotent and unable to feel love or compassion for others. He only shows affection for three people: his wet nurse Ar Mo, his Scottish tutor Reginald Johnston, and the prison governor, whom he considers "a good teacher". The rest of Pu Yi's life is a negation of any kind of affection. His secondary consort flees after asking for a divorce; his wife becomes addicted to opium and gets pregnant by his driver; and even the advances of a *femme fatale* – his cousin known as Eastern Jewel (played by Maggie Han), who also works as a Japanese spy – leave him indifferent. Bertolucci depicts Pu Yi as a eunuch, deprived of his freedom, his power and his virility.

Through the use of narrative repetitions, the director underlines Pu Yi's inability to come to terms with his past. T. Jefferson Kline described the last emperor as subject to "repetition of compulsion" (Figs. 51-56).[12] The repetitions seen in the film are indeed striking and include Pu Yi's separation from his mother and the separation from his wet nurse; the child chasing his wet nurse and the adult chasing his wife; the child sitting on his chamberpot and the child sitting on the throne; the climbing of a wall in his childhood and the climbing of a wall in his teens. Further repetitions include Pu Yi's crowning in the Forbidden City and his crowning in Manchuria, his 'imprisonment' in the Forbidden City, in Manchuria, and in the detention centre (Kline, 1998, pp, 156-157), and also the shots – symbolising vacuity – of Pu Yi's imperial seal, and of his signature on documents provided by the Japanese and the floor of the prison. All these repetitions are spaced out by the

[12] This term was used by Paul Russell to describe an experience determined by the present, but fully comprehensible only by reference to the past, or in other words, "a memory which masquerades a present-day event". The repetition compulsion is triggered by "some original and prototypical trauma" (Russell, 1988, pp. 3, 5, cited in Kline, 1998, pp. 155-156).

recurring order “Open the door!” which punctuates the entire life of a man both deeply intoxicated with himself and begging for freedom like a *leitmotiv*. Ultimately the doors really open to him, but this happens only when – if his imprisonment is considered as a metaphor for psychoanalysis – the patient’s healing is complete. When Pu Yi reaches acceptance of his past and acknowledges his mistakes, he is free to leave the prison-hospital.

Pu Yi’s individual viewpoint is contextualised by the large-scale historical events that changed China: the end of the empire, the period of the warlords, the fight between Nationalists and Communists, the Japanese invasion, the Communists’ takeover, and Maoism taking control of society. He has only a marginal understanding of these events, which he sees or hears from behind walls that are both physical (the Forbidden City, the re-education camp) and mental (the will to power). In presenting Pu Yi as a prisoner of circumstances and of himself, Bertolucci connects Freudianism (individual level) with Marxism (social level). Although the film insists more on the individual level than on the socio-historical one, Pu Yi’s ‘psychotherapy’ becomes an occasion to put China in front of its own past, let it deal with its own traumas, and solve its own recent conflicts, from the end of the empire to the Cultural Revolution, all of which occurred in the space of one generation. As with an individual, the present situation of a country and of a society is shaped by past events, but these can only be understood from a present perspective.

This point confirms what Bertolucci declared in a 1978 interview about his cinematic perspective:

> “Even though history is very important, I wouldn’t define my films as historical films […]. I make falsely historical films, because in fact you can’t write history through cinematic means: film knows only one tense, the present. […] All my films are films about the present even if they speak about the early years of this century, the twenties or of the beginnings of fascism.” (Gili, 1978/2000, p. 129).

Bertolucci’s perspective is supported in *The last emperor* by the lack of linear narration, which creates a feeling of uncertainty in the spectator that replicates Pu Yi’s own uneasiness and his ‘psychotherapy’. The director’s intentions are also supported by the photography, *mise en scène*, acting, and dramatic and repetitive music score. As for shot composition and camera work, Pu Yi is often placed at the centre of the frame or close to it, mostly in close-up, and – until he is in the Forbidden City – with eye-level and low angle shots to give visual prominence to the figure of the

emperor.[13] The numerous crane shots, dollies and tracking shots that follow Pu Yi in his exploration of physical places like the Forbidden City certainly add a spectacular component to the film, but more importantly, they appear as a metaphor for the emperor rethinking his past as an external observer.

The artificiality and theatricality of Pu Yi's past life is evident at all times, and particulary striking in the grandeur of the Forbidden City. Here, in an environment saturated with orange light – a colour which according to Storaro symbolises maternal warmth, thus giving the imperial palace the role of the family Pu Yi never had – spectators are given the feeling of visiting a living museum. In this environment every character is dressed and styled according to – or very like – the Qing dynasty canons. Thousands of people continously revere the child emperor, attend to him and observe him. Every figure moves following ancient rites, etiquette or choreography, appearing and disappearing, shifting from one side of the frame to the other and from foreground to backround as happens on a stage during a play or an opera.

Pu Yi's enthronement ceremony is an example of this grandeur and theatricality, as well as being an establishing sequence loaded with metaphoric meanings and hints about his future life (Figs. 53, 57, 65). It involves thousands of extras in the splendour of the Forbidden City and begins in a backstage space (the interior of the Hall of Supreme Harmony) where a document is signed with the new imperial seal, and the child emperor stands on the throne flapping the long sleeves of his imperial gown as a new-born butterfly would learn to flap its wings. In this case, however, the metamorphosis is reversed: the child is born a butterfly, but will become a larva in his adulthood. After this brief sequence, Pu Yi comes out from behind a yellow curtain that rises over stairs from which he dominates the immense audience kowtowing to him in the courtyard. As a young child he cannot yet understand that in his case roles are once again inverted: the audience is made of actors, and he – the protagonist – is watching the play unravel before him. Being very young, he loses interest in walking among thousands of officials, and when the noise of a cricket distracts him he runs to look for it. The cricket – an insect that in China is often kept as a caged pet – will

[13] According to Ding Ning, Bertolucci's cinematic techniques create a familiar atmosphere for a Chinese audience: in particular, the use of flat and low-angle shots resembles "written descriptions of the emperor in scholarly works about China's past" (Ning, 1998, p. 216).

magically reappear only at the end of the film, to symbolise the circularity of the last emperor's life in a cage and the continuity of Chinese culture. In this initiation to theatre, Pu Yi will soon find his role once again reversed: he will become an actor – or more accurately, a puppet.

The beauty of the Forbidden City, often revealed through wide angle shots of its pavillons and courtyards, is soon transformed in a labyrinthine nightmare thanks to the multiplicity of large and small yards framed by the camera, the low-angle shots of a long lane surrounded by tall red walls, and match cuts between these walls and the grey ones of the detention camp (Figs. 51, 58). When Pu Yi's wet nurse Ar Mo is sent away by the high consorts, he unsuccessfully chases her sedan chair through this labyrinth and ends up in the centre of a large, empty yard framed in a high-angle wide shot. This shot forms a visual conclusion of the series of events that has just unfolded, bringing Pu Yi to the realisation that he is no longer emperor of China but only of the Forbidden City, and that a newly-built wall separates him from the new President of the Republic. He is a prisoner of circumstances, a prisoner in his palace, and alone. The idea of imprisonment is further emphasised by two other sequences. In the first one, the adolescent Pu Yi hears noises and chants coming from student' protests outside the walls, and cries out to his Scottish tutor that "The students are right to be angry. I'm angry. But I'm not allowed to leave the Forbidden City! I want to go out, Mr. Johnston!". Then he crosses the courtyard, exclaiming, "I want to see the City of Sounds", a term also used in the original autobiography to describe what the emperor could hear but was not allowed to see outside of his palace.

The second sequence representing the young Pu Yi's imprisonment in the imperial palace begins when his tutor comes to report the news of his mother's death. Pu Yi is aware that she killed herself with opium, and signals his intention to go to see her and his brother. He crosses a courtyard and turns into the same narrow lane surrounded by red walls that was used by eunuchs to take away his wet nurse. This time he rides along this lane on his bicycle, and arrives at an exit gate. The captain of guards recognizes him and gives an order to the others who line up at attention. Pu Yi has found the way out of the labyrinth and gazes with curiosity at what he sees in front of him. When he approaches the gate, however, the imperial guard captain orders the door to be closed. When Pu Yi orders them to open the door, they simply kowtow to him. Irritated by their lack of action, he throws the bike on the floor, then turns back to repeat the order to the captain, who bows in silence and also kowtows. Pu Yi pulls out a little pet mouse he has hidden in

a pocket, turns again towards the door, and throws the little animal at it, killing it on the spot. The captain observes and bows again while Pu Yi runs away. By crushing the mouse, Pu Yi has metaphorically castrated himself. He has given up his will to leave the imperial palace. Like the other eunuchs, he now fully belongs to the labyrinth-prison of the Forbidden City. He is part of this world, and not of what is happening outside.

Immediately after this, in a failed attempt to escape through the rooftops, Pu Yi discovers that his vision is blurred. Although it is true that he was short-sighted, Bertolucci's decision to include the realisation of his problem at this particular moment seems to prolong the emperor's metaphoric weakening: just after his 'castration', he learns that he will need spectacles to see the world around him. On the one hand, the use of glasses brings a sign of modernity into the imperial palace, but on the other it represents Pu Yi's transition to maturity and his chronic incapability/refusal to see – and thus interpret – the world without mediation. Significantly, he even wears indigo-coloured sunglasses when he is finally forced to leave the Forbidden City in 1924, a colour that according to Vittorio Storaro's theory symbolises lust for power (Ceraolo, 2012, p. 54). Thus it is clear that Pu Yi's worldview is exclusively self-centred, and that he is determined to remain an emperor at all costs (Figs. 59-60).

Pu Yi's distorted world view becomes explicit when he moves to live under Japanese protection in Tianjin and accepts the title of emperor of Manzhouguo. In Tianjin, he is blinded by his discovery of modern Western life. He sings in English, dances, and yields to the excesses of materialism and consumerism. "I was never tired of buying any pianos, watches, radios… Everything Western was good […]. I was twenty-one. I dreamed of going to the West. I became a playboy", Pu Yi remembers during his confession to an unnamed interrogator and the prison governor. As for his becoming emperor of the Japanese-ruled Manzhouguo, the ongoing interrogation and flashbacks reveal this to be a purely self-centred decision. He feels betrayed by the Chinese nationalists, who failed to protect him and even destroyed his ancestors' tombs, and believes that the Japanese are giving him the chance to be the leader of his ancestors' land.

Thus Pu Yi in 1934 becomes a puppet completely manipulated by others. His traditional coronation ceremony in the Manchurian steppes is a mockery of his imperial coronation in the Forbidden City. To symbolise his unwillingness to admit that the Japanese are using him, he does

not wear glasses here, so he can only see a small crowd waving Manzhouguo flags and a small number of soldiers and other officials wearing traditional clothes, who kowtow to him. When the camera lingers on a large factory in the background of the ceremonial place, which is a simple round earthwork echoing the Circular Mound Altar at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, it reveals that there is no visual beauty in this mockery. To further reduce the visual impact of this event and therefore play down its importance, camera movements are limited to a few pans and a very short tracking shot of Pu Yi as he steps on the altar. This allows spectators to be better observers than Pu Yi. Or to recall the previously-mentioned visual metaphor, if the camera represents Pu Yi's re-elaboration of his past, it shows that he – as an external observer of himself – is acquiring a more complete vision of what he was unable to see at that time.

Pu Yi's intoxication with power is paralleled by his wife's opium addiction, which he despises, but it does not allow him to perceive the evidence of his own failure as an emperor and ultimately his downfall as a man. In the new imperial residence, a large and unadorned villa, he does not protest when his guards are disarmed following Japanese orders, or when he is forced to sign decisions made by others, and he has to accept that his wife Wan Jung is pregnant after having an affair with his driver. Pu Yi's decline is emphasised even further in a sequence where he fails to reach Wan Jung when she is taken away after giving birth to a child that is immediately killed by a Japanese doctor.[14] As he did his wet nurse, now Pu Yi loses his wife, and the use of a melody resembling the one that accompanied his chase of Ar Mo emphasises the similarity between the two episodes. When he arrives at the gate, Japanese guards close a red door and line up in front of it. Pu Yi is a prisoner again – a prisoner of the Japanese, but, as these narrative repetitions underline, once again also a prisoner of himself. "Open the door", he orders again. But this time he is not screaming, only whispering.

This is the moment in which Pu Yi realises who he is and what he has done. However, this realisation has to occur in the present, which is reached via another sudden flashforward to the Chinese prison. Here, in a projection room, a Chinese documentary made of old film footage is screened to allow prisoners to face the atrocities committed in China by the Japanese: the

[14] In Pu Yi's autobiography there is no mention of Wan Jung's pregnancy, while the person who was really killed by a Japanese doctor was a girl the emperor chose as secondary wife after being left by Wen Xiu.

invasion of Manchuria, the bombing of Shanghai, the massacre known as the Rape of Nanjing. Then, while a voiceover states that Manzhouguo was ruled by the puppet emperor Pu Yi, his black and white image appears on screen. In this moment, Pu Yi, who is watching the documentary, stands up in the projection room (Figs. 61-62). While the video footage shows the remains of people killed by biological experiments and a voiceover explains the damage caused by opium produced in Manzhouguo, a cutaway shot again shows Pu Yi standing among his fellow prisoners with an expression of incredulity on his face. It is in this moment that his past joins his present. Hirohito's radio announcement of Japanese surrender is used to accompany footage of Hiroshima destroyed by the nuclear bomb: the Japanese emperor's voice functions as a sound bridge connecting this sequence to a further flashback that opens with a close-up of a radio and ends with Pu Yi's failed attempt to escape.

Once the former emperor realises he is a war criminal, the narration jumps to 1959, when he receives his pardon, and then to 1967. Here, a visibly aged Pu Yi, wearing the standard blue uniform of the Maoist era, works in a greenhouse, and his interactions with coworkers show that he is now an accepted member of China's new societly, one among many. However, while he may have healed, this society still shows symptoms of sickness. Bicycles stop at a green traffic light and move when it turns red, and a quiet scene of daily life is interrupted by the arrival of a group of young Red Guards marching on the street in front of Pu Yi. They are playing revolutionary songs, waving the *Little Red Book* and red flags, carrying large portraits of Mao Zedong, and accompanying some people pilloried for unspecified crimes. Among these prisoners, Pu Yi recognises the person who re-educated him, the governor of the prison (Fig. 63). When he tries to explain to the Red Guards that he knows the man is a good teacher, a young guard forces the governor to confess crimes he has not committed and to kowtow to a giant portrait of Mao painted on a wall. Then Pu Yi is rudely pushed away and falls on the floor, from where he watches a group of girls dancing and chanting, accompanied by a boy waving a large red flag. Despite the revolution, Bertolucci seems to suggest, little has changed. The old emperor has been replaced by a new one, and red remains his colour. Thus it is time for Pu Yi to leave the scene, and for purposes of narrative circularity this can only happen in the same place where he was proclaimed emperor for the first time.

In the next sequence, Pu Yi returns to the Forbidden City as a tourist (Figs. 64-65). In the empty palace, he tries to reach the golden throne in the Hall of Supreme Harmony, but a child runs in to stop him. He introduces himself as the son of the custodian, saying he lives there, and asks Pu Yi to introduce himself. Pu Yi replies that he was the emperor of China and he also used to live there. As the child asks him to prove it, Pu Yi takes out from the throne the small box with the cricket he received on the day of his crowning. Sitting on the throne stairs, he gives the box to the child. When the latter climbs down to check the box, the camera tilts down, leaving the smiling Pu Yi out of frame, and when the child turns his attention to the throne again and the camera tilts up, Pu Yi has disappeared. Surprised, the child climbs up to the throne looking around, then he checks again the box, from which the cricket emerges, magically still alive, symbolising the continuity of Chinese traditions and culture through wars and revolutions, and Pu Yi's ultimate liberation from the cage where he was kept for most of his life. A new era is to begin and a new generation will lead China, but with this sequence and the cricket's linking function Bertolucci seems to warn the new leadership about the necessity of staying connected with their millennial history.

In the concluding shot, after a final ellipsis, the Hall of Supreme Harmony is shown full of foreign tourists. These surround a tour guide explaining that the last emperor crowned there was Aisin Gioro Pu Yi, who died in 1967. The People's Republic of China has opened its doors to foreigners, and seems ready to share its past – or at least a processed version of it – with them. But has China healed from its own traumas? A brief discussion on the epic function of Bertolucci's film may help to illustrate this point.

Although the definition of "epic film", as Andrew Elliot suggests, and its identification as a genre remains a confusing task (Elliot, 2014, p. 1-2), traditionally this genre has helped to define national identity and consciousness. More precisely, "monumental epic films not only appropriate the past for the present but do so by recycling previous cinematic reimaginations" (Bronfen, 2013, pp. 218-219). Therefore, keeping in mind Cecil B. DeMille's films and other classic epics produced by Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s[15] and focussing the attention on epic-historical films, it is possible to identify some common traits in these films and *The last emperor*. They are

[15] Among these are *Cleopatra* (1934 and 1963), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960).

monumental tales focussing on one or more heroes, inserted against the background of great historical events. As Tim Dirks argues,

> Epics often rewrite history […]. Accuracy is sometimes sacrificed: the chronology is telescoped or modified, and the political/historical forces take a back seat to the personalization and ideological slant of the story. (Dirks, 2016)

Bertolucci's film works to represent China reflecting on its own identity. However, Hollywood standards are reversed in the figure of the film's hero. In addition, most of the grandeur is in Pu Yi's memory and is intertwined with Bertolucci's own psychoanalytical preoccupations. From this point of view, it may be argued that the Italian director produces his own version of an epic film by representing China as a product of memory, a grandiose mental palace that becomes concrete and real only when foreigners are allowed to visit it as tourists, once the protagonist has also become a part of the past.

5.4 Masterpiece in the West, debated in the PRC

Once filming was completed, *The last emperor* was edited in London by Gabriella Cristiani. The director's 163-minute final cut was released in cinemas in October 1987 (Hendrickson, 2008). Critically acclaimed in the West, the film won 52 international and Italian awards, including nine Academy Awards in 1998, but not the Oscar for Best Actor, as if to underline a general though calculated lack of expressiveness in the film, in which characters conform to the role of puppets, in this case fully controlled by Bertolucci.[16] The film's success at the Oscars was reflected in extraordinary box office results, which totalled nearly $44 million in the USA alone (Box Office Mojo, 2016).

[16] However, many of the young actors involved in this film developed successful careers. Joan Chen has continued acting and become a producer and director of both Hollywood and Chinese films; Vivian Wu has also continued her career in cinema across the world; John Lone, after becoming famous in Hollywood, has progressed his career in the Asian market; and Chen Kaige has become one of the leading figures of the Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers, winning a Golden Palm at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival with *Farewell My Concubine*.

If its success in Western countries was universal, *The last emperor* met some challenges in the two countries it dealt with: China and Japan. The distribution of the film in Japan resulted in self-imposed historic censorship by Shochiku Fuji Distribution Company, which decided to cut the thirty-second sequence dealing with the Rape of Nanjing without informing Bertolucci. This infuriated the director, who had the sequence restored immediately. The company also apologised, explaining that the cut had been decided on "out of respect for Japanese audiences", because the scene was "too sensational" for them. This revealed that war crimes committed in China and Korea were still a very sensitive issue (Chang, 1997, pp. 210-211).

The film was released in China in late 1988 after being delayed several times without explanation.[17] If officials in Beijing expressed doubts about Bertolucci's work, it seems the main reason for the delay was an ongoing struggle between the Film Bureau and Chinese Television, which stemmed from the Minister of Culture's 1984 decision to support Bertolucci rather than the TV co-production with Alex Haley. CCTV had persisted in its plan, and had completed a miniseries based on the life of Pu Yi entitled *末代皇帝 Mòdài huángdì*, directed by Huan Zhou and starring Chen Daoming.[18] According to the *Corriere della Sera*'s Beijing correspondent Renato Ferraro, the miniseries was shown on TV in July – three months ahead of the planned broadcast – as a reprisal against the Film Bureau (Ferraro, 1988, p. 4).[19] In reviewing scholarly works of the period, Stefano Baschiera has recently noted that Bertolucci's *The last emperor* was met with general scepticism and even ignored (Baschiera, 2014, p. 409). In contrast, ten years after its release, the Chinese scholar Ding Ning, also mentioned by Baschiera, wrote that the Chinese audience approved of and

[17] The case of *The last emperor* also became part of a heated debate at the National People's Congress – the Chinese parliament – where the actor and Vice Minister of Culture Ying Ruocheng had to defend the legitimacy of the authorisation to film in the Forbidden City given to the producer (Agi-Ap, 1988, p. 23). Some delegates also criticised scenes that "offended China" and the lack of historical accuracy (Afp-Ansa, 1988, p. 25). The release – approved after the film's success at the Academy Awards – was originally scheduled for May, then postponed to June, and again to the end of September. However, the film was previewed at two theatres in Beijing for ten days in August, and tickets were sold out (Agi-Ap, 1988, p. 23; 'Tutto esaurito a Pechino per Bertolucci', 1988, p. 16).

[18] The title of the Chinese TV series is translated in English as *The Last Dynasty* on imdb (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1594776/). News of the time reports that the miniseries was co-produced with Hong Kong, but do not mention the name of the production company, which is uncredited on the International Movie Database.

[19] To underline the diplomatic and political significance of this case, the news was reported in the "Foreign Affairs" section of the newspaper rather than the "Culture" section.

even admired Bertolucci's film (Ning, 1998, p. 213). However, Ning also noted that the film was criticised for its excessively Western focus on Pu Yi's inner conflict and for the excessive use of a Western gaze in the representation of the imperial court – for example in the voyeuristic sequence where the high consorts use binoculars to watch Pu Yi nursing. Further critiques were expressed about historical oversimplifications and inaccuracies, such as servants wearing clothes of the wrong dynasty and excessive breaches of court etiquette (Ning, 1998, pp. 216-217).

The latter point became a common critique when Chinese reviewers compared *The last emperor* with *末代皇帝 Modai Huangdi* and several academic works praised the historical realism of the Chinese series in contrast with Bertolucci's emotional approach (Baschiera, 2014, pp. 409-410). If Bertolucci's film won limited approval, in contrast the local miniseries won a number of national awards, including the Chinese Television Feitian Award for best series and best actor. However, it failed to gain commercial success due to its pedantic, textbook-like appearance (Ferraro, 1988, p. 4). It may be speculated that the critical success of *Modai Huangdi* also had a nationalist component. The Chinese miniseries was a local production, starring exclusively local actors, and for these reasons it overshadowed Bertolucci's film in China. It appears that it was not distributed abroad. The production of *Modai Huangdi* became a turning point and a clear message to the international film industry: after briefly cooperating with foreign producers to make films about its own history, China was ready to review its past using its own cinematic means. Historical authenticity – or what the Chinese regulators considered to be historical authenticity – was more important than artistic merit, thus state-sponsored local productions had the double advantage of being more controllable and of talking to the Chinese audience in a cinematic language they could more easily understand. Most importantl,y they were free of morally and politically harmful content such as sexual references, voyeurism, and the abuse of prisoners by communist officials.

However, more recent scholarly articles commenting on *The last emperor* have not focussed on the importance of historical accuracy, switching their attention to style and *mise en scène* and remarking on the presence of visual and musical elements which are part of the Chinese tradition, such as the frequent use of symmetrical image composition (Baschiera, 2014, p. 411). These seem to take into consideration Bertolucci's declared intention of focussing on the story of one character rather than on the history of China, as he was not interested in making a *teatro-inchiesta* – a term that could be translated in English as "investigative fiction". Pu Yi was confined for most

of his life while major historical changes were occurring outside the walls, out of his reach, and his discovery of China outside the walls of the Forbidden City and of the re-education centre coincides with Bertolucci's and the Western viewer's discovery of China (Koch, 1987/2000, p. 191; Pisu, 1984, p. 12). This could (and perhaps should) be a way for younger generations of Chinese viewers to watch this film today: a first glimpse into an extremely troubled period of their own history, which is not easy for anyone to interpret.

5.5 Conclusions: Bertolucci's China

Overall, *The last emperor*'s success in representing China with a Western, individualistic, and psychoanalitical gaze was due to a benign compound of extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Firstly, the film dealt with a politically-acceptable story pleasing to the Chinese government, where an anti-hero assumes a didactic function. Secondly, it was produced in a favourable historic moment that combined strong Italian-Chinese relations with the early stages of China's open door policy. Thirdly, it benefited from having professional people leading negotiations with host institutions: both the director and the producer were able to maintain good relations with the CFCC during the long and difficult pre-production discussions, and their political and intercultural acumen allowed them to understand their counterparts, with Bertolucci's political activism becoming a further advantage. In comparison with Lizzani, Antonioni and Montaldo, Bertolucci could also capitalise on several advantages in terms of support on location, working procedures that had already been tested, a cinema industry that had been restarted and that was developing its own momentum, and an existing organisation that specialised in foreign film projects (the CFCC). Fourthly, like Carlo Lizzani and Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci was highly motivated during his approach to China by professional reasons at a difficult moment in his career.

After his failure to film *Red Harvest* in Hollywood, Bertolucci was fed up with Italy and Western countries. In contrast, China and its culture were no longer secretive and intangible and in the early 1980s had become a common topic in the Italian media (Pisu, 1987, p. 11). When Bertolucci arrived there, he dropped the prejudices acquired during the years of the Cultural Revolution: in his own words, he tried "to absorb the most that I could, and above all not to hide behind my Western cultural categories", forgetting as much as possible his European intellectual background

(Koch, 1987/2000, pp. 189, 192) while at the same time admiring the longevity of Chinese culture and its capacity to adapt to new categories like Marxism. Bertolucci's choice to include a psychoanalitical approach and a broader set of cultural contaminations in the film may appear to contradict his original intentions, but it was the result of his willingness to experiment with cultural categories previously undisclosed to him and to the majority of Western filmmakers. The use of Freudian principles in analysing Pu Yi became an occasion to portray China reflecting on itself. As Robert Burgoyne suggests, the film "offers a discourse on the production of model images as the fundamental and defining element in the formation of national identity". From this point of view, the figure of Pu Yi encapsulates and mediates both social relations and historical actuality (Burgoyne, 1998, p. 224).

It may also be argued that Bertolucci, in applying psychoanalytical principles to Chinese culture, foresaw two of China's major social and cultural issues in the early twenty-first century. The first is the "little emperor syndrome" affecting children born after the implementation of the one-child policy in 1978, who are venerated and spoilt by their families, with the consequence of developing hundreds of millions of narcissistic and pessimistic personalities (Kluger, 2013). The Chinese government addressed this issue by phasing out the one-child policy in 2015. The second issue is the re-evaluation of China's history and civilisation, from something to despise – as Antonioni had noticed – to something to take pride in. The present government is working hard to bolster its cultural heritage through the designation of UNESCO World Heritage sites, the restoration of thousands of temples, the veneration of ancient great sages (Confucius, Lao Zi, Mencios), and the promotion – also by means of new, Chinese-produced and internationally distributed epic films – of 'Chineseness' at a global level as well as in the rapidly-transforming domestic environment.[20]

Futher cultural contaminations Bertolucci made use of consisted of the deliberate inclusion of Orientalist stereotypes and generalisations in the film. For instance, his representation of the Forbidden City is based on the sense of mystery surrounding imperial etiquette, a *mise en scène*

[20] Regarding contemporary China's cultural soft power, cultural nationalism and 'Chineseness', see Gil (2017), Shambaugh (2013, pp. 207-268) and Guo (2004, pp. 109-132). Some of the most well-known internationally-distributed historic dramas, and epic *wuxia* and even monster films are *Hero* (2002), *House of flying daggers* (2004), *Curse of the golden flower* (2006), *The flowers of war* (2011) and *The great wall* (2016), all directed by Zhang Yimou.

characterised by overwhelmingly lavish decorations and oversaturated colours, and the recurrent references to opium addiction. Asked by a journalist if he was not worried about the risk of falling into exoticism, the filmmaker replied: "I don't want to renounce anything, even *chinoiserie*" (Pisu, 1987, p. 11). This was also true of the score. He wanted Western audiences to be as overwhelmed by China as he was (Pisu, 1987). Thus comments from scholars such as Tobing Rony, who wrote that "*The last emperor*'s opium-dreamlike oneirism, although self-conscious, descends into old stereotypes about China and Orientalism: that is, Oriental cruelty, sensuality, and lack of rationality" (1998, p. 143-144), seem to overlook Bertolucci's intentions. The idea of China that emerges from this film is that of a country whose people are 4,000 years old, as the Italian director loved to repeat, giving continuity to the length of Chinese culture where there had frequently been a lack.

Bertolucci's China is almost exclusively secluded behind walls – the courtyards and halls of the Forbidden City, the villas in Tianjin and in Manchuria, and the prison – while outdoor spaces are limited to Pu Yi's coronation in Manzhouguo and his movement across Beijing at the end of the film. However, the striking scale of China – a theme common to all of the films analysed so far – can easily be inferred by the wide angle shots of the Forbidden City and the crowd scenes in its courtyards. Unlike the works of Lizzani, Antonioni and Montaldo, there is no idyllic rural China here, and not even a clearly urbanised one, as the few shots of traditional Beijing streets reveal almost nothing of the capital city. Bertolucci's China is essentially a country transformed by cultural contamination and political ideology. Examples of this include Reginald Johnston entering the Forbidden City, Pu Yi playing tennis and singing *Am I blue*, the demise of traditional gowns in favour of Western-style suits and dresses, the eunuch servants transformed into butlers, the Japanese ruling over Manchuria as they pleased, and the Red Guards adoring Mao Zedong and forcing innocent people to confess crimes they did not commit. Indeed, these contaminations are not only *in* the film; the entire film production is a result of visual, musical, philosophical, technical, financial and political contaminations. A strong Italian touch was mediated by world music, transnational actors (including American and Hong-Kong-born Chinese stars, some of whom were visiting the PRC for the first time), and capital from four different countries. Despite the global nature of his film and his unprecedented cinematic analysis of China and its culture, Bertolucci surprisingly considered *The last emperor* to be a very Italian film, "in the manner of an

Italian opera or melodrama. Like in an opera you have the Emperor and the Empress, the Cause, the Country, the baddies and the goodies" (Nowell-Smith & Halbelstadt, 1996/2000, p. 247). This may be one element of its success: like an opera, it is almost universally understandable.

With the focus placed on the central figure of the last emperor, history seems to slip away out of the door, and rather than being shown on screen, major events are always reported to Pu Yi and the audience. The young emperor discovers only by chance that he has been deposed. Student demonstrations in 1919 – which the audience sees, but Pu Yi only hears – are explained to him by Johnston; Hirohito's surrender message is heard on the radio; the atrocities committed by the Japanese are only seen in a documentary shown to prisoners. However, this is sufficient to give an understanding of the complexities and fragmentation of China's contemporary history. In this context, China appears as a country extremely capable of rethinking itself, ready to acknowledge and condemn the excesses of its traditions (the lavish life of the emperor in the Forbidden City) and its more recent ideology (Maoism, the story of which is subtly told without being openly mentioned, and the extremism of which appears in the later sequences). International tourists visiting the Forbidden City in the last sequence are the symbol of a country looking for normality and ready, at last, to talk about itself, and even to be criticised by a Western filmmaker. It is possible, as Tobing Rony also notes, that the negative representation of the Cultural Revolution aided the PRC government's ongoing reform policy, and the presence of the Vice Minister of Culture Ying Ruocheng in the key role of a good teacher who ends up humiliated in front of Mao's portrait seems to confirm this (1998, 143).

After the challenges met by Lizzani and Antonioni, and just a few years after Montaldo's epic miniseries, *The last emperor* brought Italian (and Western) filmmaking in the PRC to a sudden maturity. It can be considered a case study of an extremely successful independent, transnational epic production. Successful, because it was critically acclaimed in Western countries and became a box office hit by using Hollywood epic film canons of monumentality mixed with independent art cinema, and its achievements still remain unsurpassed among all Western films shot in the PRC. Transnational, because it was directed by a globetrotting Italian, produced by a Briton open to cultural contaminations, dealt with Chinese history, and was made in three countries by a multicultural production team, crew, and cast that included American and Hong Kong-born Chinese actors, and Chinese actors. The film was proof that national borders were no longer a

political and cultural barrier. Now that the PRC had opened its doors, working effectively in China was feasible.[21] At the same time, though, the contrasting reviews and distribution of *The last emperor* in China were also a warning to foreign producers that their cinematic language was still at odds with what local film regulators – if not the local audience – expected in terms of 'historical accuracy', and gave the Chinese input to start dealing with their own recent history on screen. Even the film's reception in the PRC anticipated what was to become a constant theme in the following decades: China remained more accessible to foreigners as a filming base than as a distribution market.

[21] Other Western productions followed very soon. For example, in early 1987 Steven Spielberg filmed crowd scenes for his *Empire of the sun* in Shanghai for three weeks.

6. Gianni Amelio and *La stella che non c'è / The missing star* (2006): filming China to describe Italy

"I filmed in the most inscrutable country to understand my country."

(Gianni Amelio)

Almost twenty years after *The last emperor* – a period of transition from an attitude of benevolence toward China to one of disenchantment and ultimately uncertainty – Gianni Amelio became the first Italian director to take an international co-production to the PRC. This happened at a turning point in diplomatic relations between Italy and China, and also at a crucial moment when the PRC was implementing milestone regulations on film production and distribution in its territory. Thanks to careful planning and organization, the making of *La stella che non c'è* was a surprisingly smooth process compared to previous films shot by Italian directors in the PRC. This film was not a cinematic approach to a mysterious and faraway country, but tackled with surgical precision two specific issues: the moment when the PRC's economic expansion began to have a visible impact on the Italian industrial sector, and migration –in terms of both Chinese internal migration and the early stages of a small but significant migration of Italians to the PRC. This did not completely avoid misunderstandings, such as Amelio's decision not to cut a few problematic sequences despite the censors' request that he remove them. These choices, however, did not cause political or diplomatic reactions thanks to a favourable political moment characterised by

the signing of the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement and the proclamation of the Year of Italy in China. [1]

This chapter is based on the relatively limited literature available on Gianni Amelio, and on the even more limited literature on *La stella che non c'è* (2006). The only comprehensive book on Amelio and his films published after its debut is Antonio Vitti's *I film di Gianni Amelio / The Films of Gianni Amelio* (2009), which contains an interview with the filmmaker, a complete filmography and an analysis of his major films up to *La stella che non c'è,* placing them in the context of contemporary Italian cinema. More on this film was published in the homonymous 2006 book by Amelio and Contarello (edited by Codelli), in which Amelio gives an account of the film's pre-production and shooting, the Chinese censorship approval process, and his impressions on China. Luan Amelio's backstage documentary (2006) and Gianni Amelio's scene-by-scene commentary – available as extras on the film's Italian DVD – provided precious additional information about the film's production and the filmmaker's intentions. Further details on Amelio's cinematic style were gathered from articles by Silvestri (2001) and Selvaggi (2010), the latter in particular paying attention to the global relevance of Amelio's films, which is also an essential component of *La stella che non c'è.*

To obtain an understanding of the film's genesis and Amelio's development of the story and its characters, attention was also given to Ermanno Rea's 2002 novel *La dismissione*, which inspired it. Additional information and details on the film's production and reception, including interviews with Amelio, were gathered from online archives of Italian newspapers including *Corriere della Sera, Repubblica, La Stampa* and *L'Unità* between 2004 and 2006. *Corriere* and *L'Unità* in particular dedicated eight and nine articles respectively to this film, including interviews with Amelio and leading actor Sergio Castellitto and the opinions of jury members at the Venice Film Festival where it was screened. This chapter is also partially based on an analysis I carried out in 2014 on the film's realism in comparison with Antonioni's *Chung kuo*. Finally, I was able to gather an eyewitness account of the film's production through an interview with cinematographer Luca Bigazzi. He talked about his experience in China and the difficulty of visually rendering an

[1] See Section 1.5.

environment with which he did not have a cultural affinity, despite his own past as a former Maoist.

6.1 Gianni Amelio, between migration and globalisation

Migration, social injustice and diversity have always been at the centre of Gianni Amelio's films, as these issues have affected his own life since early childhood.[2] Despite becoming one of Italy's most prominent contemporary filmmakers, Amelio has never forgotten his humble origins. Born in 1945 in the poor southern region of Calabria, Amelio grew up without his father, who migrated to Argentina. The young Amelio soon learned the importance of a strong work ethic and the need to flee the narrow horizons of his poor hometown. As a student at the University of Messina in Sicily, he organised film screenings, wrote reviews, and attended meetings with some of the most important Sicilian critics. This allowed him to develop a clear, though non-political, critical approach, which placed him in an uncommon position among normally *engagé* Italian intellectuals. In 1965 Amelio moved to Rome, where he became Vittorio De Seta's assistant director for his film *Un uomo a metà / Half a man* (1966). He then continued his apprenticeship on the sets of Spaghetti Westerns, as well as making short films and TV advertisements. Amelio's feature debut came in 1970 with the RAI-produced *La fine del gioco / The End of the Game*, which recounts the relationship between a boy returning to his hometown in Southern Italy from a juvenile prison and a television journalist intent on making a documentary about him.

This film already contains most of the topics and techniques which were to define Amelio's artistic vision and cinematic style, which are characterised by a mixture of autobiographical events and social and historical ones. Some of these topics became a constant part of the director's future productions: they included people on the run from a place or a situation, loneliness, incommunicability, travel, relations between northern and southern Italy, encounters between children and adults, and a focus on the poor. From a cinematic and visual point of view, *La fine del gioco* and all of Amelio's following films are characterised by the use of long silent scenes,

[2] See Vitti (2009, pp. 20-22).

meticulous image composition and frequent close-ups of characters' expressions. In combination with Amelio's choice to use non-professional actors – based on the idea that film directors do not have the right to modify reality – these themes and stylistic features appear to be influenced by Italian Neorealism and the French *Nouvelle Vague* (Silvestri, 2001, p. 121; Vitti, 2009, pp. 25-29, 42).[3]

Making a documentary in 16mm about Bernardo Bertolucci on the set of *Novecento* / *1900* in 1975 (*Bertolucci secondo il cinema / The Cinema According to Bertolucci*) allowed Amelio to refine his artistic vision. Scholars like Moliterno and Vitti believe this experience to have been a turning point for him, as it helped him to refine his knowledge about the choice of actors, the need to let fortuity alter the shooting of planned sequences, the influence of the subconscious on creativity and the preparation of scenes. It is not by chance that echoes of Bertolucci's realism, contrasts and narrative rhythms are present in several of Amelio's subsequent films, which gave him national visibility (Vitti, 2009, p. 33; Moliterno, 2000, p. 13).

The cinematic proximity between the two filmmakers became evident in Amelio's feature debut. This occurred in 1982 with *Colpire al cuore / Blow to the heart*, a film about Italian political terrorism – a theme that Bertolucci had recently touched on in *La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo* (1981). For this work Amelio received a nomination for the Golden Lion at the 1982 Venice Film Festival, and other national awards in 1983. Despite this critical success, he could not source funds for new features until the late 1980s, so he continued to work in television. Between 1983 and 1986 he also taught direction at Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. Then in 1990 he had a triumphant return to the silver screen with *Porte aperte / Open doors*, set in Sicily and based on a book by Leonardo Sciascia. This film and *Il ladro di bambini/ Stolen children*, which followed in 1992, allowed Amelio to achieve both box office success and critical appreciation.

The good results of the latter film allowed him to gain funding for a high-budget Italian-French-Swiss co-production led by the Italian Cecchi Gori Group. He used this opportunity to make *Lamerica* (1994), his first film made outside of Italy. Set and shot in Albania, *Lamerica* is the story

[3] It is not possible to list or comment on Gianni Amelio's entire filmography here. Only those films that had a significant impact on his style and artistic vision, and that share similarities with *La stella che non c'è*, will be discussed.

of two Italian swindlers in post-communist Albania, with one of them returning to Italy aboard a large refugee ship in an epic final scene. Despite the setting, the film mainly addressed Italians, as it remarked on their forgetfulness of being a country of migrants and their cynicism in current society, when their enriched country had become in turn the recipient of a wave of migration (Vitti, 2009, pp. 260-264).[4] *Lamerica* was highly regarded by critics, and received multiple awards at the 1994 Venice Film Festival and at other international film festivals, including Best Film at the 1994 European Film Awards. This film also marked the first cooperation between Amelio and cinematographer Luca Bigazzi, which was to last for most of the director's future films.

Four years later, Amelio won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival with *Così ridevano / The way we laughed* (1998), a fully Italian film produced by the Cecchi Gori Group, about the difficult life of two Sicilian brothers who migrated to Turin in the 1960s. Characterised by the extensive use of ellipses and long silent scenes, this film shows the exploitation suffered by Southern migrants in the industrialised North. At the same time, *Così ridevano* tackles the dark side of modernity and its destructive effects on traditional values, a theme that Amelio would further explore in *La stella che non c'è*. The film flopped at the box office in Italy, and its distribution in the USA – which occurred only three years after its first screening – ended up a failure (Vitti, 2009, pp. 293-297).

Partly because of the contrasting results of *Così ridevano* and partly because his producer Cecchi Gori went bankrupt in the early 2000s, Amelio could not shoot another feature film for six years. He spent that time making socially-focused documentaries and further exploring the themes at the core of his artistic vision. He eventually found a network of Italian, French and German co-producers willing to fund *Le chiavi di casa / The keys to the house* (2004), a new feature film focused on the *rapprochement* between a father and his disabled son during a trip to a Berlin hospital. Amelio based this film on the novel *Nati due volte* / *Born twice*, written in 2000 by Giuseppe Pontiggia, but developed it in parallel with the original story. This peculiar adaptation technique would be replicated and pushed to its limits in the following *La stella che non c'è*, as shall be discussed below. Another technique that Amelio developed in *Le chiavi di casa* and further explored later was the use of locations as extensions of the characters' moods and psychologies:

[4] Twenty years after its making, *Lamerica* appears a prophetic glimpse into the future, as the mass migration of refugees and asylum-seekers across the Mediterranean Sea has escalated from a regional to a continental issue.

the choice of Berlin symbolised the reunion between father and son, but also their isolation from the surrounding context as neither of them could speak German. In contrast to Amelio's previous film, *Le chiavi di casa* was undervalued at the Venice Film Festival, but it appreciated by the audience and critics.

Immediately after the completion of this film, another co-production inspired by a novel marked a further major step in Amelio's transnational mobility. This time, the director's destination was China.

6.2 The making of *La stella che non c'è*

In 2004, Amelio was approached by screenwriter Umberto Contarello, who asked him to read a novel by Ermanno Rea titled *La dismissione/ The Decommissioning* (2002). This recounts the impact on the town of Bagnoli (Naples) of the dismantling of a large steel mill that has been sold to a Chinese company. The author seems to consider this event "a metaphor of the end of [...] political ideology, social solidarity, loyalty to work" (Persoli, 2008). In addition, the decommissioning of the factory symbolises a major transition in the Italian economy, characterised by the progressive disappearance of its large-scale industry. The story is narrated in first person by the protagonist Vincenzo Bonocore, a skilled technician who has to supervise the dismantling of the plant. During the lengthy process, Vincenzo makes friends with the leader of the Chinese delegation, and is even invited to move to China. Amelio decided with Contarello to imagine the sequel of this story, where Vincenzo – whose surname is changed to Buonavolontà, or Goodwill in English – travels to the PRC in an attempt to pursue an undeclared personal obsession (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, pp. 12-13). Thus, as he did in *Le chiavi di casa*, the director decided to make a film which was not an adaptation of novel, but used the novel as a starting point. Then he proposed this idea to his new producer.

After the collapse of the Cecchi Gori Group, Amelio had signed a contract for a film to be shot in Libya with Cattleya,[5] one of Italy's major independent production companies. When the project was dropped because the local political situation discouraged filming on location, Cattleya accepted the director's new idea and bought the copyright of *La dismissione* (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 14). Due to the renewed diplomatic activity between Italy and China, this was a favourable moment to make a film in China, especially for a young and ambitious production company.[6]

Once the producer had seconded the project, Amelio and Contarello wrote a film treatment focussing on the feelings they wanted to convey to the audience – those of a middle-aged man in the midst of a life-changing experience. Only later did they visit the PRC for three weeks, where they immediately found the cities that would be the right locations for the film: first Shanghai, which reminded Amelio of Hong Kong when he visited it in the 1960s, but which "had surpassed it beyond imagination" (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, pp. 15-16), and then other major cities such as Wuhan and Chongqing and smaller centres like Yinchuan and Ciqikou. In particular, the director was impressed by Chongqing, a municipality of thirty million inhabitants located in a hot, humid and rugged part of central China, whose vast urban area is characterised by steep roads surrounded by high-rise buildings. He considered this the toughest environment he encountered due to the striking contrast between poverty and skyscrapers, which he did not find in other cities.

As the story required Vincenzo to visit several steel mills, these became a priority when selecting locations. Amelio was allowed to access several modern and efficient mills in different parts of China. However, only during his third trip and after a three-month-long negotiation was he authorised to enter a plant in Chongqing, which he described as hell. He was shocked to see children living in the factory, walking barefoot among metal scraps, and women preparing meals just a few metres away from machines in operation. The authorisation he received, though, only allowed him to film the newest part of the factory (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 17).

---

[5] Founded in 1997 and chaired by Riccardo Tozzi, Cattleya has become a major Italian independent film and television producer (Cattleya, 2010). Tozzi's dynamism towards China became evident when he was appointed president of ANICA in 2011, a role he held until 2016. On ANICA and China, see the Introduction: "Theories and reasons".

[6] See Section 1.6.

Meanwhile, three drafts of the screenplay were prepared and the final one was submitted to the Shanghai film authority – the appropriate local authority, as Cattleya sought the cooperation of Shanghai Film Group – and the CFCC for approval. This stage was completed in March 2005. The writing process was alternated with further trips to the PRC to inspect more locations and cast non-professional actors (Amelio & Contarello, 2002, p. 18; Morgoglione, 2006). At the same time, Cattleya arranged a network of co-producers, which included RAI Cinema and Achab Film (Italy), Babe Films (France), Carac Film and RTSI (Switzerland) and Oak3 (Singapore, and involved in part of post-production work). As for China, the Shanghai Film Group Corporation did not finance the film but provided paid technical and logistical support – which according to the new laws was enough for the film to be considered an assisted production. Part of the budget of EUR 8 million was covered by the European Commission's fund for European co-productions (Eurimages), and by the Liguria Region Film Commission (Duesse, 2005; imdb.com).

The film was written with Sergio Castellitto in mind to play the protagonist. He was the only professional actor recruited by Amelio for *La stella che non c'è.* There were only seventeen other characters, including the female Chinese co-protagonist, and these actors were mainly found on location. Amelio wanted a young, female Chinese-Italian interpreter to accompany Vincenzo on his trip across China. However, she had to have been born in China rather than in Italy, because he wanted her to speak Italian with a foreign accent. Thus he recruited Tai Ling, a university student of Italian without acting experience, whom he found in Beijing. All the other actors were extras or had only small parts.

Amelio could also rely on a highly-skilled team with cultural knowledge of China and experience of working in the PRC. Executive producer Mario Cotone had already been production manager for Bertolucci's *The last emperor* and Montaldo's *Marco Polo.* Likewise, Attilio Viti was chosen as set designer. Although he did not have specific experience in this role, he had worked with Cotone as production and location manager, and his familiarity with the locations made it easier to quickly arrange the sets (Amelio, 2006). China's production coordinators Laura Trombetta Panigadi, a sinologist and interpreter, and Maria Barbieri, who had established a production service company in Shanghai, had also worked on *The last emperor* in different roles. The two assistant directors were also acquainted with Chinese language and culture: Sergio Basso had a degree in Oriental Studies, and was selected by Amelio for his knowledge of Chinese language and culture when he

was a student at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome; and Yang Shi was a young Chinese-born, Milan-based actor. Finally, the sinologist Giorgio Trentin was also consulted as a cultural advisor.

Filming in the PRC ran for slightly more than nine weeks between May and July 2005, and tracked the stages of Vincenzo's journey in chronological order, from Shanghai to Inner Mongolia (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 23; Caprara, 2005, p. 30). The crew, comprising Italian and Chinese technicians, was always accompanied by officials from various departments. Up to 25 of them were present on set (Gallozzi, 2006, p. 18), including a quiet and attentive controller who had to ensure that filming took place according to plan (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 26; Bigazzi, 2016). In particular, the latter was responsible for ensuring that the crew did not film certain situations, such as a demonstration against the pollution caused by a factory (Amelio, 2006; Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 26). Most of these prohibitions were respected, but a few 'stolen' scenes made their way into the final cut. In contrast, real crowd scenes were not forbidden. However, Amelio found it impossible to film them because as soon as people realised there was a camera at work, they started staring at it. This would have been appropriate for an observational documentary, but not a fiction film. Therefore, with the exception of a very few shots, all crowd scenes were staged (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, pp. 24-26).

The working rhythm was particularly tight, as authorisations to shoot in places such as roads and airports lasted only a few hours and were non-renewable. For Luca Bigazzi, the working speed was a consequence of three major factors: perfect organisation, a great Chinese crew that despite the linguistic barrier understood what had to be done, and the unpleasant environment. The latter became an incentive to finish earlier because, as he commented in his inteview, the Italian crew could no longer bear the heat, the humidity, and the sombre urban and industrial areas where the film was set (Bigazzi, 2016).

As filming required continous changes of location, it was not possible for Amelio to take a Moviola with him and check the dailies. These were therefore sent to Rome, and when the director returned to Italy he found that editor Simona Paggi had already put together a film he judged to be very close to the finished product he had in mind (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 27). The only Italy-based sequence was filmed in September 2005 and featured the dismantling of the steel mill.

As the Bagnoli plant – which was described in Rea's book – had already been decommissioned ten years earlier, filming was moved to Genoa, where large-scale steel plants were also being partially dismantled and one of the blast furnaces had just been shut down. It took only two weeks to complete the editing of what Amelio considered the easiest film he had ever made (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, pp. 21, 28).

6.3 Analysis: re-imagining China

La stella che non c'è is characterised by a linear plot and an anticlimactic, open-ended narration.[7] In an unnamed Italian city, a large blast furnace is sold to a Chinese company. Vincenzo Buonavolontà, a middle-aged Italian technician, knows there is a glitch at the plant and immediately reports it to the Chinese technicians who have arrived to disassemble the furnace. However, despite his recommendation that they work slowly and carefully, the Chinese technicians quickly complete the job and leave before he can produce a replacement for the damaged component. Once he has made the new part, he takes it to China himself. When he arrives in Shanghai, he discovers that the buyer of the furnace is just a trading company, which will not disclose the end user's details. Accompanied by the young interpreter Liu Hua, he embarks on a 3,000-kilometre journey from Shanghai to the cities of Wuhan, Chongqing and Baotou, trying to find the factory. Eventually Vincenzo succeeds in making his delivery, but he is unaware that his component is immediately scrapped because the Chinese technicians have already made several others and his work is not needed. The film ends with Vincenzo and Liu Hua sitting by a railway in the Mongolian grassland.

As the story is built around the two protagonists, a close-up on them is a necessary starting point for an in-depth analysis of this film. The enigmatic protagonist Vincenzo introduces himself as a maintenance technician who has worked in the Italian factory for thirty years. This is all that is explicitly mentioned in the film about his past. He has an affectionate connection with his workplace, and a great passion for his job. He moves around the rusted steel mill like a silent

[7] This section is based on Bona (2014, pp. 49-54), which has been further elaborated.

observer, a lost soul in a place of death – as Amelio himself called the mill (Amelio, 2006) – or a custodian of its unmentioned memory.

More about Vincenzo's past and his beliefs is revealed through images, particularly in the sequence where he visits a steel plant in Wuhan. Here, under the watchful eye of a giant Mao statue, a series of shots accompanied by music of increasing volume track him walking into a modern production facility and cheerfully greeting some workers. Next, a slow-paced montage made of a series of shots and reverse shots creates a connection between his increasingly ecstatic expression and a blast furnace in full activity, which comes progressively closer in each take (Figs. 66-71). The furnace seems to breathe like a living creature, in contrast to the rusty, gloomy Italian furnace seen in the establishing sequence of the film. It is in this sequence that something of Vincenzo's life can suddenly be understood: he is a fifty-year-old metal worker who remembers how in the past he shared the Italian working-class myth of Mao and the Cultural Revolution. Amelio himself explained how here "from Vincenzo's expression, we understand that perhaps in the past he had mythologised China, sort of fallen in love with it. As the story progresses, he will see both good and bad things, but he already had an idea in mind" (Amelio, 2006). Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s Italian metal workers, as well as intellectuals and students – including some who were part of the film crew, like Luca Bigazzi – were largely supportive of Maoism (see Chapter 1), and this factory represents what Vincenzo had hoped to find in China. However, he will soon also discover the darker side of his mythologised China (Amelio, 2006).

In fact, the stop in Wuhan is just the first stage of Vincenzo's journey across China. In a sort of filmed *Bildungsroman*, he experiences a series of challenges: being taken into police custody, discovering the vastness of China, seeing children's lives in dangerous and unhealthy industrial plants, witnessing the disparities between poor houses and opulent Westernised shopping centres, falling ill, overcoming his own crisis, and at last managing to reach his unknown destination without the interpreter's help. Vincenzo's persistence allows him to overcome all these difficulties and become accustomed to local life. He is able to access the core of China, and of himself, by using progressively smaller and shakier means of transportation – airplane, train, ferry, bus, truck, pickup and three-wheeler – which metaphorically highlight the progressive erosion of his certainties. An interior conflict coupled with hidden strengths pushes him to persist in his quest in an environment that is completely new to him, and that leads him to question himself and his own

ideas. The one time Vincenzo seems on the verge of giving up, Liu Hua urges him to go ahead. The numerous construction sites he finds in every corner, from Shanghai to the arid interior of China, seem to mirror his own process of deconstruction and reconstruction, which is that of a jobless worker trying to rethink his future, reconciling with himself and with society. Eventually, this process is accomplished. Thanks to his journey, Vincenzo learns to take his eyes off technical drawings and start watching the world around him: life is more important than a mechanical component, and human values are stronger than linguistic barriers**.** This is clearly expressed in the last sequence, when Liu Hua asks him in Chinese, "Was it hard to find that factory?" and Vincenzo replies in Italian ,"Not at all, everything was fine, I was lucky".

Vincenzo's reflective character and gradual realisation of changes occurring in his own life are also rendered through slow-cutting editing. This is characterised by several long takes lasting up to 90 seconds, and an ASL of about 8 seconds. The prevalence of reflection over action is further enhanced by the way in which the narrative's slow pace is occasionally broken by sudden accelerations created by elliptical editing. For example, an ellipsis 'disassembles' the Italian factory, and further ellipses instantaneously 'move' Vincenzo from that location to Shanghai airport, and through his trip in China.

The female co-protagonist of *La stella che non c'è* is Vincenzo's key to accessing contemporary China and its daily life, seen from the perspective of someone who is struggling to survive in an over-competitive social environment. Like Vincenzo, Liu Hua must rebuild her life: as a failed student and single mother with no stable income, she seems to find a lifeline in Vincenzo, even after losing her job as a corporate interpreter because of him.[8] To a closer scrutiny, her role reveals a complexity that is not self-evident on the screen. This becomes clear when she is compared to Pio-Li, who in *La muraglia cinese* guided Lizzani's crew to discover the secrets of Hong Kong. The similarity between Liu Hua and Pio-Li – the discovery of the 1950s Westernised part of China and the early twenty-first century's industrialised China through two female characters – underlines a longstanding, implicit sexist and Orientalist parallel between a Western

[8] In the film's opening sequence, Vincenzo scolds Liu Hua in front of the Chinese delegation and their leader when she cannot translate some technical terms, unaware that his behaviour ignores the etiquette of company hierarchy and makes Liu Hua lose face – or in other terms, her professional reputation.

male's attraction to an Asian woman and his exotic curiosity about China and everything Oriental in general. However, there is also a substantial difference between these two young women. While Pio-Li remains silent and embedded in the mysteries of Hong Kong, Liu Hua appears closer to the other major female figure of Lizzani's documentary: Liang Qi, the last sold bride, who rebels against her condition of enslavement. Like Liang Qi in the pre-Maoist era, the single mother Liu Hua is a homage to women's resilience in post-Maoist society, where they once again have to fight gender inequality and social stigma. To use Vitti's words, Liu Hua's demonstration of resilience encompasses the tenacity of Chinese people and transforms her into a heroine (Vitti, 2009, p. 384). In addition, she encapsulates the harsh life of the so-called 'floating population' of internal migrants – the more than two hundred million people who (often illegally) move from rural areas in search of work and life opportunities in industrial areas and major cities. Most of them have to endure extremely tough living conditions and are only able to reunite with their families – including their own children – once a year, during the Spring Festival holiday. Thus it may be argued that Liu Hua acquires a dual role. On the one hand, this modern heroine retraces the Orientalist canons of a masculine fascination for the exotic by guiding the former Maoist Vincenzo and the audience to learn something about contemporary China. On the other, she allows the leftist Amelio to not only expand the social analysis he undertook in his previous films about illegal emigration to Italy (such as *Lamerica*) and Italian internal migration (such as *Così ridevano*) to a significantly larger scale, but also to show there is no exotic sexiness in this China, and ultimately to express a veiled critique of a society that appears to have forgotten its egalitarian achievements in a quest for individual success. Liu Hua's unusual trip with Vincenzo becomes a means for her to reflect on the injustice she has had to endure, and possibly to find a way out of it. In fact, the bond created by the hardships they have experienced in their lives and Vincenzo's immediate affection for her son seems likely to continue beyond the film's open ending.

A comprehensive analysis of characters is also made possible by the cinematography, which is key not only to understanding the protagonists, but also to effectively connecting them with the surrounding environment. With a few exceptions, the camera rarely leaves Vincenzo – who appears in about one hour of the film, almost two thirds of its length – and occasionally uses point-of-view shots, connecting the film to Ermanno Rea's book on which it is loosely based, in which Vincenzo is the first-person narrator. His feelings, frustrations and unexpressed ideas are

underlined by numerous close-ups of his bewildered expressions and of a final, long, liberating cry. Unsurprisingly, dialogue covers only 40 minutes out of the film's total length of 102 minutes. As in Amelio's previous works, the weight of the images in this film largely exceeds that of the words.

It is left to the camera to create the connections between characters and setting, and this is done in multiple ways. One way is characterised by complex movements and extremely accurate frame composition. This is well illustrated by the Italian factory sequence. Here the camera cranes up and down through the old, dark steel mill to track the parallel movements of Vincenzo – who observes from upstairs – and the Chinese delegation visiting the factory. Some shots of the technicians posing for group photographs in front of the old furnace recall similar Chinese propagandistic posters of the Maoist era, when steel production was one of the official priorities in the PRC (Fig. 72).

In other sequences, though, camerawork is characterised by a series of hand-held camera shots which appear to add realism to the film (Fig. 73). This happens particularly in street scenes, where Vincenzo walks among the crowd, and also in the Chinese steel plants, conveying the idea of a hidden camera and even 'stolen' shots. This feeling is further enhanced by the choice of a standard 1.85:1 aspect ratio rather than a panoramic one, which would better suit an epic film (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 24).[9]

Another way in which the cinematography connects characters and space, and conveys their moods about the places surrounding them, is the overwhelming use of cold colours, grey tones and rain and mist, which appear in most scenes and mirror the characters' inner feelings – in particular for Vincenzo his uncertainty and unhappiness, coupled with his steely resolve (Figs. 74-75). The constant absence of sunlight magnifies the overall impression of discomfort felt by both people living in places affected by heavy air pollution and travellers who visit those areas for the first time. When interviewed, Luca Bigazzi could not recall using any Promist filters or modifying colours in any way: what is seen on screen is what the camera captured and transferred onto 500-ASA film stock (Bigazzi, 2016). In contrast with all the other films analysed in this thesis, here the

[9] *La stella che non c'è* was filmed in 35mm with two Arri cameras (Amelio, 2006; Amelio & Contarello 2006, p, 24; *Piccolo diario cinese*, 2006).

camera seems to carefully avoid framing anything pleasant or photogenic: even the misty mountains and rivers which are part of traditional Chinese aesthetics and one of the most common features in painted paper scrolls look disquieting and melancholic. This was not an aesthetic choice; Bigazzi confirmed that there was nothing visually appealing to be filmed. This unattractive environment created a dilemma for him: on one side, he intended to film realistically, with as little interference as possible on sets and with little or no use of artificial lights, but on the other he felt compelled to improve the appearance of the dull places he was filming. Eventually, he chose a compromise between those two options: realism, with minimal improvements (Bigazzi, 2016).

Bigazzi's words highlight Amelio's preoccupation with realism. This is conveyed not only through cinematography, but also through the choice of actors, setting, *mise en scène*, sound and music. Some of the numerous non-professional actors employed in the film play their real-life roles – for example, Vincenzo is questioned by real police officers (Amelio, 2006). Realism is also present in cultural details: certain sequences are touching for their awareness of folk traditions and culture, exemplified by Liu Hua's frequent use of proverbs and by her grandmother who prays to the goddess Guanyin for Vincenzo's health (Fig. 76).[10] Furthermore, realism is rendered through the *mise en scène,* with only few places having been set up for the film, and through the addition of real life sequences filmed covertly, like the one showing children in the Chongqing factory (Amelio, 2006). In this context, the soundtrack seems to have a twofold function: Franco Piersanti's melodies convey an impression of detachment from the chaos of traffic and crowded cities, probably with the aim of amplifying Vincenzo's mood, while the use of Chinese songs reinforces the 'flavour' of the cultural context in which the story is unfolding. The film's *leitmotiv* is a traditional Chinese love serenade entitled *半个月亮爬上来 Bànge yuèliàng páshàng lái / Half moon rising*. This adds a further, hidden romantic layer to the story, conveying an implicit message

[10] Guanyin is venerated by East-Asian Buddhists as the goddess of mercy and prayed to for good health, as she is believed to have the power to relieve suffering, grant a quick recovery, and grant couples children. Statues of Buddhist deities are often kept in homes on altars or in cabinets.

about the protagonists' feelings for each other, which can be sensed but never emerge in the film, stopping short of making it into a romantic movie.[11]

There are only brief and occasional glimpses of futuristic urban landmarks and historic areas in the film, because the focus is not on China, but on Vincenzo. When he travels by taxi from the airport to Shanghai, nothing around him attracts his attention. Visually this is rendered by a half-screen occupied by close-up of technical drawings, while the large Lupu Bridge is confined to the other half of the screen. The reverse shot shows the same drawing in the foreground and Vincenzo sitting in the car, completely absorbed in what he is reading. He does not see anything else (Fig. 77).

Only Vincenzo's visit to the steel mill in Chongqing will open his eyes and let him realise where he is. This topical moment is underlined by a close-up of his head seen from the right side, perfectly inserted between two parallel, oblique steel handrails which form a 90-degree angle with their supports (Fig. 78). This geometric and unusual frame composition seems to underline Vincenzo's rigorous, technical certainties clashing with the acute angst that he suddenly begins to develop when he observes a little girl eating rice and other children playing in an extremely unsafe and unhealthy working area.

The lack of appealing landscapes throughout the film does not imply a lack of poetic and meaningful images, such as the dark, rusty furnace in Italy and the combination of night lights, wet roads, and geometric structures that Vincenzo finds in China. The best example of these is possibly the curved ramp under which he stays after being sent out of the police station in Wuhan, framed against the blurred background of a major road. The cold, white light above his head isolates him against the dominating amber road illumination, showing a foreigner alone in an unknown country (Fig. 79). However discomfiting, China as seen through Amelio's camera remains in its own way a fascinating place.

If China is not beautified in any way in *La stella che non c'è*, Italy does not fare any better. In fact, the film suggests Italy's marginal role in the globalised economy, and in general hints at its small

[11] The song recounts the story of a lover who asks his girlfriend to look out of her window and throw him a rose.

size and consequent unimportance. This message is exemplified by three sequences: in the first, Liu Hua explains that she studied Italian because it is a "minor language" suitable for students from less prestigious schools; in a second, a local man is not able to distinguish Italy from Iraq; and in a third the control unit that Vincenzo produced with passion and accuracy and that he has doggedly taken to China ends up on a factory scrapheap, symbolising the defeat of Italian craftsmanship by Chinese mass production, and possibly even their inherent incompatibility. Luca Bigazzi believes that the indifference shown by the worker who throws away the control unit "goes beyond the gesture. It produces meaning, because [Italy and China] are two worlds that do not understand each other" (Bigazzi, 2016). Applied to the experience of the Italian filmmakers who preceded Amelio in China, Bigazzi's words seem to reflect the frustrations encountered by Lizzani and Antonioni – and to a lesser extent, Montaldo and Bertolucci – before, during, and after production, as well as China's disaffected or at least uncertain attitude towards their finished films.[12] Nevertheless, Amelio seems to imply that Italians can still overcome a negative moment in their history. They can still find opportunities in cross-cultural relations, on condition that they dismiss their pride, think outside the box, accept new challenges, go beyond the barrier of misunderstandings and view the world with an unbiased mind, as Vincenzo learns to do. It even appears that Amelio hints, inadvertently, at what will become an early example of a new wave of Italian migration, which was to gain momentum in the aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.[13] In this context, discovering modern China and rediscovering its culture becomes an occasion for self-rediscovery, as the contrast between modernity and tradition sooner or later causes most foreign visitors to question themselves in depth. This contrast, which Lizzani underlined in 1957 through the comparison between Hong Kong and mainland China, is now fully visible within the PRC. And Lizzani's feelings about the mass performance he filmed in Beijing ("exciting and depressing", "a Chinese torture that dazes the Western observer") could very well be Amelio's point of view about contemporary China, summarised by Vincenzo's bewilderment.

---

[12] As explained in previous chapters, this was for either aesthetic or political reasons.

[13] Statistics show the number of Italians who moved their domicile abroad between 2006 and 2015 increased by 1.5 million (49.3%), and this official figure only includes those who registered at the Registry of Italians Resident Abroad. Although the bulk of them moved to other European countries or the USA, about 1,000 each year went to China. Only a fraction of those who left the country have returned (Fondazione Migrantes, 2015, pp. 6-9).

The film also tackles the cost of China's economic success, which affects both Italy and China itself. In Italy, the opening sequence features the arrival of Chinese technicians to the steel mill on a gloomy and rainy night. They are received by protesting Italian workers, who call them "vultures" and are in despair over losing their jobs. The officer who meets the technicians at the gate gives them an oxymoronic "welcome to Italy", a very unfriendly country indeed, where the Chinese are seen as mere speculators and job thieves but appear untouched by the protests and banners ridiculing them (Fig. 80). Only Vincenzo seems to think differently, as can be seen across the film.

La stella che non c'è is rich in details about the social cost paid by China. For instance, Vincenzo realises that the construction of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangzi River will force people to leave their homes before they are flooded by the new, enormous man-made lake.[14] He also discovers that the industrialised and urbanised China is afflicted by major social problems. Here, in the very same places where people work day and night in hard conditions, a wide gap seems to separate the rich from the poor, and children born outside the one-child policy rules are hidden from authorities. This society has lost its identity. During a conversation with Vincenzo, Liu Hua explains that the stars on the Chinese flag symbolise "honesty, patience, justice, solidarity", but she fails to mention the largest one, which represents the Communist Party. Vincenzo's reply goes even further: "I heard a different explanation", he says, "however, something is still missing", implicitly acknowledging that communism is *de facto* no longer part of Chinese society.

Besides becoming the link between Vincenzo and China, Liu Hua is also the personification of the inborn fragility of this modern, ruthless society which crushes those who miss their opportunity to reach success. As Amelio declared, China will become stronger only if it prizes more basic needs over uncontrolled development (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 29). The two protagonists, then, assume a symbolic connotation, as their story shows that globalisation may have winners and losers – China and Italy respectively – but it also creates victims like Liu Hua and Vincenzo

[14] This is not a new occurrence in itself. Several other towns were evacuated and submerged to create artificial lakes across Europe, Russia and Africa in the twentieth century. These included Bezidu Nou (Romania, 1988), Graun (Italy, 1950), Mediano (Spain, 1974), Krokhino (Russia, 1961), and Vilarinho das Furnas (Portugal, 1972), not to mention the Aswan Dam in Egypt (1970), the construction of which caused the relocation of about 90,000 people and archaeological sites like Abu Simbel, and the flooding of numerous other archaeological sites. Retrieved from http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/aswan-high-dam-completed

everywhere. Only when those victims join forces, regardless of their cultural and linguistic differences, can they create hope in a better future. From this perspective, Amelio's film relays a very optimistic message and provides the spectator with a further moral message: even in a world plagued by the negative consequences of its rapid transformation, salvation is still possible.

Amelio seems to identify the main ingredient of salvation in traditional values and the kindness of the elderly people in Ciqikou, like Liu Hua's grandmother and a smiling old man who offers Vincenzo a chair (Fig. 81). Thus the protagonist's physical healing and acceptance of his new situation begin when he meets these people. Only after this encounter does the sky turn blue, Vincenzo accomplish his mission, and the camera finally show that China also has vast green areas almost untouched by concrete.

6.4 Gianni Amelio and Jia Zhangke

According to Chinese regulations, before the official film release Amelio needed to obtain approval from the Shanghai film authority and the Beijing-based CFCC and Film Bureau. This took place in May 2006. The commissions had to watch the final cut, subtitled in Chinese, and compare it with the approved screenplay to make sure that no changes had occurred. As Amelio has the habit of modifying the screenplay right up until filming begins, the chance of rejection was more concrete than hypothetical. And indeed the film contained considerable changes, caused by the reality Amelio discovered while filming. For example, Vincenzo's crisis in Chongqing and the shots of children in the old part of the local steel mill were not included in the approved screenplay, some lines were added, and the final part in which Vincenzo delivers the component was supposed to be completely different –the component should have been installed in the furnace, not scrapped (Amelio, 2006).

Amelio had to be present during the screening for the Shanghai commission, but was not allowed into the projection room.[15] He had to wait outside, while an officer came to ask him questions each time the censors watched sequences that needed to be clarified. The filmmaker was asked to

[15] See Amelio (2006) and Amelio & Contarello (2006, pp. 33-37).

cut a sequence in which a police officer searches Vincenzo's bag, and an ironic line on the need to pay to use lifts in Chongqing. Amelio promised to do as requested. Predictably, the local commission also complained about the conversation between Vincenzo and Liu Hua on the 'hidden children' and the stars on the Chinese flag. However, the film was approved at the local level and sent to the CFCC in Beijing, which also had to watch it and forward it to the SARFT for the third and final check necessary to issue the Film Release Permit.

Amelio did not need to attend the screenings in Beijing, but he later met the director of the CFCC, who gave him unofficial positive feedback and even expressed his hope that Amelio would make another film in the PRC. When he reported these events in his published notes, Amelio had not yet received the permit, but he was confident he would obtain it in a few weeks – as actually happened (Porro, 2006a, p. 44). Overall, he was sympathetic to these procedures, and understood that the Chinese authorities could not prevent the international distribution of the film because it was "a foreign production". However, they had to avoid letting a distorted image of their country appear in a foreign film. He believed that "real censorship" was a tougher reality and essentially affected local films (Amelio & Contarello, 2006, p. 37).

Amelio's words reveal that the Italian side of this production did not perceive the film to be a co-production with China, even though – as the local regulations explain – technically it should be considered an assisted film, which for the Chinese government is still a form of co-production. *La stella che non c'è* was not advertised as a foreign-Chinese co-production, and the final credits only say that it was made "in collaboration with the China Film Co-production Corporation and the Shanghai Film Group Corporation".[16] Ultimately, Amelio did not modify the director's cut, but he acknowledged that he would not be allowed to keep the criticised sequences if he wanted the film to be distributed in the PRC (Amelio, 2006, 31':10).

[16] The Italian-Chinese co-production agreement states that "a co-financed and jointly produced film shall be identified in its credits as a co-production between the two parties" (Article 11). Although in 2004 the agreement was not yet valid, its comparison with the relevant Chinese rules helps to understand small but substantial differences in the way co-productions were understood by the Chinese and the Italians at that time, which were reflected in the director's comments.

Before its international release, *La stella che non c'è* was screened in competition at the 2006 Venice Film Festival, receiving a cold reaction from the press but an enthusiastic eight-minute-long standing ovation from the public (Gallozzi, 2006, p. 18; Porro, 2006, p. 44). However, despite positive reviews and a nomination for the Golden Lion, the film was almost ignored at the awards, and only Sergio Castellitto received the Pasinetti Award for Best Actor.

The winning film of that year, the Chinese independent filmmaker Jia Zhangke's 三峡好人 *Sānxiá hǎorén* / *Still life*, came as a surprise (Porro, 2006b, p. 43). Jia's film – ironically, shot along the Yangzi River at the same time as Amelio's – shows the ongoing physical and social deconstruction of a village being evacuated and flooded as a consequence of the Three Gorges Dam construction. Unavoidably, the jury compared the two films, and ultimately *Sānxiá hǎorén*'s insider gaze on a major Chinese social and environmental issue prevailed. As a member of the jury explained, *Sānxiá hǎorén* "seduced us. […] [I]t recounts the same story as *La stella che non c'è*, but from the inside. It is a heartrending film on China, a country which on the one side is changing rapidly, but on the other side does not know what it wants to become, and keeps destroying itself" (Porro, 2006b, p. 43).[17] While *La stella che non c'è* uses China as a background to understand Vincenzo and reflect through him on the transformation of the Italian economy and society, *Sānxiá hǎorén* explicitly deals with the physical and social impact of a gigantic project conceived in response to China's insatiable need for electricity, caused by its economic development. Over a million people were relocated from the area to be flooded by the new artificial lake, and their towns were dismantled. By telling the story of a man and a woman who return to what is left of their village, Jia creates a moral critique of China's ruthless development through what Ping Zhu called "the poetic of debris" (Zhu, 2011, p. 321). If this seems to confer on it a Neorealist approach and show similarities with Amelio, critics like Manhola Dargis have also compared the film's slow pace and aesthetics, and in particular the expression of ideas through images rather than dialogues, to Antonioni's style (Dargis, 2008).

Even though both Amelio and Jia Zhangke expressed moral concerns about the dramatic social impact of globalisation and modernisation, it may be argued that Jia prevailed because his subject

[17] Original text in Italian.

was immediately recognisable, and the director had a clear insider's knowledge of the issues he described. In contrast, the meaning of Amelio's film was less immediate, and its representation of China was still mediated through a foreigner's eyes. *La stella che non c'è* enjoyed limited success at the Italian box office, totalling just 2.2 million Euros (Mymovies.it, 2006). It was also distributed worldwide, from the Netherlands to Argentina and Taiwan, but not in mainland China,[18] and eventually received the award for Best International Film at the seventeenth Turia Awards in Valencia in 2008. The most evident reason for the lack of distribution in China was that the film did not receive Chinese nationality, and remained subject to the foreign film quota. As quota places – no more than 20 per year in 2004 – were mostly filled by Hollywood blockbusters, Amelio's film had simply no chance to access the Chinese market.

Moreover, and possibly for these reasons, Amelio did not make the cuts he was requested to make by China for the international release. At a different moment, this would have angered the Chinese authorities, but on this occasion there is no public evidence of complaints from the PRC regarding Amelio's choice. After all, 2006 was the Year of Italy in China, and the political climate was favourable to the relations between the two countries.[19] Pragmatism prevailed over formalism, but this was not sufficient to improve the film's poor commercial results.

6.5 Conclusion: Amelio and China

La stella che non c'è marked the return of an Italian director to the PRC almost two decades after the international success of Bertolucci's *The last emperor.* It was completed when preparations for the Year of Italy in China were in progress, during the 'age of uncertainty', and just after the signing of the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement. However, it was not directly protected by

[18] In contrast, Jia Zhangke's *Sanxia haoren* was screened uncensored both in the PRC – in limited release – and abroad, and sold well on DVD (Lim, 2008).

[19] The PRC's tolerant approach toward Italy was also reflected in the fact that Beijing only expressed its "contrariety" when in March 2006 the then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi affirmed that "In Mao's China, communists did not eat children, but used to boil them to fertilize fields" ('Berlusconi attacca Prodi e pm: sono il Caimano', 2006, p. 5; 'La Cina: "Infondate le parole di Berlusconi"', 2006, p. 8). No anti-Italian campaigns of any sort were launched. On the contrary, in July 2006 hundreds of Italians were allowed to march spontaneously across the streets of Shanghai, chanting and waving flags, to express their joy after Italy's victory in the Football World Cup final.

this agreement, which would become effective only in 2014. Both the film's production history and the story it recounts make it possible to call it a truly transnational film. Marketed as a co-production between Italian, French, Swiss, and Singaporean companies, it features a single Italian professional actor travelling across the urban, industrial, and arid territory of the PRC amidst local non-professional actors and extras.

In this film, Gianni Amelio uses Vincenzo's journey to China as a means to discuss contemporary Italy's specific social and economic problems. In this context, Italians show mixed feelings about the PRC: China is a cause of Italy's crisis, a culture that needs to be better understood, and a land of professional opportunities. The Italian deindustrialisation is represented in the film by dismissed workers protesting against the Chinese delegation, the empty, rusty Italian factory, and the large gaping hole left in the wall after the removal of the blast furnace. Indeed, Italy does fade in the film: on a physical level, as represented by the old furnace being dismantled in the early sequences; on an economic level, as factories are closing down; and on a cultural level, as Italian is considered a "minor language". Twenty-first century Italy is no more *Lamerica*, the new land of opportunity for foreigners. Rather, its new wave of skilled Italian migrants seem to find the place to fulfil their dreams in a country like the PRC, which is no longer unreachable or far away.

Vincenzo – whose trip to China is self-imposed and seemingly one-way – may be considered the symbol of this new migration. Thousands of middle-aged skilled workers have painfully managed to re-plan their lives after losing what they believed to be permanent jobs, eventually opening themselves up to other cultures and overcoming their prejudices just as Italy seems to crumble like the dismantled steel mill. This is not simple, as Vincenzo demonstrates. The film's protagonist – whose point of view is the artistic projection of Amelio's – has to come to terms with his discovery that China is very different from his expectations. Like the characters of Antonioni's films, he is closely scrutinised by the camera, revealing his bewilderment at the consequences of China's ongoing impetuous modernisation (Figs. 82-84). Despite the fallout of this process making life tough for common citizens, though, China remains a land of opportunities for someone like him. Clearly this is no longer a country celebrating its millennial culture, but one projecting into an industrial and urban future. Nor does it appear to need and welcome foreign expertise as much as previously depicted in *Marco Polo.* However, Amelio seems to say, China still needs help – not material, technical or financial help, but moral help. It needs to find its lost soul.

Indeed this is where empathic outsiders like Vincenzo – a modern Marco Polo trying to bridge a cross-cultural divide – become necessary and the contact between different cultures becomes desirable, though not without challenges. In broader terms, society has much to gain from attempting intercultural communication, and much to lose from remaining isolated, even if misunderstandings – such as Vincenzo scolding Liu Hua in front of her leader, or the Chinese workers' lack of empathy for his efforts – are an unavoidable part of it. Moreover, understanding the other becomes a way to better understand oneself, as the film's last sequence seems to prove. Vincenzo magically shows a sudden ability to understand Chinese Mandarin after overcoming his personal crisis and coming to terms with his new situation. At the same time, he has become a lifeline for the Italian-speaking Liu Hua, the very person who has introduced him to the hardships of her own life. For both of them, help may also come from respecting traditional culture and values, the morals of which have been forgotten by contemporary, profit-driven society.

From a stylistic and cinematic perspective, the frequent use of close-ups of characters' expressions, ellipses and long silent sequences – "subtraction and unsaid", as Vitti suggests – allows Amelio to reveal the importance of the moral dimension in people's lives (Vitti, 2009, p. 417). The director's use of natural light, location filming, stealthy shots of children in factories, non-professional actors and a story based on a precise social background could position *La stella che non c'è* very much as a Neorealist movie, as well as a travelogue. Sensing major social challenges brought by globalisation, Amelio advocates the use of Neorealism and *cinéma vérité* to discuss the morality of these issues across boundaries. This necessity was also felt by the Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers. The already mentioned Jia Zhangke, as well as Wang Xiaoshuai, for instance, had openly referred to Italian Neorealism in their works such as *小山回家 Xiǎoshān huí jiā / Xiao Shan going home* (1995) and *十七岁的单车 Shí qī suì de dān chē / Beijing bicycle* (2001) respectively, which deal with people at the margins of society and their struggle for survival in a rapidly-transforming environment.[20]

[20] For an analysis of connections between Italian Neorealism and the Chinese Sixth Generation, see Lu (2014, pp. 317-333).

With this preoccupation in mind, Amelio is neither interested in showing a faraway, secluded China, nor in celebrating its economic achievements. Instead, he shows a country which is now easily accessible. The laborious trip to China, previously filmed by Lizzani, is skipped altogether via an ellipsis, and Vincenzo just needs a quick stamp on his passport to be free to move anywhere he chooses. Despite the language barrier, he freely interacts with local people of every age. Foreign visitors' easier access to China, though, is counterbalanced by a vast and generally unpleasant and uncomfortable environment, far from Lizzani's and Antonioni's earlier depictions of an idyllic, idealised country. The rainy, humid cities dominated by grey light seem to produce a visual extension of Vincenzo's inner conflict. The gloomy environment also adds an ethical depth to the film. From this point of view, Vincenzo's almost 'apostolic' mission, initially moved by his 'buona volontà', gradually allows him and the audience to become aware of the contradictions of contemporary China. His words "I never imagined China like this" are in fact loaded with such awareness (Vitti, 2009, p. 392).

Vincenzo's counterpart Liu Hua and her relationship with him represent larger contradictions on a smaller, more intimate scale. Furthermore, although Liu Hua is overall a positive female figure, using a young woman to introduce a foreign visitor (or simply spectator) to China is a narrative strategy already used by Lizzani in 1957, and could have different interpretations, which will be further explored in Chapter 7.

The production of *La stella che non c'è* also has particular importance. The change in the way the director and producers dealt with Chinese authorities reflected the rapid professionalisation and normalisation of the process of making foreign films in the PRC. Where Amelio's forerunners Carlo Lizzani, Michelangelo Antonioni, Giuliano Montaldo and to a minor extent Bernardo Bertolucci had to be directly involved in long and complex negotiations before and during production, Amelio himself was assisted by experienced Italian and Chinese professionals who greatly facilitated his work. It may be argued that *La stella che non c'è* – which was completed largely ahead of schedule – can be considered a case-study in efficient assisted production in China. In addition, this film, which is characterised by the director's decision not to cut sequences as requested by Chinese censorship, also illustrates the existing – and, to a certain degree, unavoidable – discrepancy between China's attempts to control its own image through regulations and approvals, and the freedom of artistic expression that foreign filmmakers consider a normal part of their work. For

this film, produced during a favourable political moment, this gap was tolerated without further consequences. Furthermore, *La stella che non c'è* also represented a significant change for Italian producers and directors in the PRC, because it showed that China had become a desirable filming location not only for large-scale multinational co-productions, but also for medium- and low-budget ones. However, Amelio's film also confirmed that despite its increased accessibility as a filming location, selling an Italian film in China was not an easy task. As will be discussed in the Conclusion, this was to become a major challenge for every foreign producer attempting to have their film distributed there.

7. *Two tigers* (2007): transnational femmes fatales in Shanghai

"China is a tough nut to crack. You can only succeed there if you understand [that country] and interact with it on equal terms, competing with the intelligence and the strategic capabilities of [the Chinese people]." (Sergio Pelone)

While Gianni Amelio was completing post-production work on *La stella che non c'è,* an Italian independent producer, Sergio Pelone, was preparing to shoot a low-budget film in Shanghai. To obtain the highest return with a minimum investment, he planned to target the international home-entertainment market with an English-language exploitation film. The filming location was also chosen for financial reasons, as it made it possible to minimise production costs. To direct the movie, Pelone contacted an old acquaintance, the independent filmmaker Sandro Cecca. With a small but efficient production team to support them, the pair succeeded in showing that shooting a film in China had become feasible even for low-budget productions. In addition, the making of their exploitation movie *Two tigers* also revealed the extent to which Chinese censorship in 2006 had become focused on pragmatism rather than on official rules. Understanding these censorial swings is something Chinese filmmakers and producers need to practice on a daily basis, and it is important that foreign productions in China try to understand them too.

As no literature on *Two tigers* is available, all the information about the film, its producer and its director were obtained through an interview with them conducted in Rome in June 2014. Subsequently, the data gathered on that occasion has been integrated with further email exchanges and basic information acquired from the International Movie Database. The account of

Two tigers's production history is therefore almost exclusively based on primary sources, including production documents that Sergio Pelone kindly agreed to disclose.

7.1 B-movies and Italian exploitation cinema

Two tigers draws directly from Italy's own rich history of exploitation cinema. This term can refer to low-budget movies characterised by an overall cheap appearance and short production time, owing their name to the commercial exploitation of themes forbidden and/or limited by censorship in mainstream cinema and on television, such as nudity, sex, drugs, and violence.[1] In Italy this genre became commercially successful between the 1960s and the early 1980s, with sub-genres like the *Mondo* shockumentaries, *poliziotteschi* films, Spaghetti spy films, cannibal movies, horror, sexploitation, and even science fiction – or possibly several of these blended in the same movie. Two of the dozens of producers and directors who made their career in this genre were brothers Luciano (1933-2013) and Sergio Martino (b. 1938), the former as a producer, the latter as a director. They specialised and often cooperated in making dozens of sexploitation movies and sexy comedies like *Giovannona Coscialunga disonorata con onore / Giovannona long-thigh* (1973).[2] Even after having turned to TV productions for almost two decades, Luciano Martino was still keen to share his expertise on the subject with Sergio Pelone in the mid-2000s when he was approached to discuss an unusual exploitation project in China.

7.2 An unusual background

Born in Rome in 1947, Sergio Pelone became a political supporter of extreme leftist movements in the 1960s. He later migrated to Australia, first to Adelaide and then to Melbourne, for three years

[1] For a brief definition and history of B-movies and exploitation films, see Mathijs and Sexton (2011, pp. 145-154). Regarding non-theatrical and non-professional distribution, or distribution from below, see Lobato (2012, pp. 13-14).

[2] To better understand the serial production of these films, it is sufficient to consider that between 1970 and 1980 Luciano Martino produced 57 of the 121 films that make up his fifty-year career, while in the same years his brother Sergio directed 24 feature films (imdb.com).

between 1969 and 1971. Here he found a job as a factory worker at the GM Holden car manufacturing plant and was involved in the underground organisation of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist collective action. He then returned to Italy, where he continued to work in factories while studying accountancy until he was employed by a local film producer. In 1985 he became Administration Manager for CIDIF (Italian Syndicate of Independent Film Distributors). For three years he administered Lucky Red, a distribution company of international auteur films. In 1997, Pelone established his own company, The Bottom Line, and in 1999 he produced his first feature film *Jurij*, a family movie directed by Stefano Gabrini, which won multiple awards in Italy and abroad. In 2000, the producer entered into a 50% partnership with director Marco Bellocchio, another prominent left-wing filmmaker who had founded his own production company, Filmalbatros, in 1994. Together they produced the internationally-awarded *L'ora di religione / My mother's smile* (2002), *Buongiorno, Notte / Good morning, night* (2003) and *Il regista di matrimoni / The wedding director* (2006).[3]

Meanwhile, Pelone began planning an independent project: entering the direct-to-video (DTV) global market with low-budget arthouse films shot in English with direct sound recording, targeting the DVD, home entertainment, pay-per-view and TV sectors. While reflecting on these ideas, in 2004 and 2005 he visited Shanghai and the nearby Hengdian Studios with a European film industry delegation.

He found these studios to be the perfect location for films set both in an Eastern and a Western ambience, and still affordable for low-budget productions. The size of the studios and the number of ongoing American productions were impressive. The thriving Chinese film industry contrasted with the slow-paced, Cinecittà-centred Italian industry, which in Pelone's opinion had lost several opportunities in China due to concerns over its political system. In his own words,

> [A]s usual, we [Italians] arrived late. After returning from Hengdian the first time, I went to talk to the managers of Cinecittà. They looked at me as if I was a Martian when I told them: "Look, Cinecittà does not exist any longer!". Now [ten years later] Cinecittà has [practically]

[3] This and previous paragraphs are based on the biography available on IMDb (2016b).

> disappeared, too many years have passed in the meantime [without any action].[4] (Pelone et al., 2014)

One-sided political preoccupations, he added – without explicitly mentioning Berlusconi's government, which was in charge in those years – should not be used as an excuse to hinder co-operation with China, with the consequence of frustrating attempts to create new business opportunities:

> Taking [China's] single Party system as an excuse not to work there is wrong! It's a Western point of view […]. The Chinese do not see this as a problem towards the non-Chinese. […] [T]he feeling I had was not that of judging the Chinese, but that of judging my government in its relations with the Chinese […]. It was a negative judgement, at that time. (Pelone et al., 2014)

Leaving political judgments aside, working with China can be rewarding, but some caveats should be kept in mind:

> […] China is a tough nut to crack. You can only succeed there if you understand [that country] and interact with it on equal terms, competing with the intelligence and the strategic capabilities of [the Chinese people]. From my point of view, this is the most important thing. (Pelone et al., 2014)

Inspired by his trips to China, Pelone began considering shooting a film there, but the choice of genre was not simple. Although he aimed to produce an arthouse film, this would have been financially too risky for a small producer like him. To generate the funds he needed to sustain such a project, it was first necessary to pursue a more commercially viable genre. He shared his ideas with Luciano Martino (see Section 7.1), who helped him to develop the project on the basis of his own experience in exploitation movies. The first step of Pelone's plan was therefore to produce a soft-core erotic thriller. Scholarly studies in the field seem to prove his commercial intuition was correct: according to Linda Ruth Williams, just a few years earlier erotic thrillers had become "one of the most prominent products in the late twentieth century mainstream movie and video market" and "*the* most discussed films and among the highest earners" (Williams, 2005, pp. 1-2). More

[4] The interview with Pelone, Cecca and Minisola was carried out in Italian.

concisely, Robert Barton Palmer described this genre as “the most popular genre of the 1990s” (Palmer, 1994, p. 168). On the American market, DTV erotic thrillers were distributed with a lower rating than hardcore movies, and thus “were promoted as ordinary feature films, placed in the mainstream marketplace of Blockbuster” video stores (Williams, 2005, p. 261).[5] Although at the turn of the century the interest in erotic thrillers seemed to fade, business opportunities were still considerable (Lambie, 2012).

Pelone’s company The Bottom Line bought the rights to the screenplay of *Le due tigri / Two tigers,* a soft-core thriller by Luca Miglione based on a script with the same title written by Giovanna Caico in 2005. In this story, Gilda, a young American professional killer of striking beauty, is sent by her organisation on a mission to Shanghai. When she arrives there, she finds an apartment at her disposal in a high-rise building, and soon discovers that her beautiful Chinese neighbour, Shi Ju, is a high-profile prostitute. The two become friends, although Gilda cannot disclose her true identity and profession. Meanwhile, Gilda meets George, a fascinating American-Asian man, who becomes her lover, while Shi has a Western lover, a businessman called Michael. Gilda receives instructions from her organisation: a client wants Michael and Shi to die. While Gilda is trying to deal with her feelings for Shi, the situation escalates for both women. When it is revealed that Michael is only using her, Shi kills him. Gilda then discovers that George is a gangster when he tries to kill her. Thanks to Shi’s sudden intervention, Gilda is able to shoot George and urges Shi to flee overseas. After escaping various murder attempts and avoiding capture, Gilda reappears in a seaside villa, next to Shi. The two tigers are happily reunited.

The ingredients of this screenplay followed the canons of exploitation erotic thrillers, with some additions. There was not one protagonist, but two contemporary *femmes fatales* who straddled “the roles of sexual interest, enraged victim[s], and vigilante survivor[s]” (Williams, 2005, p 2).[6] The decision to call one of the protagonists ‘Gilda’ seemed to be a reference to the cinematic archetype of the *femme fatale* in the 1946 film noir of the same name, and her geographical

[5] To have a better idea of the market size in that period, Williams explains that X-rated (or hard-core) tapes reached 100 million rentals a year in the USA (Williams, 2005, p. 263).

[6] Regarding the *femme fatale* in cinema, see Hanson and O'Rawe (2010).

location recalled Orson Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947; both films starred Rita Hayworth). Cinematic references aside, *Two tigers* also proposed guns, blood, martial arts, suspense, deceit, a cross-cultural friendship and a likely lesbian flirtation set in a Westernised yet exotic background which could well be a contemporary version of Lizzani's Hong Kong. Theoretically, it had all it needed to succeed in its market sector.

To obtain permission to film in the PRC, Pelone signed a contract with Sinema, a Shanghai-based production service company owned by Maria Barbieri, who had just assisted Cattleya and Gianni Amelio on *La stella che non c'è.* Although the film was to be shot in Shanghai, they decided to make it an assisted co-production with the Tianjin Film Studio, as this was less bureaucratised than the Shanghai Film Studio. The documents and screenplay, translated into Mandarin, were submitted to the Tianjin Film authority and later the CFCC in Beijing. Although the strict Chinese regulations in force (see Chapter 1.6) forbade the publication of obscenity and violence, the authorities showed a flexible approach to rule enforcement in this case and gave their approval to proceed, subject to minor changes in the screenplay. No one complained about showing sex, prostitution or violence, but the producer was told that the prostitute should not be Chinese, because prostitution in China is illegal. The authorities themselves suggested changing her nationality to a broader 'Asian'. Pelone accepted the recommendations, and also decided to change all references to Chinese gangsters to 'Asian'. References to Shanghai were also removed from the screenplay. As a consequence, Asia in this film became an invention of convenience: easily identifiable, but nowhere in particular.[7]

Once Chinese approval was obtained, Pelone created a consortium with two other production companies, Dania Film and Surf Film, to share the costs. He, as executive producer, would cover half of the EUR 400,000 budget, and the other two companies, as associate producers, would share the other half. While arranging the production, Pelone began looking for a director and called an old acquaintance of his: Sandro Cecca.

Just one year younger than Pelone, Cecca had approached cinema in the mid-1970s. At that time, continuing the long-term connection between leftist political activism and filmmaking already

[7] The concept of a 'non-place' will be discussed in the following pages.

discussed in previous chapters, he was a low-level executive of the Italian Communist Party, and was given the task of filming a series of videotapes on the conditions of Rome's *borgate,* or working-class suburbs. He then left active politics and concentrated on an adventurous and irregular career in independent cinema. His first fiction film, *Eremo*, was a short 16mm filmed over a weekend in 1980 using equipment and film stock 'borrowed' from a cooperative – unbeknownst to the cooperative. Two years later, his own cooperative, Mocambo Film, was commissioned by the state television channel RAI3 to make a documentary on kindergartens in Rome. However, as he and his co-director Egidio Eronico could not hope to find a better chance to shoot their first film in 35mm, they used this occasion to make a feature titled *Viaggio in città / City tour*. Cecca described this film as a road movie mixing Wim Wenders' style and Italian Neorealism, where the protagonists (a fifteen-year boy and his eight-year old sister) start wandering across Rome and encounter strange characters. The two co-directors' decision to do something different from what they had been commissioned to do caused RAI and the film industry to cut ties with them.

Their cinematic career was compromised, and for five years Cecca had to find other work. He kept working as an event organiser at a local Roman disco until film critic Enrico Ghezzi discovered a copy of *Viaggio in città* in the RAI archives and decided to show it in a late-night broadcast in July 1986. It obtained a large audience, and this unexpected success allowed Cecca and Eronico to return to cinema and make a second road movie in 1988. *Stesso Sangue / Same Blood* featured a plot similar to that of *Viaggio in città*, but with a more 'Western movie' look, as here an orphaned brother and sister escape to Southern Italy to avoid being separated by social services, and form a gang of robbers to survive. This film gained critical success, was distributed in France and received positive reviews from *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Filmcritica.* Despite being supported by the critics, however, Cecca and Eronico were soon forgotten. In the 1990s Cecca directed two documentaries and two features. One of these, *Maestrale/Mistral* (1998), was neglected by critics but appreciated by Sergio Pelone, who in 2001 asked Cecca to distribute *Jurji* (Stefano Gabrini, 2001), the first film he produced. When Pelone proposed making a film in China in 2006, Cecca accepted enthusiastically.

7.3 The making of *Two tigers*

The casting of the main characters was completed in Rome. For the role of Gilda, Cecca chose Andrea Osvárt, a Hungarian-born, Rome-based former fashion model. Selena Khoo, a Malaysian-born Chinese model and actress who grew up in Australia, was selected for the role of Gilda's neighbour, whose name was changed from Shi Ju to Lin. Both actresses were fluent in English and Italian, and Khoo even spoke some Mandarin. Lin's lover Michael became French, and his name changed to Michel, when the role was given to the French actor Olivier Pagès, who had experience in cinema and TV miniseries and was also fluent in English. For the role of the American investigator McWilliams, Cecca selected the Anglo-Italian actor Matteo Pedol (under the stage name of Matt Patresi), who had worked with him previously and had recently appeared in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). The casting of Chinese actors was supervised by the service company in Shanghai, and electronic copies of their filmed auditions were sent to Rome. The final decision about the shortlisted actors was made by Cecca when he arrived in Shanghai, one week before filming. Of the Chinese leading roles, director and actor Chen Daming became George, and Liu Jiadong was selected to play the ringleader Wang Hua. Although the film was to be shot in English with direct sound recording, Cecca did not perceive the actors' different English accents to be a problem. On the contrary, he was happy to use these differences to underline the characters' multiple nationalities. To explain Gilda's accent, the film would mention that she was American, but of Hungarian origin.

In Shanghai, Cecca could not avoid comparing his preconceived ideas with the environment he actually found there. In his interview, he expressed his impression of the "China is the future v. Italy is the past" dichotomy using words that on the one hand echo those of Amelio and Vincenzo Buonavolontà, and on the other are charged with Orientalist considerations:

> Before [arriving there] I did not have a precise idea about China, except the usual clichés, which I had to verify. However, the aftermath is important, as I was very impressed by China […]. Suddenly I felt myself as a part of history, meaning that we are the past, and they are the future. It seemed to me that we were a thing for history books […]. There I saw such an activism, an attitude, a willingness to work, a willingness to emerge, that […] when I returned to Italy I said […]: «We have no hope here! There is no comparison!». Sadly I said that in 2006, and the

> following years showed I was right […]. In the years between 2006 and 2010, [the Italian and Western economy] slumped, while there they had a GDP explosion of 10-15% every year! […] I immediately had that impression as soon as I arrived in Shanghai. It was enough to look out of the window to see hundreds of cranes pulling up skyscrapers, day and night. It was so impressive! Twelve hours of work without interruption. All restaurants were full […]. I was extremely impressed by China, or better by Shanghai, because it is where we stayed. (Pelone et al., 2014)

Filming was completed in just four weeks – 24 days in Shanghai and 4 in Rome – between June and July 2006. To save on film stock and transportation costs, and also to minimise the equipment necessary to check the dailies, the production team decided to hire two Panasonic DVX200 digital cameras with memory cards in Italy. According to Cecca and Minisola, this was a winning choice regarding both filming speed and flexibility of use. The crew could work intensively for up to eight hours a day, six days a week, in conditions of high humidity, without technical faults. In addition, digital cameras had a wider exposure latitude than 35mm ones and worked better in low light situations. Finally, their compact size made it possible to hide them easily for exterior shots and crowd scenes, or use them for car camera sequences. A large part of the film was shot in the apartments of the two protagonists – in reality, one large luxury apartment divided into two by a moving wall. For exteriors in crowded areas it was necessary to hide the camera in vans, cars and cafes; otherwise people would start staring at it. The 10-member Italian crew, which comprised the production team and camera operator, interacted well with the local crew made up of approximately thirty Chinese technicians. This was partly because most of them could speak English, and were also assisted by the presence of two interpreters on set; language often became a barrier when the Italian crew moved around the city, but it never created problems on set. In just a few days the Chinese crew became accustomed to the daily agenda, which was issued by the Italian production one day in advance and translated into Chinese. Alessandro Minisola commented: “From my [...] point of view, if we worked in Rome or in New York with Britons, Americans, French, or Italians, it would have been the same thing” (Pelone et al., 2014). Once filming in China was completed, the crew returned to Italy and shot the remaining few sequences in Rome. By late 2006, *Two tigers* was ready for release.

7.4 Matching exploitation canons

Two tigers is entirely built around its female protagonists. Like the other young women in *La muraglia cinese* and *La stella che non c'è*, Gilda and Lin guide the spectator to discover an unknown foreign place. Like Pio Li in Lizzani's film, but more notably so, they establish once again the well-known equation between exoticism and sexiness. The film's title, which appears after the opening sequence written both in English and Chinese, is an obvious reference to their dual roles as professional hunters and also as prey surrounded and hunted exclusively by men. In a scenario characterised by a generalised lack of morality, Gilda and Lin learn that they can trust no one but themselves. Their bond turns into a lifeline for them, and ultimately allows them to start a new life. Their physical beauty, their martial arts skills, their sex lives and some innuendos about a possible lesbian relationship are the real centre of attention and make the voyeuristic nature of this work extremely clear. The intrusive role of the camera leaves little to imagination and culminates in the sequence where the naked Lin is splattered with blood after killing Michel with a sword during an erotic game.

Visually, the film is characterised by a 1.78-1 aspect ratio (equivalent to 16:9 TV widescreen) and an abundance of camera movements. In both action and still sequences, the camera is always panning, tilting, dollying or zooming in, and it is often hand-held. This suits an action-based film, underlines the "on-the-edge" lives of the two protagonists and the dynamic environment around them, and makes the film look less cheap than it actually is. The shots are also characterised by frequent low angle framing that gives prominence to buildings and individuals, and occasionally by over-the-head tilted shots of interiors. Two cameras are used in action and fight scenes (Fig. 85), and natural lighting is used for exteriors, while artificial soft lights prevail in interiors. The live sound recording produced mixed results, especially in crowded environments where the background noises almost cover the dialogue. The film was dubbed in Italian, but the director was far from enthusiastic about it and preferred the original version.

From a narrative point of view, the editing creates a fast rhythm, especially during fight sequences where the ASL is rarely longer than one second and close-ups of hands are rapidly alternated with medium shots of fighters. The overall average ASL remains fairly short – just above four seconds. The few long takes consist of establishing shots such as that of the first meeting between

McWilliams and Wang Hua, or still scenes such as one in which Gilda answers a phone call in bed. The score matches the narrative's needs, both through the use of dynamic electronic pieces written by Lorenzo Caponetti and Andrea Lai, and through the addition of three uncredited Chinese pop songs.[8] The latter, in particular, add an exotic flavour to the film, and are always used when Gilda explores the city.

Despite the dynamic camera work, editing and music, the cheapness of *Two tigers* remains apparent in several details, such as the sound recording and actors' performances. However, these are not surprising, as the film was explicitly made as a low-budget exploitation movie. The real surprise here is the film's transnational approach, which is its intrinsic value for this study.[9]

7.5 *Two tigers* in Shanghai, China in *Two tigers*

The transnational approach of *Two tigers* is underlined by two main factors. The first of these the multicultural background of the cast and the decision to allow actors to speak English with their own accents; the second is the multinationalism of the companies and individuals that appear in the film. It is remarkable that an American-Hungarian woman working for an American organisation has to kill a Lebanese man and a Frenchman who are both based in an unnamed Asian city where she lives for an undisclosed amount of time. This Asian city is depicted as a cosmopolitan global hub easily accessible to citizens of multiple countries. As in *La stella che non c'è,* it is no longer necessary to cross great walls or bamboo curtains to arrive there. The entry point is the modern and efficient airport, which appears three times in the film and implies the idea of distance, but also of easy accessibility. The airport is full of passengers of every possible origin and appearance, underlining the normality of international mass travel, with East Asia having a fundamental role in its development (Fig. 86). This feeling is created by the widespread presence of non-Asian people in the city (Fig. 87), and also by the fact that both Lin's and Gilda's

[8] These are *Green Light* and *眼泪成诗 Yǎnlèi chéng shī* / *Tears into poetry* by Sun Yanzi, and *走路去纽约 Zǒulù qù Niǔyuē/Walk to New York* by Tao Ching-Ying.

[9] The film is described as "B-movie" in some of its production documents, but the distinction between the two categories, outlined in Section 7.1 above, will be maintained in this chapter.

lovers have cultural backgrounds different from theirs. Moving and interacting across countries is here a common way of living for a large number of people. It seems perfectly normal to see a quick shot of a foreign woman in an Asian taxi, watching live TV news about key moments in a football match played by the Italian national team at the 2006 World Cup in Germany.[10] And English – with all its varieties and its accents – is the *lingua franca* that allows everyone to interact effectively.

Interconnectivity is another key feature of *Two tigers*, which makes locations appear irrelevant. Phone calls to a fictitious office in Shanghai are redirected to the United States and answered in terrible Mandarin by a woman of Caucasian appearance (Fig. 88). Gilda talks to her mysterious boss – whose identity and location remain unknown – only through a camera. Payments are transferred electronically, making the location of sender and receiver unimportant. The opening sequence suggests that these payments are the key to making Gilda act, as parallel editing shows a transfer being arranged while she kills one of her victims. New instructions and research into targets' personal information are also internet-based. Global mobility and interconnectedness are the new normality when conducting business – every kind of business, including crime (and filmmaking). An entire category of wealthy and less wealthy people, and professionals, is ready to fight for its survival in this global, urbanised, multicultural jungle. And East Asia is a key player in this game, although this film shows it more as an accessory to foreigners' plans than as a truly independent actor.

From this point of view, *Two tigers* does not refrain from using the orientalist and colonialist stereotypes of a world in which the West still sees the East and its people as mere accessories to its own criminal – or at least morally controversial – plans. The American investigator employs a local *mafioso* to track Gilda, a French swindler cheats an Asian prostitute for mere sexual pleasure, and all of the rational planning – such as Gilda's methodical preparation work and the detectives' investigation – is carried out by Westerners. In contrast, Asians appear mysterious and ambiguous, and are often plotting something. This feeling is made explicit on several occasions. For example, the camera shows Asian men whispering to each other before they try to rob Lin and kill Gilda.

[10] This fortuitous glocal shot creates a link between a situation well-known to many Western viewers and the unknown locality where it is shown, and is also the only reference that connects the fictional story to a real event.

Likewise, George behaves sweetly with Gilda until he suddenly changes and is revealed to be a member of the local mafia, and Wang, following his first appearance, maintains a sly attitude – he never looks his interlocutor in the eye and uses his client for his own purposes (Fig. 89). To confirm that this was intentional, Cecca explained that when he filmed the sequence of the first meeting between the investigator and Wang,

> I organised the scene in a certain way. As I had seen how the Chinese behaved – especially some people who show little or nothing of what they are thinking – I told the Chinese actor: "You must eat when the detective is talking [to you]. Never look at his face. Keep eating as if you were eating alone. Pretend to eat on your own, and not to have a person asking questions in front of you. Don't look at him, and don't answer". […] Clearly, if I were not in China, I would have shot this scene differently. (Pelone et al., 2014)

Ironically, the film's Orientalist approach is enhanced by the choice – made in response to censorship issues – to never explicitly name the city as Shanghai. Shanghai therefore becomes an archetype of what anthropologist Marc Augé would call a non-place – a space of transience and anonymity.[11] Only spectators familiar with Chinese Mandarin or those who already know Shanghai can identify the film's location. To all others, this remains an alien Asian place where signs are written in obscure characters and local people speak an unintelligible language. The exotic feeling is enhanced by the protagonist's visit to a food market where all possible varieties of living and dead animals are sold, and where Gilda appears both amused and disgusted (Figs. 90-92). This impression is further underlined by her walk through well-known tourist areas like the Yu Gardens rather than traditional small alleys, and by the car-camera shots of busy streets full of bicycles and common people involved in their daily errands. In other words, the setting is shaped by the foreign gaze of a visitor surprised by the environment's unusual aspects – that is to say, its exoticism – and a visible distance remains in the relations between foreigners and locals. The director's words corroborate this feeling: "[F]our out of the five protagonists were not Chinese. As a consequence, their mental schemes could not reflect the Chinese mentality" (Pelone et al., 2014).

[11] The concept of non-place was theorised by Augé in his 1992-book *Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, also available in English (Augé, 1995).

Despite using Shanghai as a mere Asian backdrop, *Two tigers* stills delivers an extensive picture of the city in the 2000s, and it may be argued it is the only Western fiction feature film to do so in those years.[12] The postmodern city seen in *Two tigers* is an urban forest where trees are replaced by an infinite number of skyscrapers, omnipresent cranes, and enormous highways (Figs. 93-96). Some recently-constructed landmarks like the Oriental Pearl Tower and the skyline of Pudong – nicknamed by many 'the Manhattan of the East' – give a futuristic touch. Here hypermodernism, countless construction sites, luxury cars and houses, and dynamism contrast strongly with the daily life of the common people who still survive by collecting and reselling empty plastic bottles – best revealed by a zoom shot showing a bottle collector in the foreground, in front of the enormous Oriental Pearl Tower, as Gilda walks with George (Fig. 97). This is a city where foreigners are expected to be well-paid company managers: both Gilda and the American-Asian George use this role as a cover. These foreigners are always on the move, and their need to understand the local language and habits is limited, although Gilda is shown attempting to study some Mandarin. English is the common language of 'expats' – a term encompassing a politically-correct twenty-first century version of a previous colonial attitude – who have only limited interactions with locals. Indeed, this also creates ground for rebellion, as Lin's rage leads her to brutally murder the Westerner who was exploiting her.

Clearly Shanghai is only a small part of China, and therefore it would be a gross generalisation to say that *Two tigers* portrays the entire country. However, as the main economic hub of the PRC with a population of over 20 million, this megalopolis is indicative of China's contemporary urbanisation process and remains a window on China – significantly, the World Expo 2010 was organised here. Most of Shanghai's major buildings are no more than fifteen years old. Its apparent wealth is showcased in futuristic buildings, luxury villas, cars and apartments, easily available technology and interconnectivity. All this rests on a base of colourful tradition, represented in the film by the food market, and an unresolved underlying conflict between locals and foreigners that is balanced between reciprocal utilitarianism and distrust. Thus, *Two tigers* still reveals a mixed Western gaze on Shanghai, and by extension on contemporary China – one that is

[12] With the exception of Amelio's *La stella che non c'è,* the only other Western film shot there and set during those years was the Hollywood blockbuster *Mission impossible 3* (2006), in which Tom Cruise jumped from a skyscraper in a memorable stunt sequence.

both cold and enthusiastic. This is a place where everything is possible, but trusting others is not recommended. 'Business is business' seems to be the principle moving the whole story and its setting.

7.6 Flopping tigers

Postproduction work on *Two tigers* was completed in Italy in late 2006. In a surprising interpretation of the relevant regulations, the director's cut did not need to be submitted to Chinese censors, because the film was not to be distributed in the PRC. China had become a valued site of production, but its attractive domestic market remained off-limits for foreign producers, so much so that some of them, like Pelone, did not even attempt to access it. The film's international distribution was arranged by RAI Trade, a branch of the Italian state broadcaster created in 1997 to promote both the RAI's own productions and other Italian audiovisual productions on the international market. RAI Trade paid a minimum guarantee to The Bottom Line, Dania Film and Surf Film, and sold the film to home video distributors in sixteen countries across North America, Western and central Europe, and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (including Taiwan).

According to Sergio Pelone, the agreement with RAI Trade – over which he did not have any control – was extremely disadvantageous for the producers, and RAI Trade's efforts to distribute the film were unsatisfactory. In his opinion, this was the key point that determined the failure of the whole project. Cecca believes that almost every film produced in Italy is harmed by poor distribution. He and Pelone both asserted that the commercial flop of *Two tigers* was due to the strategic error of not diversifying its sales, as the distributor appeared to target the home video market exclusively in the very years of its collapse and to neglect the growing pay-per-view and online streaming sectors.[13] RAI Trade did not provide the producers with any further information

[13] Without entering into a detailed market analysis, during the interview Cecca remembered that "All Blockbuster outlets in Rome closed down between 2006 and 2008". Blockbuster Italy ceased to exist in 2012, eighteen years after the opening of its first Italian store (De Cesare, 2012). In addition, by the time *Two tigers* was released, erotic thrillers had lost their popularity.

about sales results, and in 2011 it ceased to exist. The only way to access sales results would be to ask every single distributor directly. As for its reception, exploitation films are not made to be well-reviewed. The few opinions about *Two tigers* available online show strong contrasts: depending on the writer, it is either a poorly acted, pointless movie proposing nothing new, or a little gem in its genre (IMDb, 2016a).

Apart from all considerations of the film's contents and genre, Pelone and Cecca agree that the *Two tigers* experience remains double-faced: extremely positive regarding everything related to its production, and extremely negative regarding its distribution. It remained the first and only step in Pelone's long-term project to gather funds in order to produce arthouse films.[14] Asked if they would consider the idea of making another film in China, both producer and the director replied enthusiastically, as they were truly impressed by the professionalism they found there. However, Pelone said that should he try again, he would change his business strategy and work with an international partner able to move more effectively in the market. Certainly the now-effective Italian-Chinese co-production agreement and the emergence of genuine Chinese production companies as discussed in Chapter 1 would make this goal more achievable, at least theoretically. In practice, though – as will be explained in the Conclusion – this agreement is increasingly connected to a market that is more and more focussed on large box office returns, which are guaranteed by blockbuster movies, leaving little or no space for low-budget productions.

7.7 Conclusion

Setting a twenty-first century exploitation erotic thriller in China and selling it on the home entertainment market seemed like a winning project to a small independent Italian producer and filmmaker. *Two tigers* was indeed an unusual transnational, production-led movie, as it was characterised by a multinational English-speaking cast, a low budget, and an undisclosed yet recognisable Asian location. It experimented with the use of digital cameras when over 90% of

[14] *Two tigers* was the last film Cecca directed. Pelone has continued to produce documentaries, short films and a feature fiction film.

top-grossing feature films were still shot in 35mm (Follows, 2016). All production decisions were made in order to minimise costs, and the choice to film in China was central to this strategy, as in 2006 China apparently offered qualified crews and an impressive service industry at a fraction of Italy's costs – although the producer did not elaborate on the difference.

Moreover, *Two tigers* showed that even though censorship rules in China are extremely strict, their practical application can be discretionary and changeable. For example, as these rules forbid showing material considered to be contrary to public morality, such as Chinese prostitutes and criminals, local censors suggested bypassing the problem by simply removing any explicit reference to China in the screenplay. This lenient attitude might be explained in three ways. Firstly, if small-budget exploitation and B-movies made by foreign producers were not to be distributed in China, the censors might not consider them potentially dangerous and thus would not need to be too strict. Secondly, *Two tigers* was the second Italian film to be shot in China following the signing of the 2004 co-production agreement, so keeping a low profile regarding censorship could have been considered important in order to attract more producers. And thirdly, 2006 was the Year of Italy in China, and – as explained in Chapter 6 – this created an officially benevolent attitude toward Italy. In support of this last hypothesis, it must be noted that during the 2007 Shanghai Film Festival the organisers publicly acknowledged a film such as *Two tigers* as a positive experience of cooperation between Chinese and European cinema.

Although *Two tigers* was almost completely filmed in Shanghai, the city remains a mere Asian backdrop adding an exotic taste to a film whose main ingredients are a mix of action, martial arts (necessary to make a film associated with China internationally saleable), sex and voyeurism. However, the city is shown to an extent that few other foreign productions were able to replicate until then, and is dominated by skyscrapers, cranes, glass, concrete and lights.[15] The idea conveyed by the film is that of a dynamic, ever-growing global city where traditional food markets like those shown by Antonioni in 1972 co-exist with futuristic buildings, and where the presence of foreigners is common. Regardless of ethnicity and origin, people's actions here are motivated by a single, common goal: money. Gilda is paid to kill, Lin is paid for sex, Michel has stolen money from

[15] Large international productions would soon begin exploiting the glass-and-towers skyline of Shanghai. For example, the well-known Shanghai sequence in Sam Mendes' *Skyfall* (2012) is built on these elements.

his company, and Wang Hua, it can be inferred, is paid to find Gilda. Thus as Gianni Amelio also noted when he filmed *La stella che non c'è*, money has been quick to corrupt again the pure and industrious people that Lizzani and Antonioni had portrayed decades earlier. This message seems to be highlighted by Cecca's Western gaze, which cannot avoid Orientalist stereotypes of shady and inscrutable local people always ready to betray others for personal interest. Despite Gilda's cross-cultural friendship with Lin, the distance between locals and foreigners remains palpable. This view, it may be argued, is a direct consequence of the fact that the director had limited knowledge of China, was visiting Shanghai for the first time and was enthused by what he found there.

After *Two tigers*, the slowness of the process for approving the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement and the uncertainty caused by the Global Financial Crisis deterred other Italian producers from starting new feature film projects in the PRC for a few years. If it is hard to imagine the shooting of further sexploitation films in China under President Xi Jinping's pervasive anti-corruption and moral education campaigns, it is more likely that the now-effective Italian-Chinese agreement and the recent opening of an ANICA office in Beijing will attract new medium- to-low-budget co-productions of more conventional films, although whether they will actually be distributed in the Chinese market still appears uncertain.[16] The full results of this agreement, however, will only become visible in the years to come. For now, it is only possible to focus on what has already been made, and to attempt in the following chapter a comparative analysis of the films discussed in this thesis, in the awareness that – after years of complete standstill – things are now changing at a fast pace.

[16] In 2014, Xi Jinping also took aim at the representation of China abroad when he declared that "the stories of China should be well told, voices of China well-spread and characteristics of China well explained", with obvious repercussions for the media and film industries (Groot, 2016).

Conclusion: Three stages, a comparison, and a glimpse into the future

Taking into account the ongoing debate on the need for a scholarly redefinition of Italian cinema, this thesis proposed to examine the transnational value of Italian cinema in the global context. Specifically, it analysed six case studies of Italian directors who shot feature films and a television film in the People's Republic of China between the 1950s and the 2000s. The first four works – two documentaries and two high-budget transnational epic productions – were instrumental in bringing the PRC to Western theatre and TV screens, albeit with contrasting results. The latter two, fiction films characterised by low budgets and settings in contemporary China, gained only limited international visibility but at the same time shed light on the state of the Italian film industry and its need to rethink itself as a global player despite its limited size.

The choice of these specific case studies was dictated by the consideration that Italy has repeatedly – though not on a regular basis and not necessarily via official, diplomatic means – functioned as a pilot for Western-Chinese relations. The productions studied here are exemplary because Italian filmmakers were the first, and among the very few, Western directors allowed by Beijing to shoot feature films on location, starting during Mao Zedong's leadership and its immediate aftermath. Furthermore, the choice of location and timeframe was due to further considerations about the antithetical economic trajectories followed by Italy and China. Italy's economic miracle in the 1950s and 1960s pushed the country to become one of the world's largest industrial economies, but was followed at the beginning of the new millennium by a long period of stagnation and decline. In the meantime, the launch of China's opening reforms in the late 1970s eventually led it – one of the poorest countries in the world – to its post-1980 rise, embracing mass industrialisation and consumerism to become the world's second-largest economy. The PRC seemed to repeat Italy's economic boom half a century later and on a vastly larger scale, both in

terms of size and duration, during the very years of Italy's crisis. This has raised questions about how the dramatic transformations experienced by China and its people have been perceived in the Western countries (including Italy) which have been rapidly displaced from their global economic rankings by the PRC. As scholars including Qing Cao contend, perception (in terms of the public impression of reality) and images are a relevant part of international relations. Once re-elaborated by our minds, the concepts and images we perceive acquire meaning and become representations. Therefore, 'representation' may be considered a political construct with a key function in the production of culture (Cao, 2014, p. 5). For these reasons, the perception of China in Western countries is loaded with political, diplomatic and cultural significance, and does vary across socio-historical contexts. This is particularly true in the case of the feature films shot by Italian filmmakers in the PRC.

On the basis of the discussion conducted in Chapters 1 to 7, it is possible to argue that the shooting of these films on location in mainland China went through several different stages and genres as a result of individual and/or political decisions. These stages are exploration, consolidation and normalisation. The first stage, exploration, was carried out via documentaries when it was necessary to show or 'explain' China to Western audiences during the ages of hostility and curiosity (Lizzani, 1958) and oadmiration (Antonioni, 1972). The consolidation stage inolved the making of epic, historic, big-budget fiction films (Montaldo, 1982 and Bertolucci, 1987) at a time when China had just begun its reforms and opening-up policy; these films became a form of cultural support for the tightening of Chinese-Western relations at the moment when the Western attitude of disenchantment towards China was changing to a benevolent one. And finally, the normalisation stage was characterised by medium-low budget fiction features (Amelio, 2006 and Cecca, 2007) set in contemporary China, and took place once foreign investment and the making of foreign films on location in China had become a common occurrence. Films made during the first two stages in particular exceeded merely artistic boundaries to assume diplomatic connotations in the Chinese-Western context. This extended significance is not shared by the 'normalisation' films – those made once Italy had become one country out of many to film in the PRC. However, even the latter works were not without diplomatic implications, as they were produced in the immediate aftermath of a co-production agreement between the two countries after a decade of fading relations. An explanation of why and how the six productions analysed in

this thesis were made requires exposing a set of variables that range from the socio-historical to the technical, and their combinations. These variables were discussed in the Introduction. Understanding and comparing them in this Conclusion further clarifies how they affected the making and distribution of all six films. It also sheds some light on the future of foreign access to the Chinese market and of Chinese-foreign co-productions.

How and why: a commentary

The following comparison of the six productions analysed in this thesis will illustrate the complex alchemy of diplomatic, political, personal and/or trading factors that were, to various extents, crucial in their making. It will also show that these factors remain critical for all transnational productions dealing with China. This discussion becomes particularly relevant at the present time, when the Chinese film industry has become a global player and the large Chinese box office is increasingly stimulating the commercial appetites of international producers and distributors.

While Carlo Lizzani's *La muraglia cinese* became a diplomatic headache involving unofficial cultural channels, two productions in particular – *Chung kuo* and *Marco Polo* – were the direct result of diplomatic relations between Italian and Chinese institutions and were largely produced using Italian public funds. Similarly, *The last emperor*, which was made when Italy was one of China's most active economic partners, was the result of a private initiative, but was also crucially backed by the Italian government during a negotiation impasse, and funded by international commercial banks. The most recent two films in this study, *La stella che non c'è* and *Two tigers*, were private initiatives but were still useful in the consolidation of Italy and China's bilateral relations. In fact, they were produced following the signing of the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement and the proclamation of the Year of Italy in China.

Personal political motivations were another factor that affected the making of these films. In Lizzani's case, his political affinity with the PRC was *the* factor that allowed him to pursue his goal. All of the other directors and at least one producer working on the films included in this study were or had been communist, or at least of a leftist bent. This factor was decisive in allowing Lizzani to obtain an invitation from the PRC to film in China, but it may be argued that to some

extent it also helped all the other directors to obtain filming permits. For instance, Bertolucci noticed that his Communist Party membership was appreciated in Beijing (Bertolucci, 1987, p. 35). However, the fact that the directors were politically acceptable in China did not imply easy or smooth approval of their work during the various stages of production. Each film's screenplay (for fiction films), itinerary and filming plan was closely scrutinised, and for five of them these required extensive negotiations, even after agreements had been signed. Particularly in the case of early attempts to film on location, these negotiations became part of an overwhelming cultural discovery. For instance, Lizzani and Antonioni often found themselves at odds with central and local officials because of the ongoing contrast between their own plans and those of their hosts.

The difficulties experienced by Lizzani and Antonioni did not disappear in the following years, but were mitigated following the PRC's adoption of its reform and opening-up policy, which allowed foreigners and foreign investors to access the country in larger numbers. The 1980s were a honeymoon period for China and the West, and this was reflected in the supportive attitudes experienced by Montaldo and Bertolucci, who were backed by large-scale multinational productions fully supported by the PRC film and government authorities, and could exert more negotiating power than their predecessors. According to Montaldo, *Marco Polo* was the starting point for China's cinematic escalation (Montaldo, 2014) . It was also the occasion for the PRC to start creating specific institutions and policies to deal with foreign productions, as well as learning the job through practical experience under the supervision of a well-established and prestigious film industry. Moreover, the making of *Marco Polo* allowed a group of Italian professionals to develop connections and expertise with the Chinese film industry and authorities. Alfredo Bini, Mario Cotone, Franco Giovalè, Attilio Viti and Maria Barbieri, to mention a few, were all later involved in Bertolucci's, Amelio's, and/or Cecca's films, and were instrumental to their completion. If Amelio, in 2005, and Cecca, in 2006, found the experience of filming in the PRC easy from an organisational point of view, it was thanks to these predecessors, who had developed a knowledge of Chinese regulations and procedures, and had also consolidated their professional and institutional networks in China.

From the new millenium onwards, filmmakers and their crews could also rely on the high professional standards of local technicians and were positively impressed by them. The changes – cultural, technical, and logistical – were remarkable. In 1956-1957, Lizzani found himself facing an

often impassable cultural barrier, and had to bring all his production equipment from Italy. In contrast, fifty years later, the production team of *Two tigers* likened their Shanghai-based experience to filming in New York City (Pelone et al., 2014). They could not recall any significant cultural clashes or issues with local authorities, and they took from Italy only essential filming gear, as most of the equipment they needed was available on location. The linguistic barrier could not be altogether removed, but this remained only a marginal problem on set thanks to the presence of French-Chinese or Italian-Chinese interpreters, and from the 1980s to a more widespread use of English, both as common language and as the chosen language for filming in, as will be discussed below.

To obtain filming permissions, not only did the directors have to be politically acceptable in both China and Italy, so did the subjects of their films and the finished films themselves. Evidence shows this was a major problem, as political acceptability is an extremely volatile concept, requiring a synchronisation between the filmmaker's point of view, the content of their film, the Italian political environment, and a Chinese political leadership prone to internal power and ideological struggles despite its show of unity around the current leader. The lack of such synchronisation caused all sorts of problems for Lizzani, who struggled to make a film equally acceptable to two opposite political arenas (the communist PRC and capitalist Italy). Antonioni was possibly the main victim of this synchronisation issue, as the Chinese leadership changed just after the release of his documentary and the new leaders considered him and his work unacceptable. Montaldo was fully supported by the PRC in every possible way during his film's planning and production, as he filmed *Marco Polo* during the 'honeymoon' phase of the relationship between China and Italy. However, even his miniseries could not avoid being heavily conditioned by China's afterthoughts. Montaldo had to agree to cut an entire section covering the Crusades and the Pope before *Marco Polo* could be screened in Chinese cinemas, as Roman Catholicism was indeed a sensitive political issue for Beijing at the time.

In contrast, Amelio's and Cecca's works featured topics forbidden by Chinese regulations, such as social and political critiques, local crime and prostitution; however, neither of the two directors was stopped because of this. Their films were completed during the Year of Italy in China, during which favourable bilateral relations created a relaxed political climate and consequently a more lenient attitude towards them. Their films, however, were not distributed in China for commercial

reasons – namely, import quotas on foreign films – and more generally, none of the films analysed in this thesis was made with a Chinese audience in mind. The latter consideration also implies a substantial difference between Italian and Chinese aesthetic views and expectations. For example, while Italian directors focussed on the individual, a touch of exoticism and, in the case of epic films, the visual beauty of details in costumes and *mise en scène*, China's main preoccupation remained the creation of its positive image through an emphasis on social and technical achievements, and thus the use of realism in the representation of the whole rather than of particulars. This discrepancy did not help to facilitate a warm reception for these films in China, and it became the basis for a conflict that was used to mask political motives as in the case of the reaction to Antonioni's *Chung kuo.*

The motivations behind the making of these six productions were not only expressed by their directors and producers in negotiations with the Chinese authorities, but also reflected in stylistic aspects, and in some shared common traits. Despite belonging to different genres, from a narrative point of view all these films include components aimed at introducing China, its culture and its achievements to a Western audience by means of cross-cultural comparisons and/or explanations. In the case of documentaries, these components comprise explanations and comparisons that are introduced by voice-of-God commentaries, while in the fiction films they are introduced by interactions between Chinese and Western protagonists, usually while walking through streets and markets, or travelling, or during conversations.

These cross-cultural comparisons can be divided into two categories: implicit and explicit. The former include Lizzani's and Antonioni's remarks on gender equality, which leave to the audience the task of judging the difference between China's desirable equality and the disparity typical of Western countries. In contrast, explicit comparisons involve considerations of 'us' and 'them', and deviate towards Orientalism. This occurs in three ways. The first comprises the recurrent introduction of exotic elements of daily life in China. These are rendered by multiple means: showing traditional food (discussed in all six films), acupuncture, *taijiquan*, *qigong* and acrobatics (seen in the two documentaries and in *Marco Polo*); including slogans, signs, and commercials written in characters or spoken in Mandarin, unaccompanied by any visual or oral explanation of their meaning (as in *Chung kuo*); and including authentic Chinese music or at least scores that resemble or echo it, which is common to all films. The second type of implicit cross-cultural

comparison makes use of cultural exaggerations, like the levitating Buddhist monk and the old man of the mountain in *Marco Polo*. The third type consists of stereotyping, which occurs in different fashions, including highlighting the inscrutability of China and its people or remarking on Chinese irrationality versus Western rationality, as occurs in *Two tigers*.

Language is an essential component of speech, and also is a fundamental component of films. Therefore, the choice of which language will be spoken in a film reveals intentions about that film's target audience and international distribution plans. It is self-evident that a film spoken in English has a larger potential international market than one spoken in Italian. Only three of the six productions analysed here (the two documentaries and *La stella che non c'è*) were made in Italian, while the others were shot in English, either through direct sound recording or, when necessary, through post-synchronisation, with actors dubbing themselves. Even when post-sync was used, the directors decided to maintain the actors' British, American, or non-English accents. The use of different accents was a well-considered choice in the case of *Two tigers,* in which all of the characters come from different countries. However, this appeared unnatural in historical films where, for example, Marco Polo and Kublai Khan understand each other in a *lingua franca* which spectators suppose to be a form of Chinese but is fact English. From this point of view, *La stella che non c'è* maintains complete linguistic authenticity, as its director Gianni Amelio chose the Chinese protagonist on the basis of her Italian accent and Italian is the *lingua franca* in this film. These films are not made for Chinese viewers, so Chinese Mandarin remains confined to the background and is used only occasionally in all six productions to give a feeling of cultural authenticity – or, some might say, exoticism.

Visually, all six filmmakers conveyed the vastness of mainland China by filming the sheer size of its natural and rural areas, monuments (the Great Wall and the Forbidden City appear in three of the six films), and cities (Shanghai is seen in four productions, with other the contemporary cities shown being Beijing, Chongqing, Nanjing, Suzhou and Wuhan). However, they establish this vast scale in different ways. Most of them do so by travelling to multiple locations, thousands of kilometres apart. Lizzani, Montaldo and Bertolucci underlined the spectacular aspects of China through the use of crowd scenes and choreographies, and two of them made use of wide screen. The use of saturated colours to emphasise red, blue and yellow tones, especially in three films *La muraglia cinese, Marco Polo* and *The last emperor*, gives prominence to costumes and monuments

over an otherwise almost monochromatic grey or brown background. In contrast, the feeling of visual spectacle is absent in Amelio's film, which is more interested in dealing with the discomfiting aspects of contemporary China and therefore insists on cold colours and unpleasant landscapes. These can be divided into two categories: rural and urban/industrial. In the early films China's rural and natural landscapes are dominant, but these disappear from *The last emperor* onwards. In Bertolucci's film, this choice was largely related to the need to represent Pu Yi as a prisoner, while in Amelio's and Cecca's works China appears transformed by the ongoing economic development into an overwhelmingly urbanised and industrialised country, where any idea of wilderness or at least rurality is almost completely absent.

The impressive extent of contemporary China's urban sprawl can be better understood through a comparison of the shots of Shanghai that appear in the four films that show the city (Figs. 98-108). In *La muraglia cinese* and *Chung kuo*, the eastern port city appears as a busy metropolis crossed by a busy river, with roads crowded by bicycles and buses, and a large expanse of buildings which are generally no more than a few storeys high. The area of Pudong does not have any specific landmarks. In *La stella che non c'è*, although the camera is focussed on Vincenzo, it is possible to see a downtown background that includes high-rise buildings, skyscrapers, and construction sites. In *Two tigers*, Pudong becomes a futuristic landmark of Shanghai. The city has grown vertically overnight and is now filled with skyscrapers, construction sites, and gigantic road intersections. Its visual transformation is impressive and makes a spectator think of its social and generational consequences. Bicycles have been replaced by cars, the dominant role of political ideology has apparently disappeared, and the presence of foreigners has become common. The Yu Gardens, where Antonioni showed retired Party officials and their families having tea together, appears thirty-four years later in Cecca's film as a crowded tourist attraction open to everyone, regardless of their origin. Exoticism – the idea of a faraway, different, inaccessible place – has been mixed with cosmopolitanism.

The gradually increasing presence of foreigners in the films needs further discussion because it visually underlines mainland China's transition from an isolated country to an apparently Westernised one. In 1957 no foreigners could be seen anywhere in Mainland China, and in 1972 only a few appeared, occasionally. The films shot in the 1980s showed the interaction between tradition (a foreign emperor being assimilated by Chinese culture) and a variety of foreign cultures

(Italian, Arabic, British, Japanese, American). Finally, the two films shot in the 2000s show China as a world business hub, which can even send its technicians to disassemble a blast furnace in Italy, and which grants foreigners easy access to its territory. If foreigners – and specifically Caucasian ones – have become extremely visible, the existence of multiple Chinese cultural identities remains a more complex matter. Lizzani showed the differences between the Chinese in Hong Kong and those in mainland China, as well as between the prevailing Han population and local minorities such as the Mongols. The Mongols were present in *Marco Polo* also because of Kublai Khan's origins. Montaldo's miniseries also added a difference between non-Chinese rulers and Chinese peasants, as well as the hope of having China as a mother country for all its ethnicities – one of the key points of the PRC's ethnic minorities policies.[1] Bertolucci also dealt with the often conflicting relations between Han and Manchurian ethnicities, which in his film remain evident throughout most of Pu Yi's life. However, the other three films do not even mention the existence of multiple ethnicities or cultural identities. While it is likely that Antonioni was not allowed to talk about this issue during the Cultural Revolution, Amelio and Cecca express more general considerations on the differences between an apparently monolithic 'Chineseness' (or at least East-Asianness) and a multinational foreignness, perpetuating in the viewers the feeling they are dealing with a rock-solid, cohesive culture at the crossroads between weakening tradition and a fast-advancing modernity. However, as will be explained below, this feeling does not last once *La stella che non c'è* and *Two tigers* are compared to the previous four films.

The complexity of cultural negotiation between Chinese tradition, political ideology and foreign culture is also apparent in the clothes people wear in these films (where the term 'people' refers to both professional and social actors, and extras appearing in staged and authentic crowd scenes). In 1957, Lizzani could still spot elderly men wearing the traditional long gown and young women wearing *qipao*. Just fifteen years later, during the Cultural Revolution observed by Antonioni, these had disappeared altogether and almost everyone was dressed in blue, green or military uniforms. In *Marco Polo,* clothes even become a symbol of cultural assimilation as the protagonist and his companions adapt to the local dress code. The historical and cultural changes

[1] An official explanation of the National Minority Policy in the PRC issued by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be found at http://www.china-un.ch/eng/bjzl/t176942.htm.

of mainland China as seen through its mainstream dress code are extremely clear in *The last emperor*, where Pu Yi and his entourage alternate traditional imperial clothes with Western suits and the Maoist uniform. In contrast, in twenty-first century China almost everyone appears dressed the same casual and formal clothes that are seen in every Western country, and any cultural specificity is lost.

More generally, this consideration is true with regard to not only the dress code, but also almost every aspect of daily life. Lizzani, Antonioni, Montaldo and Bertolucci literally built their films around the cultural uniqueness of China by showing and/or describing to different extent one or more of its traditional features and the negotiation between tradition and modernity in different historic moments. The Forbidden City and Buddhism (in the form of temples or praying monks) are therefore shown or discussed in *La muraglia cinese, Chung kuo, Marco Polo* and *The last emperor.* The first three films also represent the Great Wall as a symbol of China, while the two fiction films deal with imperial etiquette. The list could continue with the practice of *taijiquan* and *qigong,* explanations of Taoism, the practice of acupuncture, Maoism and collectivism, the use of the same proverbs in *La muraglia cinese* and *Chung kuo*, and so on, but the above inventory is sufficient evidence of Lizzani's, Antonioni's, Montaldo's and Bertolucci's emphasis on Chinese cultural singularity.

In the new millennium, Amelio and Cecca felt this urgency only marginally. Amelio depicts an overwhelmingly unpleasant country filled with anonymous buildings and a society plagued by inequalities and injustice, but he also thinks that salvation can be found in the traditional values embodied by the elderly, like Liu Hua's grandmother whom he shows praying to Guanyin. And Cecca appears to exploit the uniqueness of a food market and the traditional sword used to kill Michel as cultural fillers to convey a feeling of exoticism. With the exception of these brief sequences, both Amelio and Cecca – for different directorial reasons – insist on an industrialised, urbanised, consumerist and futuristic country that could easily be confused with other nations, and *Two tigers* does not even mention China explicitly. A comparison of these two films with the previous four therefore becomes a cinematic notification of the cultural levelling caused by globalisation, which appears to leave little space for anything more than local folklore, even in contexts characterised by the strongest and longest-lasting traditions.

As for the production modes of these six films, from the viewpoint of Western-Chinese relations they all featured organisational and logistical assistance that was provided by relevant Chinese authorities (the Central Film Bureau, the CCCC, the CFCC and the SARFT in different periods) for a fee – a practice that current regulations would describe as "assisted co-production".[2] From the Italian point of view, it is possible to trace a double transition. Firstly, there is a change from purely national productions (*La muraglia cinese* and *Chung kuo*) to transnational co-productions involving Italian directors, public and private Italian and international producers, and a multinational cast (*Marco Polo*, *The last emperor* and *La stella che non c'è*). Secondly, there is a change to films where the nationality of the producer, the filmmaker, and the crew has no relevance to the choice of cast and setting. Transnationality is not only a production mode, but also a diegetic element. From this perspective, all the fiction films analysed in this thesis contain various degrees of transnationality: Marco Polo travels from Italy across China and becomes acquainted with local habits, Pu Yi's teacher Reginald Johnston is a Beijing-based British scholar, the Italian Vincenzo Buonavolontà moves from Italy to China and travels across the country without a precise destination, and in *Two tigers* several foreign characters easily move back and forth from overseas to Shanghai. What matters in the latter film is the interconnectedness between the global (in this specific case, US, France, Hungary, Britain, Kenya and Asia) and the local (Shanghai), and the need to carry out a job.

A final consideration concerns film budget and commercial success in terms of box office or TV audience. For historic/epic films the budget was very high, and for movies set in contemporary China it was low or extremely low, with the exception of *La muraglia cinese* which was the first Western feature to be made in the PRC and as such needed to be captivating. Expensive epic films were made during the 'consolidation' stage, when the PRC opened to foreign investments and producers were keen to invest in order to access the Chinese market ahead of other competitors. Considering the medium to small size of contemporary Italian production companies, it is unlikely that other PRC-based Italian-directed productions or co-productions will reach those budget peaks again. As for audience results, despite the directors' and producers' best intentions and their

[2] Considering the production history of all six films and in the absence of sources confirming this information, it may be presumed that paid assisted production was also the case for *Chung kuo*. However, it was not possible to confirm this.

artistic and technical achievements, their films did not necessarily obtain commercial success, and some caused heated ideological debates. The two most watched productions were *Marco Polo* and *The last emperor*, which were also those with the highest budgets, the most awarded, and the only two screened in multiple Chinese cinemas – although *The last emperor* did not receive particularly positive reviews in China. The reason for the contrasting results of the other films can be ascribed to several factors. These include: China's rapid changes of political/ideological context (*La muraglia cinese* and *Chung kuo*); excessive references to the Italian context (*La stella che non c'è*); the fact that the films were not made with the Chinese – or, in Amelio's case, international – audience in mind; poor distribution strategy (*Two tigers*); the gap between the representation of China on screen and China's variable attitude to political acceptability; and, as will be explained in the following section, the fact that a commercially-viable screening and distribution apparatus has been developed in China only in very recent years.

A glimpse into the future

Because of the import quotas imposed by China, co-productions seem to be the only viable way to access the Chinese film market from overseas. With a steadily increasing box office revenue expected to reach $10 billion by 2017, nearly half of which is generated by foreign movies, the Chinese market is incredibly tempting. However, accessing it is not easy task. The six productions discussed in this thesis have illustrated the long-term complexities of making and distributing a foreign film in the PRC. And although their shape is constantly changing, those complexities still exist. Having a film released in China is increasingly becoming the result of strategic marketing and political work, and it could be greatly beneficial if academic research – with its structured expertise in Chinese social, political, economic and cultural dynamics – and the film industry were to join forces to address the range of variables at stake in this context. Political volatility on the Chinese side has already been discussed, and the definition of what can be considered politically and/or morally acceptable has also been presented as problematic, because what is acceptable for China may not be so for co-producing countries, and what is acceptable for both at any given point in time may not be so for China by the time the film has been completed. From a commercial point of view, the Chinese film market has become extremely competitive, fragmented, and crowded:

the most recent official statistics available show that the top Chinese production company is the state-owned China Film, with a 4.08% market share, followed by a plethora of increasingly powerful private companies including Wanda, Bona and LeVision. The top fifteen producers altogether control a market share of less than than 30% (EntGroup, 2015, p. 14).[3] This fragmentation and competition is reflected in the high number of domestic films produced – an average of 617 per year between 2010 and 2014 – and their low exhibition proportion, which swung between a 17% low in 2010 and a 50% high in 2014 (EntGroup, 2015, p. 13). Fragmentation, however, disappears on the distribution side, where the number of players is significantly lower and over 55% of the market is controlled by state-owned China Film and Huaxia Film (EntGroup, 2015, p. 17). Along with the censors, these distributors are the real decision-makers regarding which films that can be projected on China's 40,000 screens – a number increasing at a rate of 27 per day in 2016. Their ownership is heavily concentrated in the hands of three major groups, with the Wanda Group in the role of market 'superpower' (EntGroup, 2015, pp. 22, 25)[4].

To succeed in this environment, it is necessary to propose the right mix of political, cultural and commercial ingredients, which requires planning a film with the Chinese audience in mind and anticipating what the censors may or may not approve. This requires teamwork between filmmakers, producers and distributors starting in the early stages of a film project, and as several directors have acknowledged, implies accepting compromises to comply with Chinese requirements (Callick, 2016; ComiConverse, 2016; Sala, 2016; Sani, 2015).[5] An understanding of

[3] Several of these companies, like Huayi Brothers and Bona Film Group, are listed on the Shenzhen and New York stock markets. The largest private production company, the conglomerate Wanda Group, is also heavily involved in distribution, owns China's largest chain of cinemas, and is heavily involved in the international market. It invested billions of dollars to buy America's AMC Theatres in 2012, Australia's Hoyts Cinemas in 2015, and Europe's Odeon-UCI Cinemas in 2016. In the same year, it also purchased Legendary Entertainment for USD 3.5 billion (Fritz & Burkitt, 2016), and tried without success to acquire 49% of Paramount Pictures, which later signed a $1-billion deal with Shanghai Film Group and Huahua Media (Wong, 2016; Reuters, 2017). Despite its size, Wanda only holds a 3.17% market share in China (EntGroup, 2015, p. 14).

[4] Wanda is therefore a key player from production stage to projection. As of September 10, 2017, more recent official statistics were unavailable.

[5] In the coming years, under Xi Jinping's leadership, these requirements are expected to become particularly attentive to ideological orthodoxy. A new law governing the film industry came into effect on March 1, 2017, targeting box office frauds, banning films that harm China's "national dignity, honour, and interests" and encouraging the promotion of "socialist core values" – for instance, through the establishment of a "professional ethics committee" to guide organizations and people in the industry to practice these values. Despite allowing more political interference,

the Chinese film industry and market must entail cultural and political awareness. The cases analysed in this thesis demonstrate that when the official political line focuses on ideological and moral orthodoxy, strict controls and rule implementation may be expected. However, when the political leadership switches to a more pragmatic approach, it is possible to anticipate a more relaxed implementation of the rules and – from a filmmaker's point of view – to cautiously take the risk of pushing forward the bar of political correctness, for instance by adding measured social critiques. The respectful understanding of this mechanism, coupled with a capacity to build strong and reliable informal connections (or *guanxi* in Chinese Mandarin) with key stakeholders and continually seek agreements with them, can make a difference in the successful completion of a film in the PRC.[6]

In this context, the future of Italian-Chinese co-productions appears both promising and challenging at the same time. Italy can legitimately draw on its unique cinematic experience in the PRC and is actively seeking common opportunities with China. The co-production agreement between the two countries has been fully effective since 2014, and a first co-producted movie has already been completed (*C'è sempre un perché / There's Always a Reason,* Dario Baldi, 2012) but not yet released, while a second was released in late 2016 (*Caffè*, Cristiano Bortone, 2016) and several others are already in production (Bona, 2015, pp. 391-394). New co-productions are expected to become numerous and involve an unprecedented number of private Chinese production companies that are increasingly powerful in the global film industry.

However, the medium-small size of the Italian film industry and its limited resources may be an obstacle. Since Roberto Benigni's *Pinocchio* (2002), Italy has not produced a film with a budget exceeding EUR 40 million, which is a fraction of the cost of a high-budget Hollywood production. The size disparity when compared to Chinese producers is remarkable: the sales revenue of Italy's

---

the new law has also had positive practical effects, such as cutting red tape by delegating film censorship powers to provincial governments (Xinhua, 2016).

[6] The director's and producer's personality are also remarkably important in the creation and maintenance of *guanxi*. For example, Montaldo was helped by his inclusive and gregarious personality, while the rigorous Lizzani and Antonioni struggled to cope with the frustrations they met, but complied with the Chinese requirements of them. At the other extreme, the producer of the American film *Tai-pan* in 1985 gave vent to her frustrations in newspaper interviews and adopted a confrontational attitude towards the Chinese authorities. As a result, her work on location became even harder, if not impossible.

largest production company, RAI Cinema, does not reach EUR 400 million and is less than 10% of Wanda's (Reportaziende, 2016; *Hollywood Reporter*, 2017). Italian producers' lack of financial leverage means that equity or Italian-majority co-productions with China are only possible for small-budget projects with the smallest Chinese production companies, which hold a marginal market share. This is likely to become a major constraint in accessing the Chinese market. Even when small-budget films are approved by the Chinese censors, it is unlikely that they will be distributed in China, where they have to compete with blockbusters that generate massive box office returns.

As the medium-small size of the Italian film industry does not appear sufficient to impact the Chinese market, institutional support will become essential to creating visibility and opportunities and to setting a direction to be followed. A more financially viable way for Italian producers to co-produce films with China is to shoot Chinese-majority blockbuster films in Italy, similar to what happened when Hollywood majors arrived at Cinecittà in the late 1950s and the 1960s. ANICA, the Italian producers' association, is working as an institutional co-ordinator to encourage co-productions in both countries. The organisation of numerous 'China Days' at Rome and Venice Film Festivals may become instrumental in gaining the attention of Chinese distributors and create a local market niche for art cinema. In addition, filmmakers like Sergio Basso and Cristiano Bortone who are fluent in Chinese and have been cooperating with Chinese television and the Beijing Film Academy for years are working hard to build a cinematic bridge between Italy and China, and possibly to increase their chances of being hired by a Chinese producer.[7] From a cinematic perspective, these appear to be the only – and most effective – ways Italy can currently pursue an approach to China again. In the past, making feature films in China was a way for a few Italian filmmakers and producers to find new career opportunities and/or obtain international visibility and prestige. In the 1980s, the mediatic impact of epic films shot in China by Italian directors was beneficial to China in the moment when it was restarting its own cinema industry, but at the same

[7] After working as an assistant director on *La stella che non c'è*, Basso made a feature documentary on the Chinese community in Milan (*Giallo a Milano / Made in Chinatown,* 2009), a second documentary for RAI about ten Italians who lived in the PRC between the 1950s and the 1970s (*Cine tempestose*, 2013, which was only shown on Italian television), and in 2014 directed a documentary on the Han dynasty that was produced by the Chinese CCTV6 channel for local audience. As for Cristiano Bortone, his feature fiction *Caffè*, released in late 2016, is an Italian-Belgian-Chinese co-production – the first following the enactment of the Italian-Chinese co-production agreement in 2014.

time it was becoming clear that such large-scale projects were untenable for Italian producers. Today, it is the small-scale Italian film industry that needs Chinese capital, while its impact on the Chinese film industry remains negligible.

Looking at the larger picture, the only way for Italian filmmakers and producers to increase their chances of accessing the hyper-competitive Chinese screen theatre circuit is to take part in future larger-scale projects, such as European-Chinese co-productions, or co-productions involving multiple countries. These would make it possible to create a stronger, more financially balanced partnership, and at the same time to develop a niche for European and Italian arthouse cinema in the enormous Chinese screen theatre circuit. The recently-created Berlin-based Bridging the Dragon network is currently working to connect European and Chinese cinemas for this purpose, and to coordinate the fragmented efforts of European countries to access the Chinese market (Laviosa, 2017, p. 95). Even under the European umbrella, it will take years to know whether these efforts will remain a mere political and diplomatic coordination of common film projects, or produce commercially successful and artistically memorable results.

If this is likely to be the future, the past experience accrued by Italian filmmakers in China will form an essential part of the heritage of Western-Chinese relations the field of cinema, and may well be considered pilots for future projects, keeping Italy and its cinema at the core of a transnational production mode. Even though cross-cultural challenges, misunderstandings and negotiations have been an overwhelming part of these filmmakers' works, the making of their films can also be considered a databank of winning and losing strategies for working in China, as well as case studies showing Chinese producers and film authorities what to expect when they work with foreign producers, directors, and crews. The experiences of Lizzani, Antonioni, Montaldo, Bertolucci, Amelio and Cecca also helped China and Italy lay the foundations for Chinese-foreign co-productions. At present these – possibly under the European umbrella – seem the most practicable way to both build Chinese interest in non-mainstream European cinema and bring fresh capital and larger non-Hollywood productions to Europe. Despite their diplomatic and financial risks and benefits, these films are also carriers of a powerful intangible value: the mutual enrichment embedded in the work of producers and screenwriters from multiple cultural backgrounds and of culturally diverse crews. From this point of view, filmmaking has a positive, unifying function. Its transnationality – made visible by labelling films 'Italian-Chinese', 'European-

Chinese', 'Chinese-Italian' or 'Chinese-European' co-productions – may just be a stage on the way to cinema as a universal practice. To use Luca Bigazzi's words, sometimes we may not understand each other across different cultures, but

> The cinema environment makes it possible to overcome [linguistic and human] misunderstandings. After all […] actors are always actors, and the camera is always the camera. Everyone knows exactly what to do at all latitudes. (Bigazzi, 2016)

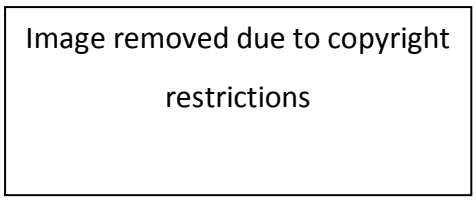
Appendix 1 – General comparison

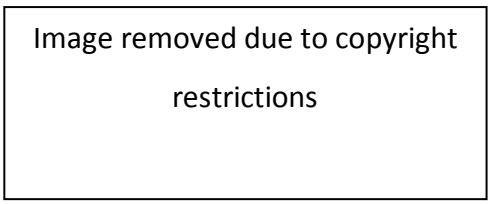
Year of release / Western image of the PRC / *Chinese image of the West*	Production Title	Director & main producer(s)	Why (genesis)	How (production mode and style)	Diplomatic relevance
1958 **Hostility & curiosity /** ***Hostility & Isolation***	*La ,muraglia cinese*	Carlo Lizzani L. Bonzi & Astra Cinematografica	Director's political motivations; producer's biography (prestige) Director-initiated Subject's political acceptability	**Production mode:** 100% Italian-funded; 10+ months on location; heavy cultural & linguistic barriers; complex negotiations; high budget; use of latest technology available; small crew, difficult interactions with locals; limitations imposed by Italian censorship; Italy's & PRC's film industries being rebuilt, prestige of Italian Neorealism. **Style:** - **Narrative:** documentary, expository, comparative, Orientalist; continuity editing; ASL longer in PRC sequences (7") than in HK ones (5"); original music theme partly recalling Chinese songs; post-sync sound; language: Italian - **Acting & setting:** social actors; mostly set-up sequences; current PRC and HK; authentic sets; authentic traditional costumes still present - **Cinematography & visual aspects:** spectacular (widescreen, wide-angle shots colours, complex camera movements); environment: vast, static, rural, (over)crowded in urban areas, traditional, closed to foreigners, social equality, socially innovative, pleasant, collective, safe.	High international relevance. First Western feature film made behind the 'bamboo curtain'. Problematic because made with no official bilateral relations yet in place.
1972 **Admiration /** ***Opening***	*Chung kuo*	M. Antonioni RAI	Diplomacy / International relations Producer-initiated Producer's history (advantage of early contacts with PRC) Director's artistic vision (focus on 'new man'), mild fondness for China Subject's political acceptability	**Production mode**: 100% Italian-funded; 3 weeks on location; heavy linguistic and cultural barriers; complex negotiations; controls on set; presumably low budget; Éclair Super-16 camera; small crew, difficult interactions with locals; Italy's film industry one of world's largest, PRC's film industry stopped during Cultural Revolution. **Style:** - **Narrative:** documentary (travelogue), expository with minimalist commentary, comparative, few historical inaccuracies; slow rhythm and extremely long takes; ellipses and use of logical associations to connect sequences; authentic music and live sound recording; language: Italian - **Acting & setting:** social actors; some set-up scenes; current China; authentic sets; Maoist uniforms - **Cinematography & visual aspects:** camera often handheld; frequent use of zoom; occasionally hidden camera; environment: vast, (over)crowded in urban areas, static, largely rural, traditional, closed to foreigners, social equality, pleasant, collective, safe.	Bilateral and international
1982 **Benevolence** **/** ***Admiration & Suspicion***	*Marco Polo*	G. Montaldo RAI – P&G – Dentsu	Diplomacy / International relations National economy (PRC's opening to foreign investors), international trade Producer-initiated Producer's history (international prestige and exclusive deals with China) Director's artistic vision (contempt for intolerance), earlier communist activism Subject's political acceptability	**Production mode:** assisted multinational co-production, mostly Italian-funded; 5 months on location; censorship in the PRC on screenplay and finished work; CCCC created to deal with foreign co-productions; very high budget; use of high-quality equipment (all technical equipment brought from Italy); large Italian crew, problem-solving attitude with locals; huge logistical and organisational support on location provided by PRC; director's adaptability and effective negotiating skills; Italy's film industry in crisis, PRC trying to revive its own film industry;. **Style:** - **Narrative:** fiction, explanatory, comparative, Orientalist, few historical inaccuracies; slow rhythm, long ASL (7.6"); flashbacks and flashforwards to mix direct and reported narration; live sound recording reworked in post-production; original musical themes with some Chinese authentic melodies; language: English - **Acting & sets:** professional actors for leading and secondary roles, non-professional actors for crowd sequences; thousands of extras; thirteenth-century China; high-quality costumes based on historic research; artificial sets and adapted authentic sets - **Cinematography & visual aspects**: spectacular (crowd scenes, sets, complex camera movements); environment both idyllic and characterised by social contrasts, generally pleasant, open to foreigners.	Bilateral and international
1987	*The last emperor*	Bernardo Bertolucci	Director's biography (willingness to work away from Italy, previous project in Hollywood cancelled), communist membership	**Production mode:** assisted multinational co-production (CCCC replaced by CFCC), mostly British-funded; four months on location; censorship in the PRC on screenplay and finished work; high budget; use of high-quality equipment; director's and producer's effective negotiating skills; large Italian-British crew, smooth interaction with locals; huge technical and logistic support from PRC; organisational support from China-based Italians; political support from Italy; Italy's film	Bilateral and international

Benevolence **/** ***Admiration & Suspicion***		Jeremy Thomas (RPC, Hemdale, Yanco Films, Tao Film)	International trade Director-initiated Subject's political acceptability	industry struggling, early films of Fifth Generation Chinese directors. **Style:** - **Narrative:** fiction, explanatory, comparative, Orientalist, few historical inaccuracies; non-linearity (flashbacks, flashforwards, ellipses), slow rhythm, long ASL (8"); original music score based on fusion of Western and Chinese tunes; direct sound recording reworked in post-production; language: English. - **Acting & sets:** professional actors for leading and secondary roles, non-professional actors for set-up crowd sequences; thousands of extras; China (1906–1967) high-quality costumes based on historic research; artificial sets and adapted authentic sets; - **Cinematography & visual aspects:** spectacular (widescreen, crowd scenes, elaborate sets, complex camera movements; monumentality); Storaro's colour theory; environment: highly dynamic (multiple socio-historical transitions); conflict between tradition and innovation; social contrasts; unsafe before foundation of PRC; open to foreigners before 1945 and after 1980.	
2006 **Uncertainty** **/** ***Admiration & Suspicion***	*La stella che non c'è*	Gianni Amelio Cattleya – Babe Film – Carac Films – RAI Cinema – RTSI Initiated by director	Director's biography (new producer, previous project in Libya cancelled), leftist artistic vision Signing of co-production agreement between Italy and China when film pre-production was in progress Director-initiated Subject's political acceptability	**Production mode**: assisted multinational co-production (CFCC, Shanghai Film Studios), mostly Italian-funded; 9 weeks on location; new regulations for film production & distribution in PRC; medium-low budget; standard equipment; medium-sized Italian crew supported by professional Chinese technicians; efficient organisational and negotiating support from China-based Italian professionals; problem-solving attitude; cultural/linguistic barriers despite on-site interpreters; booming foreign co-productions on location, expanding Chinese film industry. **Style:** - **Narrative:** fiction, explanatory, comparative; linear, continuity editing with occasional ellipses; slow rhythm (ASL 8"); limited dialogue; live sound recording; original music themes, some authentic songs; language: Italian. - **Acting & sets:** all but one actor non-professional; contemporary China; adapted authentic sets; set-up crowd scenes; standard, casual Western-style costumes - **Cinematography & visual aspects:** standard 1.85:1 aspect ratio; large use of close-ups, focus on characters' expressions, some complex camera movements and handheld shots, cold colours; environment: vast, crowded, unattractive, dynamic, urbanised and industrialised, unpleasant, open to foreigners, individualistic, unsafe working locations.	Bilateral (made immediately after signing of Italian-Chinese co-production agreement)
2007 **Uncertainty** **/** ***Admiration & Suspicion***	*Two tigers*	Sandro Cecca Sergio Pelone	Producer's biography (business project and willingness to work in China, former communist activist) Filmmaker's biography (independent, low-budget films, former communist activist) Producer-initiated Subject's political acceptability	**Production mode**: assisted co-production (CFCC, Tianjin Film Studios), 100% Italian-funded; 4 weeks on location; medium-sized Italian crew supported by professional Chinese technicians; efficient organisational and negotiating support from China-based Italian professionals; linguistic barrier despite on-site interpreters; problem-solving attitude; booming foreign co-productions on location, expanding Chinese film industry; low budget. **Style:** - **Narrative aspects:** fiction, comparative, Orientalist; continuity editing and some use of parallel editing; fast rhythm (ASL 4"); direct sound recording; original music score with inclusion of a few Chinese pop songs; language: English. - **Acting & sets:** professional actors, contemporary China; current Shanghai (anonymous); authentic sets, authentic crowd scenes; standard, casual Western-style costumes and some traditional ones. - **Cinematography & visual aspects:** standard 16:9 aspect ratio, digital camera, abundance of camera movements, focus on action, use of hidden camera; environment: vast, crowded, dynamic, urbanised, futuristic, open to foreigners, social contrasts, individualistic, unsafe (crime).	Bilateral (made during Year of Italy in China)

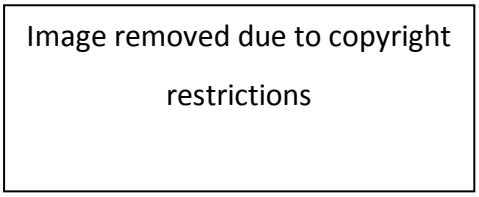
Appendix 2 – Screenshots

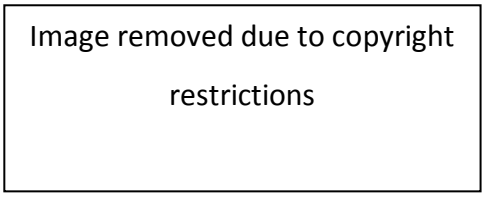
Screenshots from *La muraglia cinese*





Figures 3-4. Women as objects in Hong Kong





Figures 5-6. The fairy-tale landscape of Guilin

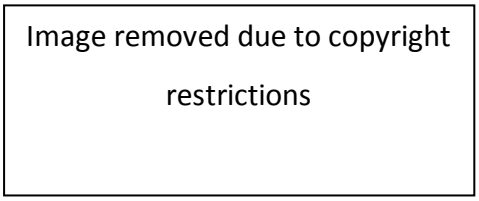


Figure 7. Nomad shepherds in the grasslands: an example of the representation of mainland China's vastness

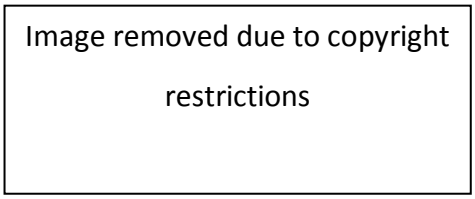
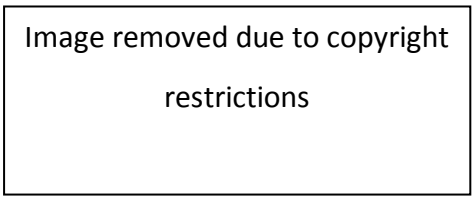
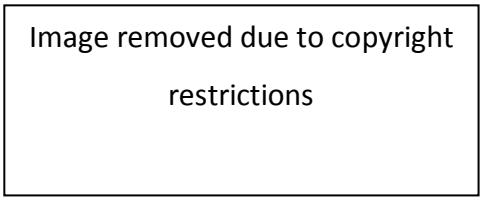


Figure 8. Idyllic rural China





Figures 9-10. The last sold bride

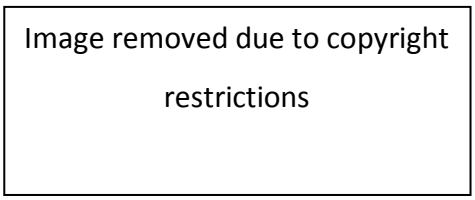


Figure 11. Female construction worker

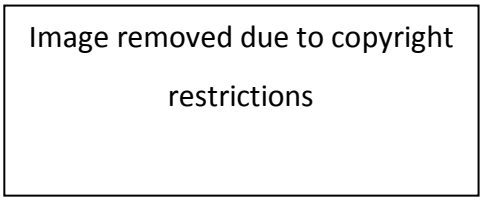


Figure 12. Gathering of female university graduates

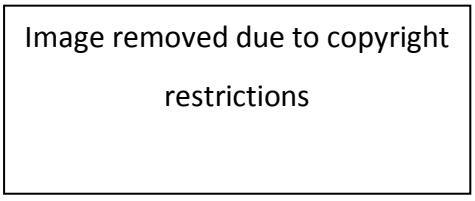


Figure 13. Collectivism at work after a natural disaster

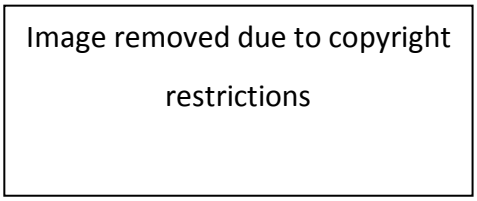


Figure 14. Collectivism at the October 1 parade in Beijing

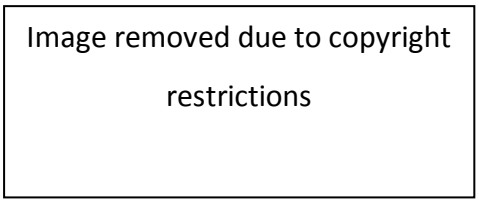


Figure 15. The Temple of Five Hundred Buddhas near Beijing

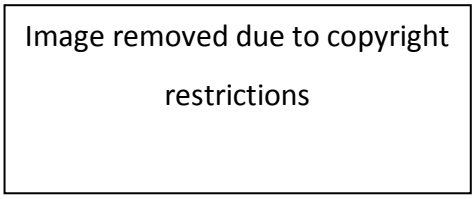


Figure 16. Factory construction site

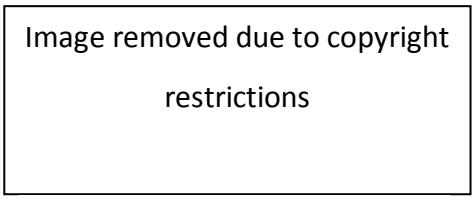


Figure 17. Shanghai

Screenshots from *Chung kuo*

Figures 18-19. Establishing shots from the opening sequence

Figure 20. Traditional medicine meets modern surgery

Figure 21. Happy children as a political message

Figure 22. "Long live Chairman Mao!" on the facade of a factory.

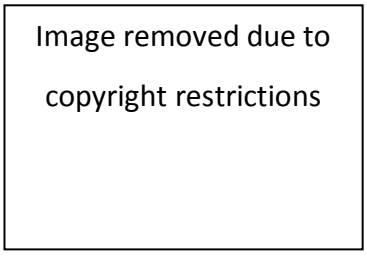


Figure 23. Political meeting of factory workers

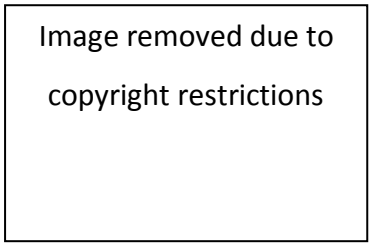


Figure 24. Visiting the Great Wall

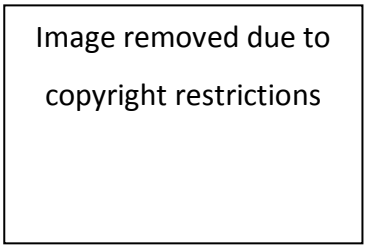


Figure 25. Unplanned visit in a remote rural village. The difference between these children and their peers in Beijing is striking

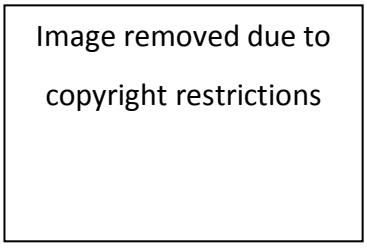
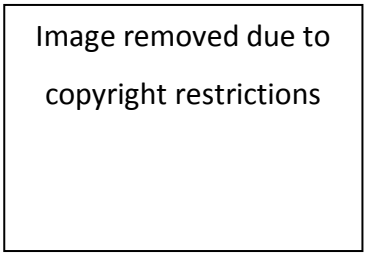


Figure 26. Mao's cult in a rural village

Figure 27. Mao's cult in a teahouse in Shanghai

Figure 28. The busy Huangpu River in Shanghai. Waterways connect the PRC to the world.

Figure 29. Revolutionary acrobats in Shanghai



Figures 30-32. Focus on the new man

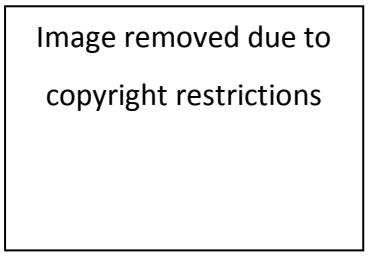


Figure 33. One of the shots criticised by China: the bridge on the Yangzi in Nanjing

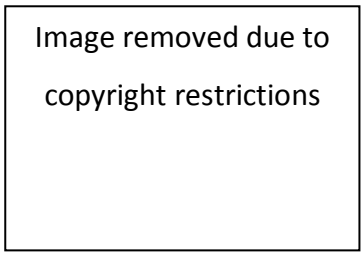


Figure 34. The most despicable sequence according to the *Renmin Ribao* commentator

Screenshots from *Marco Polo*

Figure 35. Christianity and *chiaroscuro*

Figure 36. Religious syncretism and multiculturalism in China

Figure 37. Religious syncretism and multiculturalism in China

Figure 38. Religious syncretism and multiculturalism in China

Figures 39-40. *Yin* and *yang*

Figures 41-43. Montaldo seems keener to support Buddhism than any other religion

Figure 44. Montaldo seems keener to support Buddhism than any other religion

Figures 45-46. Idyllic landscapes and vastness

Figures 47-49. Architectural grandiosity.

Figure 50. The Dragonda

Screenshots from *The last emperor*

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figures 51-56. Repetition of compulsion

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 57. Grandeur and theatricality in Pu Yi's enthronement ceremony

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 58. Grandeur and theatricality in the Forbidden City

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figures 59-60. Pu Yi wearing indigo sunglasses, a symbol of lust for power

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figures 61-62. Pu Yi watching Pu Yi

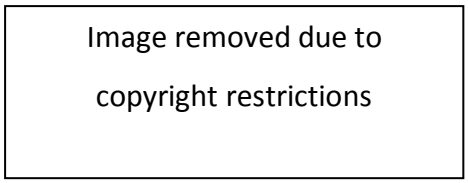
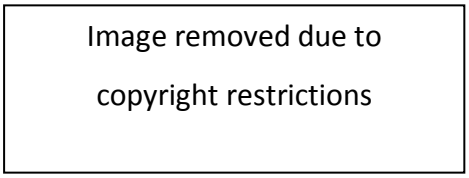
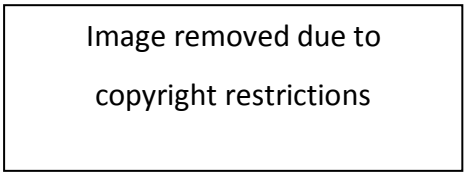


Figure 63. Pu Yi sees the prison governor being re-educated





Figures 64-65. Narrative circularity: the end matches the beginning.

Screenshots from *La stella che non c'è*

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figures 66-71. Slow-paced montage sequence connecting Vincenzo to a blast furnace

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 72. Workers posing as in Cultural Revolution propaganda posters

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 73. Vincenzo, the only foreigner in a Chinese crowd.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figures 74-75. Gloomy colours generate a feeling of discomfort

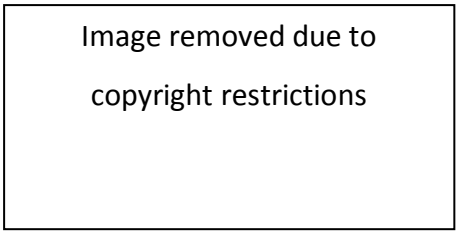


Figure 76. Realism and cultural details: certain sequences are touching for their awareness of folk traditions and culture

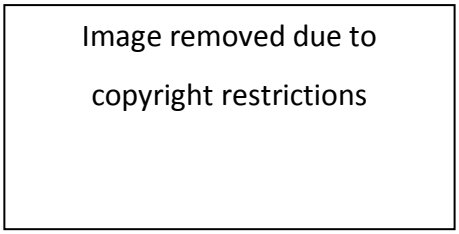


Figure 77. Focussing on Vincenzo

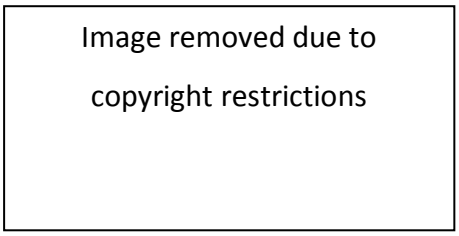


Figure 78. A symbolic frame remarking Vincenzo's distress

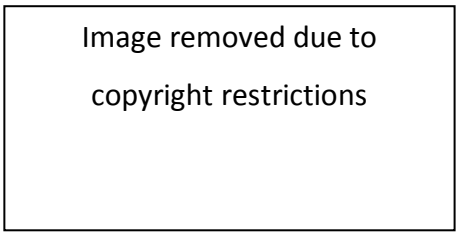


Figure 79. The lack of appealing landscapes does not imply the lack of poetic images, like the combination of night lights, wet roads, and geometric structures that Vincenzo finds in China

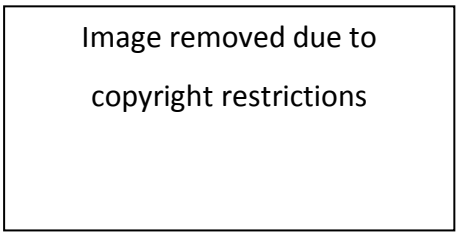


Figure 80. Italian workers welcoming the Chinese technicians with protests

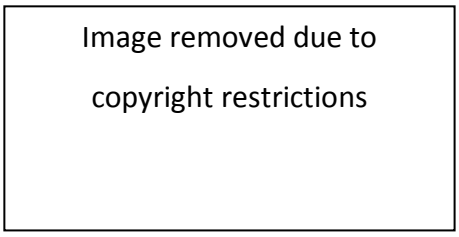
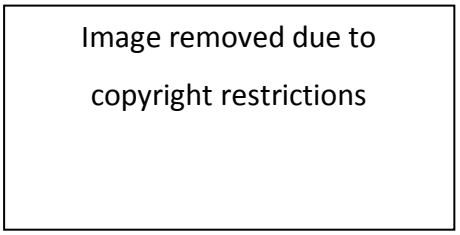
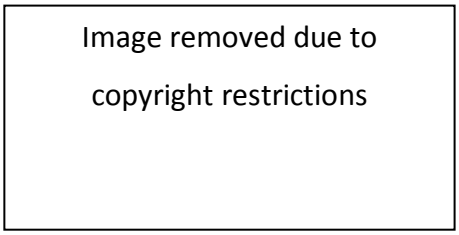
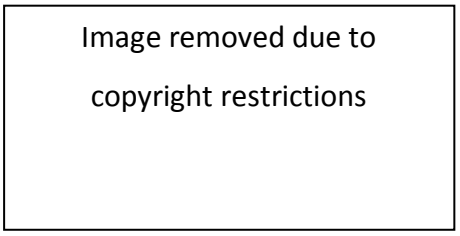


Figure 81. Amelio seems to identify the main ingredient for salvation in traditional values and in the kindness of China's elderly people







Figures 82-84. China is different from Vincenzo's expectations

Screenshots from *Two Tigers*

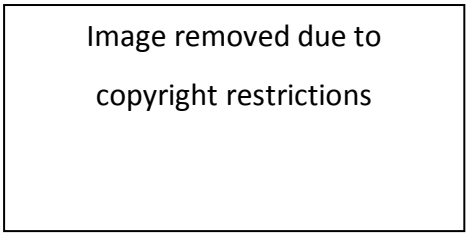


Figure 85. Abundance of action scenes

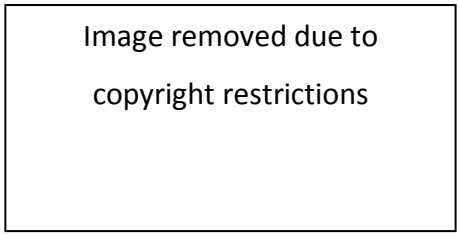


Figure 86. Cosmopolitan China

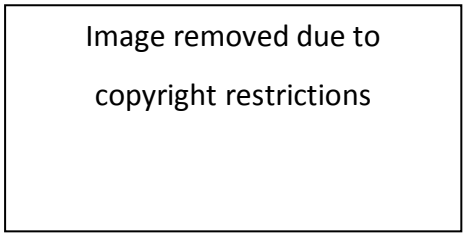


Figure 87. Cosmopolitan China

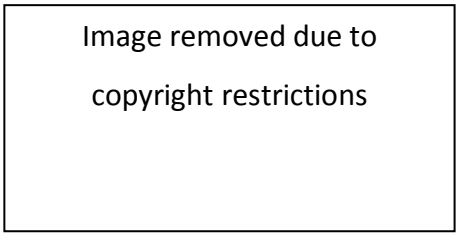


Figure 88. Interconnectivity

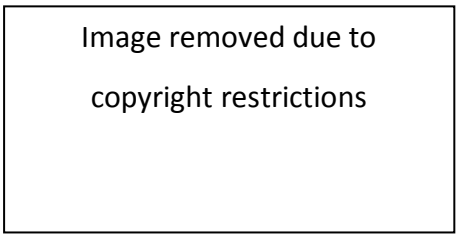


Figure 89. Use of Orientalist stereotypes

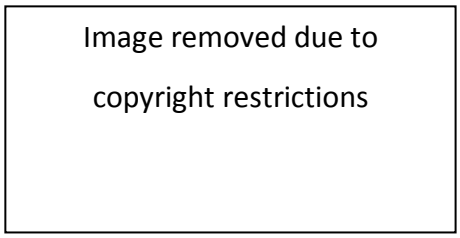
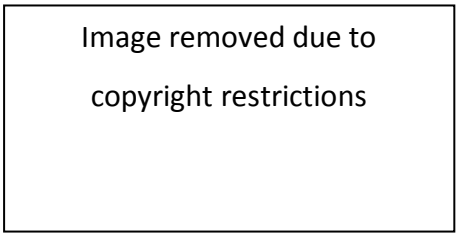
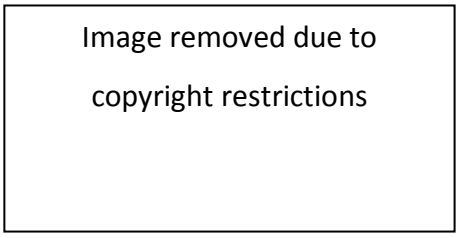
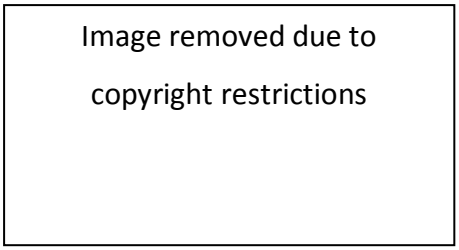


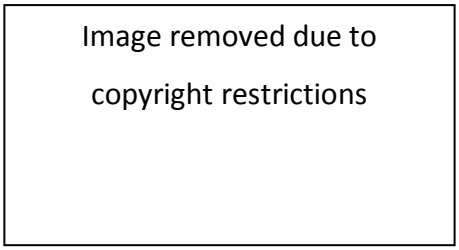
Figure 90. Use of Orientalist stereotypes

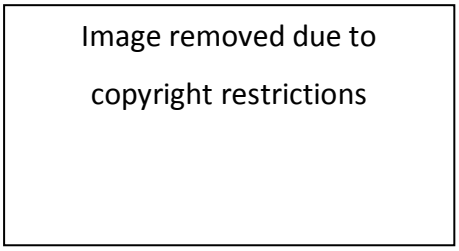


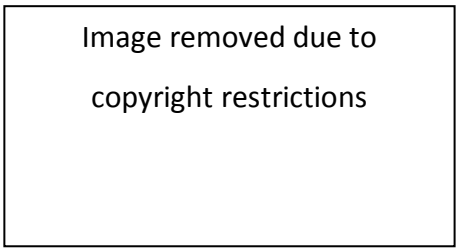


Figures 91-92. Use of Orientalist stereotypes









Figures 93-96. Shanghai as an urban forest

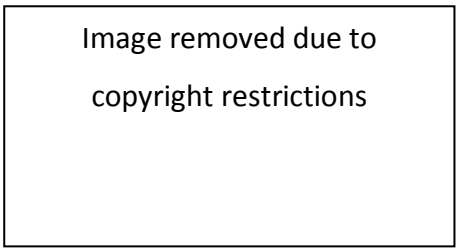
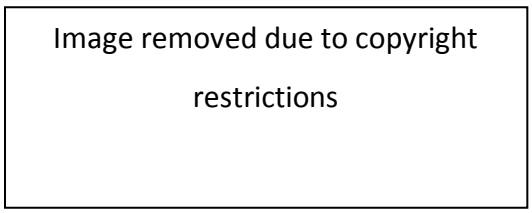
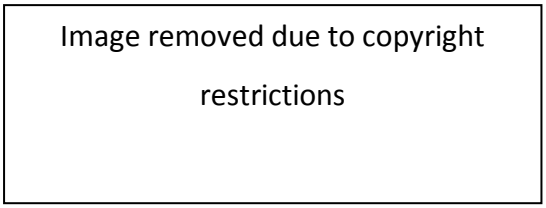


Figure 97. A city of contrasts

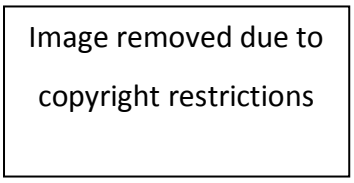
Visual comparison: Shanghai

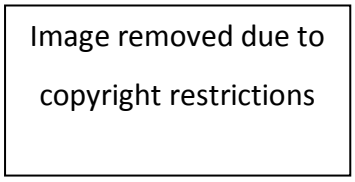


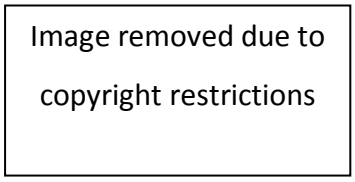


Figures 98-99 (above). Shanghai. Carlo Lizzani, *La muraglia cinese* (1958)

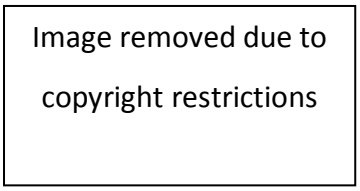
Figures 100-102 (above) Shanghai. Michelangelo Antonioni, Chung kuo (1972)

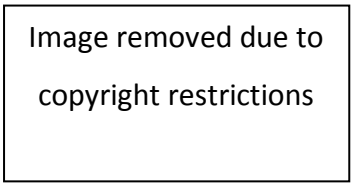


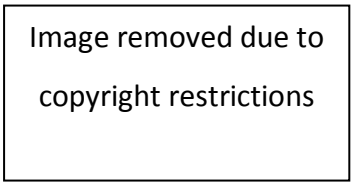




Figures 103-105 (above). Shanghai. Gianni Amelio, *La stella che non c' è*(2006)







Figures 106-108 (above). Shanghai. Sandro Cecca, *Two Tigers* (2007). Fig. 108 and Fig. 102 show the same area of Pudong.

.

References

"Cina" di Antonioni rifiutata dal MIFED. (1974, April 20). *Corriere della Sera*, p. 15.

"L'italia e' il paese che amo". La discesa in campo sul video. (2004, January 22). Retrieved January 18, 2017, from La Repubblica.it: http://www.repubblica.it/2004/a/sezioni/politica/festaforza/discesa/discesa.html

"Marco Polo": 26 milioni di telespettatori. (1982 , December 10). *L'Unita'*, p. 11.

"Offesi" i cinesi con Antonioni. Violento e inaspettato attacco del "Quotidiano del Popolo". Una dichiarazione del regista. (1974, January 31). *Avanti!*, p. 3.

1994 - Discesa in campo di Berlusconi. (2009). Retrieved January 8, 2014, from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8-uIYqnk5A&feature=related

A Sock in the Nose. (1959, December 21). *Time, 74*(25), 59.

Acciari, M. (2016). Theorizing liminal cinema: Unsettling the transnational spaces of Italian Indian co-productions. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 4*(3), 387-402.

Afp-Ansa. (1988, April 23). L' "Imperatore" a Pechino in giugno. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 25.

Agi-Ap. (1988, April 15). Al Parlamento della Cina scoppia il caso Bertolucci. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 23.

Agosti, S. (2011). *Bernardo Bertolucci su L'ULTIMO IMPERATORE, intervistato da Silvano Agosti (video).* Retrieved December 2, 2015, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EA0_HsHFU78

Agostini, L. (1979, October 1-6). Nasce il Marco Polo. *Radiocorriere TV*(40), pp. 18-23.

Agostini, L. (1982a, February 14-20). Essere Dragonda, questo e' il problema. *Radiocorriere TV*(7), pp. 40-41.

Agostini, L. (1982b, December 19-25). Una lunga corsa da Venezia a Pechino. (51), pp. 50-52.

Agreement on Film Co-production between the Government of the Italian Republic and the Government of the People's Republic of China. (2012, October 10). *Gazzetta Ufficiale (serie generale - n. 237)*, pp. 4-8.

Amelio Ujkaj, L. (Director). (2006). *Piccolo diario cinese* [Motion Picture]. Italy.

Amelio, G. (Director). (2006). *La stella che non c'e'* [Motion Picture]. Italy, France, Singapore, Switzerland, China.

Amelio, G. (Director). (2006). *La stella che non c'e' - Director's commentary* [Motion Picture]. Italy.

Amelio, G., & Contarello, U. (2006). *La stella che non c'e'.* (L. Codelli, Ed.) Venezia: Marsilio.

Ames, R. T. (2004). Language and Interpretive Contexts. In C. H. Dale, *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature* (pp. 15-26). New York: State University of New York Press.

Andalini, U. (1982, March 14-20). Marco Polo alla frontiera americana. *Radiocorriere TV*(10/11), pp. 40-46.

Andalini, U. (1985, January 20-26). E ora Marco Polo parla cinese. *Radiocorriere TV*(3), pp. 36-38.

Andrew, D. (2000). Adaptation. In J. Nanemore (Ed.), *Film Adaptation* (pp. 28-37). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

ANICA. (2015). *Tutti i numeri del cinema italiano - Anno 2014*. Retrieved October 30, 2016, from http://www.anica.it/allegati/Tutti_i_numeri_del_cinema_italiano_dati2014.pdf

ANSA. (2016). *A Milano Hu cognome più diffuso*. Retrieved October 26, 2016, from http://www.ansa.it/lombardia/notizie/2016/08/21/a-milano-hu-cognome-piu-diffuso_1327677e-031d-451c-8d89-162d8b670210.html

Antonioni e gli USA pace fatta. (1974, January 18). *Corriere d'Informazione*, p. 13.

Antonioni va dai cinesi e parla di alienazione. (1972, June 2-3). *Corriere d'informazione*, p. 11.

Antonioni, M. (Director). (1972). *Chung kuo - Cina* [Motion Picture]. Italy.

Antonioni, M. (1974). *Chung Kuo Cina.* (L. Cuccu, Ed.) Torino: Einaudi.

Antonioni, M. (2009a). Fare un film e' per me vivere. In C. di Carlo, & G. Tinazzi (Eds.), *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema* (pp. 13-16). Venezia: Marsilio.

Antonioni, M. (2009b). Prefazione a "Sei film". In C. di Carlo, & G. Tinazzi (Eds.), *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema* (pp. 56-65). Venezia: Marsilio.

Antonioni, M. (2009c). La malattia dei sentimenti. In C. di Carlo, & G. Tinazzi (Eds.), *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema* (pp. 20-46). Venezia: Marsilio.

Antonioni, M. (2009d). La mia esperienza. In C. di Carlo, & G. Tinazzi (Eds.), *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema* (pp. 5-12). Venezia: Marsilio.

Antonioni, M. (2009e). La Cina e i cinesi. In C. di Carlo, & G. Tinazzi (Eds.), *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema* (pp. 102-108). Venezia: Marsilio.

Archivio Centrale dello Stato. (n.d.). *Servizi al pubblico*. Retrieved July 11, 2013, from http://www.acs.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/96/servizi-al-pubblico

Asian Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). *Regulations on the Administration of Films*. Retrieved August 10, 2016, from http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/roaof382/#6

Asianweek Staff. (2009). *Chinese American Hero: John Lone*. Retrieved January 12, 2016, from http://www.asianweek.com/2009/08/07/chinese-american-hero-john-lone-2/

Associna. (2006). *L'anno dell'Italia in Cina*. Retrieved July 11, 2016, from http://www.associna.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=372

Astra Cinematografica. (1958). La Muraglia cinese. *Mondo libero. Film giornale d'attualita'*, 1.

Augé, M. (1995). *Non-places: introduction to anthropology of supermodernity.* London, New York: Verso.

Australian Copyright Council. (2014). *Fair Dealing: what can I use without permission?* Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Copyright Council.

Bachmann, G. (1975, Summer). Antonioni after China: Art versus Science. *Film Quarterly, 28*(4), 26-30.

Baker, S. (2012, April 17). *Chart of the Day: China's GDP growth.* Retrieved January 19, 2014, from http://www.efinancialnews.com/story/2012-04-17/china-gdp-growth-bubble

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Baldi, D. (Director). (2013). *C'e' sempre un perche'* [Motion Picture]. Italy, China.

Barbaro, U. (1955, December 29). Redenzioni e celluloide. *L'Unita'*, p. 3.

Barbato, A. (1972, July 9-15). A ottobre in TV la Cina di Antonioni. *Radiocorriere TV*, pp. 18-21.

Barberis, A. 1. (2000). Making Movies? It's Like Writing Poetry. In B. Bertolucci, F. S. Gerard, T. J. Kline, & B. Sklarew (Eds.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: Interviews* (pp. 6-9). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Barile, S. (1982, February 1-6). L'epopea del Mongolo grande e terribile. *Radiocorriere TV*, pp. 44-46.

Barile, S. (1987, November 8-14). C'era una volta l'imperatore. *Radiocorriere TV, LXIV*(45), pp. 129-132.

Barmé, G. (1996). *Shades of Mao: the posthumous cult of the great leader.* New York: East gate.

Baschiera, S. (2014). From Beijing with love: The global dimension of Bertolucci's The Last Emperor. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 2*(3), 399-415.

Bayman, L. R. (2013). The Fair and the Museum: Framing the Popular. In L. R. Bayman, *Popular Italian Cinema* (pp. 1-28). Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bayman, L., & Rigoletto, S. (2013). The Fair and the Museum: Framing the Popular. In L. Bayman, & S. Rigoletto (Eds.), *Popular Italian Cinema* (pp. 1-28). Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bazin, A., & Gray, H. (1960). The Ontology of the Photographic Image. *Film Quarterly, 13*(4), 4-9.

Bergère, M.-C. (2000). *La Repubblica popolare cinese (1949-1999).* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Berlusconi attacca Prodi e pm: sono il Caimano. (2006, March 27). *Corriere della Sera*, p. 5.

Berry, C. (2010). What is transnational cinema? Thinking from the Chinese situation. *Transnational Cinemas, 1*(2), 111-127.

Bertolucci e' vicino. (1986, February 26). *Stampa Sera*, p. 17.

Bertolucci va nella Città proibita. (1985, Setpember 16). *Stampa Sera*, p. 7.

Bertolucci, B. (1987). Billions of Emperors. *Film Comment, 23*(6), 34-36.

Bertolucci, B. (Director). (1987). *The Last Emperor* [Motion Picture]. China, Italy, UK, France.

Bertolucci, stretta finale per l'imperatore. (1984, November 6). *La Stampa*, p. 19.

Bertoni, R. (2015). *Carlo Cassola, Viaggio in Cina*. Retrieved October 20, 2016, from http://cartescoperterecensionietesti.blogspot.com.au/2015/06/carlo-cassola-viaggio-in-cina.html

Bertozzi, M. (2010). Paradigmi dal secolo breve. Il documentario. In V. Zagarrio (Ed.), *Carlo Lizzani. Un lungo viaggio nel cinema* (pp. 269-280). Venezia: Marsilio.

Bertuccioli, G., & Masini, F. (2014). *Italia e Cina.* Roma: L'Asino d'oro.

Biamonte, F. (1981, 9 1-7 March). In giro per il mondo con Marco Polo. *Radiocorriere TV*(9), pp. 20-23.

Bloom, M. E. (2016). *Contemporary Sino-French Cinemas.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Bocconetti, G. (1980a, February 17-23). In Cina col Marco Polo TV. *Radiocorriere TV*(8).

Bocconetti, G. (1980b, December 1-6). Buon viaggio Marco Polo. *Radiocorriere TV*(49), pp. 29-31.

Bocconetti, G. (1980c, November 16-22). Che fatica trovare Marco Polo. *Radiocorriere TV*(47), pp. 28-32.

Bocconetti, G. (1980d, November 9-15). Nasce il Marco Polo. *Radiocorriere TV*(46), pp. 32-34.

Bocconetti, G. (1980e, November 23-29). Marco Polo scopre Venezia. *Radiocorriere TV*(48), pp. 30-37.

Bocconetti, G. (1980f, December 7-13). Chi ha paura di Marco Polo? *Radiocorriere TV*(50), pp. 29-30.

Bocconetti, G. (1980g, October 12-18). Il primo amore di Marco Polo. *Radiocorriere TV*(42), p. 31.

Bocconetti, G. (1981a, March 1-7). A Erfoud sulla via del Qataj. *Radiocorriere TV*(9), pp. 23-25.

Bocconetti, G. (1981b, May 3-9). Montaldo: ci attendono a Pechino. *Radiocorriere TV*(18), pp. 29-31.

Bona, S. (2014). Italian Filmmakers in China and Changing Cultural Perceptions: Comparing "Chung kuo – China" (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1972) and "La stella che non c'è / The Missing Star" (Gianni Amelio, 2006). *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 2*(1), 41-58.

Bona, S. (2015). Italian-Chinese film co-productions: An interview with Andrea Cicini. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 3*(3), 389-392.

Bondanella, P. (2001). *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present.* New York: Continuum.

Bonsaver, G. (2007). *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy.* Toronto : Toronto University Press.

Bonsaver, G. (2010). Themes and challenges for Italian film studies. *The Italianist, 30*(Film Issue), 272-289.

Bonsaver, G. (2011). The aesthetics of documentary filmmaking and Giallo a Milano: An interview with film director Sergio Basso and sociologist Daniele Cologna. *The Italianist, 31*(2), 304-18.

Bonsaver, G. (2014). Censorship from the Fascist Period to the Present. In P. Bondanella (Ed.), *The Italian Cinema Book* (pp. 66-73). London: British Film Institute.

Bonsaver, G., & Gordon, R. (Eds.). (2005). *Culture, Censorship and the State in 20th Century Italy.* Oxford: Legenda.

Bonzi, E. (1999). L'avventura diventa cinema. In E. Bonzi, & C. Soffici (Eds.), *Leonardo Bonzi: l'uomo che partiva sempre. Storia di un Italiano non qualunque* (pp. 219-262). Milano: Mursia.

Bonzi, E., & Soffici, C. (1999). *Leonardo Bonzi: l'uomo che partiva sempre. Storia di un Italiano non qualunque.* Milano: Mursia.

Bonzi, L. (1957a, November 2). Una gigantesca diga scolorira' il Fiume Giallo. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 5.

Bonzi, L. (1957b, November 12). Montone vivo da da palla per i Kasaki del Sinkiang. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 5.

Bonzi, L. (1957c, November 23). Adorano Mao pero' non sono comunisti. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 5.

Bonzi, L. (1957d, December 3). La giunca scopo della vita. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 5.

Bonzi, L. (1957e, December 26). Ai lama della Mongolia non son giunte le penne a sfera. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 3.

Bonzi, L. (1958, January 5). Viaggiare in Cina e' sempre molto difficile. *La Domenica del Corriere*, pp. 18-19.

Bonzi, L. (1959). *La Muraglia cinese.* Novara: De Agostini.

Borsa, G. (1990). Cina: una modernizzazione contrastata. *Asia Major*, 11-45.

Bowker, G. (1987, February 1). *Bertolucci Brings Back Imperial China.* Retrieved June 10, 2013, from http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/movies/bestpictures/emperor-ar1.html

Box Office Mojo. (2016). *The Last Emperor*. Retrieved January 20, 2016, from http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=lastemperor.htm

Brancati, D. (1984). *Dal Milione di Marco Polo ai 34 miliardi della RAI*. Retrieved February 25, 2015, from http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1984/07/17/dal-milione-di-marco-polo-ai-34.html

Bridging the Dragon. (n.d.). *About*. Retrieved December 11, 2016, from http://www.bridgingthedragon.com/en/About.php

Brizio-Skov, F. (2011). *Popular Italian Cinema: Culture and Politics in a Postwar Society.* London, New York: I.B. Tauris.

Brody, R. (2011). *Wasted on the Young*. Retrieved August 22, 2017, from https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/03/28/wasted-on-the-young

Bronfen, E. (2013). Monumental Cleopatra: Hollywood's Epic Film as Historical Re-imagination. *Anglia, 131*(2-3), 218-235.

Brunatto, P. (Director). (1986). *Nostalgia di un Colossal* [Motion Picture]. Italy.

Brunetta, G. P. (1985). *La cinepresa e la storia. Fascismo antifascismo guerra e resistenza nel cinema italiano.* Milano: Mondadori.

Brunette, P. (1998). *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burgoyne, R. (1998). The Stages of History. In B. H. Sklarew (Ed.), *The Last Emperor: Multiple Takes* (pp. 223-233). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Burns, J. F. (1986). *'Tai-pan' Contrasts Old China and New*. Retrieved January 11, 2016, from http://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/27/movies/tai-pan-contrasts-old-china-and-new.html?pagewanted=1

Businessdictionary.com. (2015). Retrieved June 22, 2015, from http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/globalization.html

Butler, A. (2012). *Film Studies.* New York: Oldcastle Books .

Cain, R. (2011). *How to be Censored in China: A Brief Filmmaking Guide*. Retrieved August 10, 2016, from http://www.indiewire.com/2011/11/how-to-be-censored-in-china-a-brief-filmmaking-guide-50870/

Cain, R. (2012). *China's Leading Movie Production Companies*. Retrieved June 23, 2015, from http://chinafilmbiz.com/2012/07/29/chinas-leading-movie-production-companies/

Callick, R. (2016). *Beijing's great wall of film censorship*. Retrieved September 23, 2016, from http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/film/beijings-great-wall-of-film-censorship/news-story/524c10b7cf3fa878fef3a2d938f51181

Cannella, M. (1973). Ideology and Aesthetic Hypotheses in the Criticism of Neo-Realism. *Screen, 14*(4), 5-60.

Cao, Q. (2014). *China under Western Gaze.* Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.

Caprara, F. (2005, November 29). Il mio Marco Polo si chiama Castellitto e fa l'operaio in Cina. *La Stampa*, p. 30.

Capretti, L. (1982a, March 14-20). A New York come Superman. *Radiocorriere TV*(10-11), p. 43.

Capretti, L. (1982b, June 6-12). Una festa di turbanti nella 5a strada. *Radiocorriere TV*(23), p. 51.

Carcano, L. (2014). *Maria Grazia Cucinotta al China day: Produrrò 3 nuovi film con la Cina*. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from http://www.lapresse.it/spettacolo-e-cultura/l-intervista-maria-grazia-cucinotta-al-china-day-produrro-3-nuovi-film-con-la-cina-1.596509

Carroll, N. (1996). *Theorizing the moving image.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Casiraghi, U. (1958, October 11). Cio' che dice e cio' che tace il primo film italiano sulla Cina. *L'Unita'*, p. 3.

Cassola, C. (1956). *Viaggio in Cina.* Milano: Feltrinelli.

Cattleya. (2010). *The Company - About Us*. Retrieved August 11, 2016, from http://www.cattleya.it/about/?

Cavalera, F. (2004, December 7). La Cina riconosce il ruolo internazionale di Roma. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 9.

'C'è sempre un perché' - Nel cast Cucinotta e Marini, 2012. (2012). Retrieved 5 9, 2013, from Cinemaitaliano.info: http://www.cinemaitaliano.info/news/13720/c-e--sempre-un-perche--nel-cast-cucinotta.html

Cecca, S. (Director). (2007). *Two Tigers* [Motion Picture]. Italy.

Ceraolo, F. (2012). *The Cinematic Image as a Form of Mediation: A Conversation with Vittorio Storaro.* Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis Cinema.

CFCC. (2004). *The Stipulation of Administration on Chinese-Foreign Film Co-production*. Retrieved August 10, 2016, from http://www.cfcc-film.com.cn/policeg/content/id/1.html

CFCC. (2014). *China Film Co-production Corporation - About*. Retrieved March 16, 2015, from http://www.cfcc-film.com.cn/introeg/intro.html

Chanda, N. (1999, June 10). Asian Millennium -- Early Warning: Asia got a glimpse of the perils of globalization three centuries ago when an influx of silver boosted trade but also sowed the seeds of war . *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 46.

Chang, I. (1997). *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II.* New York: BasicBooks.

Chatman, S. B. (2008). *Michelangelo Antonioni: The Complete Films.* Koeln: Taschen.

China's economy: Hello America. (2010). Retrieved June 22, 2015, from The Economist: http://www.economist.com/node/16834943

Chow, R. (2001). A Phantom Discipline. *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, 116*(5), 1386-1395.

Cina - Arrivano le uova di gomma: una vola lessate, rimbalzano. (2012, February 10). Retrieved January 19, 2014, from http://www.corriere.it/esteri/12_febbraio_10/uova-gomma-cina_d9f85886-53cc-11e1-a1a9-e74b7d5bd021.shtml

Cinemaitaliano.info. (2012). *"C'e' sempre un perche' " - Nel cast Cucinotta e Marini*. Retrieved June 10, 2013, from http://www.cinemaitaliano.info/news/13720/c-e--sempre-un-perche--nel-cast-cucinotta.htm

CineNotes. (2016). La conferenza stampa ANEC-ANEM-ANICA: i risultati CINETEL. *CineNotes*(2432), 1-2.

Clark, P. (2012). Artists, Cadres, and Audiences: Chinese Socialist Cinema, 1949–1978. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (pp. 42-56). Chichester: Blackwell.

Collotti Pischel, E. (1994). *Storia dell'Asia orientale.* Roma: La Nuova Italia Scientifica.

Colucci, M. (2008). *Forza lavoro in movimento: l'Italia e la migrazione in Europa, 1945-1957.* Rome: Donzelli.

Colucci, M. (2008). *Forza lavoro in movimento: l'Italia e la migrazione in Europa, 1945-1957.* Viterbo: Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Doctorate thesis.

ComiConverse. (2016). *Why Hollywood Needs To Cease Grovelling To China*. Retrieved September 23, 2016, from http://comiconverse.com/hollywood-needs-cease-grovelling-china-11251

Commissione Parlamentare di Inchiesta sul fenomeno della Mafia e sulle altre associazioni criminali, a. s. (2013). *Doc. XXIII n. 16 Tomo 1: Relazione Conclusiva.* Rome: Tipografia del Senato.

Committeri, G., & La Torre, M. (2008). *Agevolazioni fiscali per il cinema: Studio in materia di credito d'imposta per l'industria cinematografica italiana.* Roma: ANICA.

Connor, K. (Director). (2007). *Marco Polo* [Motion Picture]. USA.

Coonan, C. (2014, April 16). *China Film Import Quota Will Open Up in 2017, Says Top Local Producer.* Retrieved February 11, 2017, from http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/china-film-import-quota-increase-696708

Coralluzzo, W. (2008). Italy's foreign policy toward China: missed opportunities and new chances. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 13*(1), 6-24.

Corliss, R. (2007). *When Antonioni Blew Up the Movies*. Retrieved November 5, 2016, from http://content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1649984,00.html

Correia Gil, A. C. (2014). Globalization and Cultural Identities: A Contradiction in Terms? In R. S. Fortner, & P. M. Fackler (Eds.), *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory* (pp. 462-479). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Corsi universitari in lingue orientali. (n.d.). Retrieved February 16, 2012, from Alagoas: http://www.alagoas.it/Formazione/formazione61.asp

Crespi, A. (2005). *Dal Polo all'Equatore. I film e le avventure di Giuliano Montaldo.* Venezia: Marsilio.

Cristiano, A. (2013). The New Stakes for National Cinemas, a Word on the Case of Italy, and an Interview with Ivan Cotroneo. *California Italian Studies, 4*(2), 1-20.

Crofts, S. (2006). Reconceptualising National Cinema/s. In V. Vitali, & P. Willemen (Eds.), *Theorising National Cinema.* London: British Film Institute.

Crowther, B. (1959, December 10). *Behind the Great Wall (1959): Smells of China; Behind the Great Wall Uses AromaRama.* Retrieved February 15, 2012, from New York Times: http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E03EEDA103CE63BBC4852DFB4678382649EDE

Da domani le nuove mille lire. (1982 , July 28). *L'Unita'*, p. 4.

Dalla Gassa, M. (2016). *Orient (to) Express: Film di viaggio, etno-grafie, teoria d'autore.* Milano, Udine: Mimesis.

Dargis, M. (2008, January 18). *Those Days of Doom on the Yangtze.* Retrieved February 11, 2017, from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/18/movies/18stil.html

De Cesare, C. (2012). *Chiude l'ultimo Blockbuster Italia, l'annuncio ufficiale sul sito internet: «Grazie a tutti»*. Retrieved August 3, 2016, from http://www.corriere.it/economia/12_giugno_05/blockbuster-chiude-messaggio_3a181c64-af04-11e1-8a11-a0e309a9fded.shtml

De Santi, P. M. (2010). Il comunismo in contropiede. La muraglia cinese. In V. Zagarrio (Ed.), *Carlo Lizzani. Un lungo viaggio nel cinema* (pp. 281-290). Venezia: Marsilio.

Deleuze, G. (1989). *Cinema 2: The Time-Image.* (H. T. Galeta, Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

di Carlo, C., & Tinazzi, G. (. (2009). *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema.* Venezia: Marsilio.

Di Chiara, F. (2014). Connecting the West to the East: Giuliano Montaldo's Marco Polo as the first Italian and Chinese film co-production. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 2*(3), 383-398.

Direzione Generale per il Cinema; Fondazione dello Spettacolo. (2014). *Rapporto. Il Mercato e l'Industria del Cinema in Italia - 2013.* Retrieved October 25, 2015, from http://www.cineconomy.com/2013/pdf/Executive_summary_2013.pdf

Dirks, T. (2014). *The Oscars 1990s*. Retrieved December 4, 2014, from http://www.filmsite.org/aa94.html

Dirks, T. (2016). *Epics - Historical Films*. Retrieved January 14, 2016, from http://www.filmsite.org/epicsfilms.html

Dirks, T. (2017). *The history of film: The 1950s - Part 2*. Retrieved September 15, 2017, from http://www.filmsite.org/50sintro2.html

Dixon, W. W. (2016). *I vinti directed by Michelangelo Antonioni*. Retrieved August 22, 2017, from http://blog.unl.edu/dixon/2016/07/14/michelangelo-antonionis-i-vinti-the-vanquished-1952/

Douban.com. (2015, January 9). *中国 Chung Kuo - Cina (1972)* . Retrieved January 9, 2015, from http://movie.douban.com/subject/1292327/

Douban.com. (2017). *Antonioni*. Retrieved February 22, 2017, from https://www.douban.com/search?q=antonioni

Dubla, F. (1998). *Il movimento del '68 e la genesi del maoismo militante in Italia.* Retrieved February 15, 2012, from SDS-Website: http://www.isioma.net/sds13701.html

Duesse. (2005). *Cinema: 'La stella che non c'è' ottiene il contributo Eurimages* . Retrieved January 20, 2016, from http://e-duesse.it/News/Cinema/Cinema-La-stella-che-non-c-e-ottiene-il-contributo-Eurimages

Duggan, C. (1994). *A Concise History of Italy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eco, U. (1964). *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie delle cultura di massa.* Milano: Bompiani.

Eco, U. (1977). De Interpretatione, or the Difficulty of Being Marco Polo [On the Occasion of Antonioni's film]. *Film Quarterly, 30*(4), 8-12.

Economia mondiale, storico sorpasso di Pechino su Tokyo. (2010, August 16). Retrieved April 3, 2012, from Corriere della Sera.it: http://www.ils (La Cina terza economia mondiale, superato il Pil della Germania, 2009)ole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Finanza%20e%20Mercati/2009/01/Cina-Pil-Germania.shtml?uuid=b20da788-e267-11dd-a975-e94d8f9c74f9&DocRulesView=Libero

Economist. (2011, June 9). *Benvenuto, up to a point: The world comes to Italy.* Retrieved January 8, 2014, from The Economist: http://www.economist.com/node/18780903

Elliot, A. B. (2014). Introduction: The Return of the Epic. In A. B. Elliot (Ed.), *The Return of the Epic Film: Genre, Aesthetics and History in the 21st Century* (pp. 1-16). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

EntGroup. (2015). *China Film Industry Report 2014-2015*. Retrieved October 4, 2016, from http://english.entgroup.cn/uploads/reports/China%20Film%20Industry%20Report%202014-2015%EF%BC%88in%20brief%EF%BC%89.pdf

Fairbank, J. K. (1998). Born Too Late. In B. H. Sklarew (Ed.), *Bertolucci's "The Last Emperor': Multiple Takes* (pp. 203-210). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Fallaci, O. (2010). *Intervista con la storia .* Milano: Rizzoli (digital edition).

Ferraro, R. (1988, October 3). Due "ultimi imperatori" per gli schermi cinesi. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 4.

Filmitalia. (2016). *Shanghai International Film Festival*. Retrieved March 3, 2016, from http://www.filmitalia.org/p.aspx?t=festival&l=it&did=27014

Fiore, I. (1984, April 15-21). L'armata di terracotta per la prima volta in TV. *Radiocorriere TV*(16), pp. 20-21.

Fitzpatrick, M. (1983, January). China Images Abroad: The Representation of China in Western Documentary Films. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*(9), 87-98.

Fofi, G. (2011). La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo. In A. Apra' (Ed.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: il cinema e i film* (pp. 217-220). Venezia: Mardilio.

Follows, S. (2016). *Film vs digital – What is Hollywood shooting on?* Retrieved August 3, 2016, from https://stephenfollows.com/film-vs-digital/

Fondazione Migrantes. (2015). *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2015: sintesi.* Todi: Tau Editrice.

For ever espresso: Why Italy is not growing. (2011, June 9). Retrieved January 9, 2014, from The Economist: http://www.economist.com/node/18780853

Forgacs, D. (2014). Fascism and Italian Cinema. In P. Bondanella (Ed.), *The Italian Cinema Book* (pp. 42-49). London: British Film Institute and Palgrave Macmillan.

Framing crisis and rebirth in Italian cinema. (2010). *The Italianist, 30*(2), 272-289.

Freitag, U., & Achim, V. O. (Eds.). (2010). *Translocality: T he study of globalising processes from a southern perspective.* Leiden, Bristol: Brill.

Freund Larus, E. (2012). *Politics and Society in Contemporary China.* Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner.

Fu, Y., & Indelicato, M. E. (2017). "China loves Italy": transnational co-productions between China and Italy benind the mask of market. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 18*(1), 47-60.

Galbiati, W. (2012, January 10). *Il gruppo Ferretti ora parla cinese.* Retrieved January 13, 2014, from http://www.repubblica.it/economia/finanza/2012/01/10/news/ferretti_diventa_cinese-27854307/

Galli, G. (1993). *Storia del Pci.* Milano: Kaos.

Gallozzi, G. (2006, September 6). Amelio fa la "stella" della mostra. *L'Unita'*, p. 18.

Gambetti, G. (1980). La faccia nascosta del mondo di Marco. Intervista a Vincenzo Labella. In G. Gambetti (Ed.), *Marco Polo. Come nasce un film* (pp. 47-55). Torino: ERI Edizioni Rai.

Gambetti, G. (1983). *Sul set di Marco Polo.* Torino: ERI.

Garrahan, M. (2015). *China to become world's largest movie market within 2 years. Imax chief says Asian country set to surpass US in box office revenue and number of screens by 2017*. Retrieved December 5, 2016, from https://www.ft.com/content/90810812-9ccd-11e5-b45d-4812f209f861

Gatti, G. (1981, August 2-8). Marco Polo torna in Cina. *Radiocorriere TV*(31), pp. 20-23.

Gaudenzi, E. (2014). *Prevenire è meglio che tagliare. La precensura nel cinema italiano*. Retrieved November 2, 2016, from http://cinecensura.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Prevenire-è-meglio-che-tagliare_E-Gaudenzi.pdf

Gerard, F. S., Kline, T. J., & Sklarew, B. (2000). Introduction. In F. S. Gerard, T. J. Kline, & B. Sklarew (Eds.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: Interviews* (pp. xix-xvi). Jackson: Mississippi University Press.

Gernet, J. (1985). *China and the Christian Impact.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gianni Amelio: Il primo uomo racconta un mondo di poveri. (2012, April 01). Retrieved April 02, 2012, from Voto10: http://www.voto10.it/cinema/not.php?NewsID=4857&Titolo=Gianni%20Amelio:%20Il%20Primo%20Uomo%20racconta%20un%20mondo%20di%20poveri

Gieri, E. (1999). Landscapes of Oblivion and Historical Memory in the New Italian Cinema. *Annali d'Italianistica, 17*, 39-54.

Gil, J. (2017). *Soft Power and the Worldwide Promotion of Chinese Language Learning: The Confucius Institute Project.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Gili, J. A. (2000). Bernardo Bertolucci. In F. S. Gerard (Ed.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: interviews* (pp. 108-133). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Gili, J. A. (2014). European Co-productions and Artistic Collaboration: The Italian Response to the Hollywood Film Studio. In P. Bondanella (Ed.), *The Italian Cinema Book* (pp. 211-218). London: British Film Institute.

Ginsborg, P. (1990). *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988.* London: Penguin.

Ginsborg, P. (2003). *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State 1980-2001.* New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Giraud, F. (2014). *Critique de film: Dimance a Pekin*. Retrieved May 1, 2015, from http://www.dvdclassik.com/critique/dimanche-a-pekin-marker

Grassi, G. (1993, July 20). L'Italia si mette in mostra a Pechino. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 26.

Greiner, C., & Sakdapolrak, P. (2013). Translocality: Concepts, Applications and Emerging Research Perspectives. *Geography Compass, 7*(5), 373-384.

Grieveson, L., & Wasson, H. (2008). The Academy and Motion Pictures. In L. Grieveson, H. Wasson, & M. Anderson (Eds.), *Inventing Film Studies* (pp. xi-xxxii). North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Groot, G. (2016). *Chapter 8 – Making the World Safe (For China)*. Retrieved July 30, 2017, from https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2016/chapter-8-making-the-world-safe-for-china/

Gundle, S. (1995). *I comunisti italiani tra Hollywood e Mosca. La sfida della cultura di massa / Between Hollywood and Moscow. The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-91.* (R. Ambrosini, Trans.) Firenze: Giunti.

Gundle, S. (2014). Neorealism and Left-wing Culture. In P. Bondanella (Ed.), *The Italian Cinema Book* (pp. 77-83). London: British Film Institute.

Gunning, T. (1990). The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde. In T. Elsaesser, & A. Barker (Eds.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (pp. 56-67). London: British Film Institute.

Guo, Y. (2004). *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The search for national identity under reform.* London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. (. Hall, *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices.* London: Sage Publications.

Hanson, H., & O'Rawe, C. (2010). *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts .* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hartley, J. (1992). *The politics of pictures: the creation of the public in the age of popular media.* London: Routledge.

Hawtin, S. &. (2016). *Songs from the Year 1929*. Retrieved January 19, 2016, from http://tsort.info/music/yr1929.htm

Hendrickson, K. (2008). *Final Cut*. Retrieved January 20, 2016, from https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/720-final-cut

Higbee, W., & Lim, S. H. (2010). Concepts of transnational cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies. *Transnational Cinemas, 1*(1), 7-21.

Hobbs, S. (2015). Reconceptualising extreme art film as transnational cinema. *Transnational Cinemas, 6*(1), 33-48.

Hollywood Reporter. (2017). *China's Wanda Reports 31 Percent Increase in Film Income in 2016*. Retrieved March 28, 2017, from http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/chinas-wanda-reports-31-percent-increase-film-income-2016-964425

Hope, W., d'Arcangeli, L., & Serra, S. (. (2013). *Un Nuovo Cinema Politico Italiano? Volume I: Lavoro, Migrazione, Relazioni di Genere.* Leicester: Troubador.

Hope, W., Serra, S., & d'Arcangeli, L. (. (2014). *Un Nuovo Cinema Politico Italiano? Volume II: Il passato sociopolitico, il potere istituzionale, la marginalizzazione.* Leicester: Troubador.

Hudson, G. (1959, February). Mme. de Beauvoir in China. *Encounter*, pp. 64-66.

Hutcheon, L. (2004). Why adapt? *Post Script, 23*(3), 5-18.

IHS Markit. (2016, November 10). *Next Week China to Overtake US as World's Largest Cinema Market, IHS Markit Says.* Retrieved January 23, 2017, from http://news.ihsmarkit.com/press-release/next-week-china-overtake-us-worlds-largest-cinema-market-ihs-markit-says

Il lungometraggio "La muraglia cinese" presentato ieri alla "IV Rassegna". (1958, July 18). *Corriere della Sera*, p. 5.

IMDB. (2016). *Reviews & Ratings for Two Tigers*. Retrieved August 2016, 2016, from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0867205/reviews?ref_=tt_ov_rt

IMDb. (n.d.). *Marco Polo - Company Credits*. Retrieved June 10, 2013, from www.imdb.com/title/tt0083446/companycredits?ref_=tt_dt_co,

In Cina va in mostra lo spettacolo italiano. (1993, July 25). Retrieved March 3, 2016, from La Repubblica.it: http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1993/07/25/in-cina-va-in-mostra-lo-spettacolo.html

Ipsos. (2012, January 1). *High Hopes for 2012: Seven in Ten (72%) Global Citizens Online Think It Will Be a Better Year Than 2011*. Retrieved January 9, 2014, from www.ipsos-na.com: http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=5463

Isaacs, H. R. (1958). *Scratches on our minds: American images of China and India.* Westport: Greenwood Press.

Istat . (1986). *Sommario di statistiche storiche, 1926-1985.* Rome: Istat (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica).

Istituto Demopolis. (2016, July 1). *Demopolis: l'Europa nel giudizio dei cittadini dopo la Brexit.* Retrieved from Istituto Demopolis: http://www.demopolis.it/?p=3050

Italian Trade Commission . (2012, November). *Analisi delle esportazioni settoriali e degli investimenti diretti italiani in Cina.* Retrieved November 1, 2016, from http://www.cittadellascienza.it/siee/2014/wp-content/mediafiles/2014/07/Commercio-estero-settoriale-e-investimenti-in-Cina-2012.pdf

Italpress.com. (2012). *C'e' sempre un perche' - Cucinotta presenta una commedia a Favignana*. Retrieved June 10, 2013, from http://www.italpress.com/spettacoli/26137/-c-e-sempre-un-perche-cucinotta-presenta-commedia-a-favignana

Jacques, M. (2009). *When China rules the world: The rise of the Middle Kingdom and the end ot the Western world.* London: Allen Lane.

Jenkins, A. (1986). Disappearing World Goes to China: A Production Study of Anthropological Films. *Anthropology Today, 2*(3), 6-13.

Kaufman, D. (2013a). *Prime Focus Brings The Last Emperor into 3D*. Retrieved January 14, 2016, from https://library.creativecow.net/kaufman_debra/3D-Conversion_The-Last-Emperor/1

Kent, A., Lancour, H., & (Eds), D. J. (1977). *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science - Vol. 22.* New York: Marcel Dekker.

Kerekes, D., & Slater, D. (1993). *Killing for culture: An illustrated history of death film.* London: Creation Books.

Kline, T. J. (1998). The Last Director in China: Repetition, Encapsulation, and Transformation in Bertolucci's Cinema. In B. H. Sklarew (Ed.), *Bertolucci's "The Last Emperor": Multiple Takes* (pp. 147-172). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Kluger, J. (2013). *China's One-Child Policy: Curse of the 'Little Emperors'*. Retrieved February 3, 2016, from http://healthland.time.com/2013/01/10/little-emperors/

Knoedelseder, W. K. (1988). *Making "Emperor" in China an epic job of financing*. Retrieved January 6, 2015, from http://articles.latimes.com/1988-02-01/business/fi-26783_1_modern-china

Koch, U. (. (2000). Bernardo Bertolucci: Back from China. In F. S. Gerard (Ed.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: Interviews* (pp. 188-199). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Kokas, A. (2017). *Hollywood Made in China.* Oakland: University of California Press.

La Cina vista da Antonioni. (1972, June 24). *Corriere della sera*, p. 13.

La Cina: "Infondate le parole di Berlusconi". (2006, March 29). *Corriere della Sera*, p. 8.

La muraglia cinese. (1958, November 11). *L'unita'*.

La Presse. (2014). *Maria Grazia Cucinotta a 'China day' punta su Pechino con film 'C'è sempre un perché'*. Retrieved March 31, 2015, from http://www.lapresse.it/spettacolo-e-cultura/maria-grazia-cucinotta-a-china-day-punta-su-pechino-con-film-c-e-sempre-un-perche-1.595211

Labella, V. (1982, June 6-12). Cosi' Marco ha conquistato l'America. *Radiocorriere TV*(23), pp. 50-55.

Lambie, R. (2012). *The rise and fall of the erotic thriller*. Retrieved August 20, 2016, from http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/22017/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-erotic-thriller

Lavagnino, A. (2003). La Muraglia cinese, a 1958 Italian Film. In A. C. Lavagnino, E. Molteni, & F. Montessoro (Eds.), *Reflections on Asia. Essays in honour of Enrica Collotti Pichel* (pp. 105-118). Milano: Franco Angeli.

Laviosa, F. (2012). "Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies" (ISSN 20477368): Introduction to the journal. *The Italianist, 32*(2), 315-316.

Laviosa, F. (2012). Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies. *The Italianist, 32*(Film Issue), 315-316.

Laviosa, F. (2014). Editorial. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 2*(1), 3-6.

Laviosa, F. (2017, January). "Caffè" – The first Sino-Italian co-production: An interview with Cristiano Bortone. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 5*(1), 93-98.

Le prime cinematografiche: La muraglia cinese. (1958, October 11). *Il Sole*.

Lee, D. E., & Beck, R. N. (1954). The Meaning of "Historicism". *The American Historical Review, 59*(3), 568-577.

Legge 25 settembre 2012, n. 173 - Ratifica ed esecuzione dell'Accordo di coproduzione cinematografica tra il Governo della Repubblica italiana e il Governo della Repubblica popolare cinese, firmato a Pechino il 4 dicembre 2004, con Nota di interpretazione. (2012, October 10). Retrieved July 11, 2016, from http://www.normattiva.it/atto/caricaDettaglioAtto?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2012-10-10&atto.codiceRedazionale=012G0195&currentPage=1

Ley, D. (2009). Transnationalism. In R. Kitchin, & N. Thrift (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 388-393). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Li, F.-t. (1955). The Yellow River Will Run Clear. *China Reconstructs, 4*(11), 2-5.

Lim, D. (2008, January 20). *Blurring Reality's Edge in Fluid China.* Retrieved February 11, 2017, from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/20/movies/20lim.html

Liu, L. H. (2004). *The Clash of Empires.* Cambridge (Ma), London: Harvard University Press.

Liu, X. (2014). China's reception of Michelangelo Antonioni's Chung Kuo. *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies, 2*(1), 23-40.

Lizzani, C. (Director). (1958). *La Muraglia cinese / Behind the Great Wall* [Motion Picture]. Italy.

Lizzani, C. (1958, November 14). Una lettera di Lizzani. *Avanti!*

Lizzani, C. (2007). *Il mio lungo viaggio nel secolo breve.* Torino: Einaudi.

Lizzani, C. (2009a, June). La Muraglia cinese. Intervista a Carlo Lizzani. (E. Porcaro, Interviewer) Retrieved October 2, 2014, from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiyXDne2OlQ

Lizzani, C. (2009b, June). Carlo Lizzani and the Great Wall. (E. Porcaro, & H. Liu, Interviewers) CCTV. CCTV9, Beijing. Retrieved October 2, 2014, from http://english.cntv.cn/program/documentary/20120725/100018.shtml

Lobato, R. (2012). *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution.* London: Palgrave Macmillan / British Film Institute.

Lu, J. (2014). Walking on the margins: From Italian Neorealism to contemporary Chinese Sixth Generation. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 2*(3), 317-333.

Lubrano, A. (1972, May 21-27). Il telespettatore che giudica. *Radiocorriere TV*, pp. 42-44.

L'ultimo imperatore cinese scatena la guerra dei film tra Bertolucci e Alex Haley. (1984, June 5). *La Stampa*, p. 23.

Lumley, R. (1983). *Social Movements in Italy, 1968-78.* Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, unpublished PhD thesis.

Luo, H. (2006). Yidali. In *Ouzhou xianfa de mingyun (Ouzhou fazhan baogao 2005-2006).* Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe.

Lyanga, J. (2012, October 19). *Moguls: Jeremy Thomas.* Retrieved January 11, 2015, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyK2aRjp6kQ

Lyman, R. (2007). *Michelangelo Antonioni, Bold Director, Dies at 94*. Retrieved November 28, 2014, from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/01/movies/01antonioni.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Mack Smith, D. (1997). *Modern Italy. A Political History.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press.

Maddison, A. (1998). *Chinese Economic Performance in the Long Run.* Paris: OECD.

Manacorda, G. (1973). *Invito alla lettura di Carlo Cassola.* Milano: Mursia.

Mantey, J. (2013). *Q&A with costume designer James Acheson* . Retrieved January 12, 2016, from http://www.columbusalive.com/content/stories/2013/01/17/qa-with-costume-designer-james-acheson.html

Marco Polo (1982 TV Mini-Series): Company Credits. (n.d.). Retrieved May 8, 2013, from IMDb: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083446/companycredits?ref_=tt_dt_co

Marcorelles, L., & Bontemps, J. 1. (2000). Interview with Bernardo Bertolucci. In B. Bertolucci, & F. S. Gerard (Ed.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: Interviews* (pp. 10-16). Jackson: Mississippi University Press.

Marcus, M. (2008). Pina's Pregnancy, Traumatic Realism, and the After-Life of Open City. *Italica, 85*(4), 426-438.

Marcus, M., & O'Leary, A. (2009). Editorial. *The Italianist, 29*(2), 173-4.

Marinelli. (2010). The encounter between Italy and China: two countries, multiple stories. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 491-501.

Massey, D. B. (1994). *Space, place and gender.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Masters, K. (2013). *Erratic decisions, murky agendas: Frustrated studios are up against a not-so-secret agenda of the world's second-biggest box office market as they try to build their own entertainment studio system*. Retrieved June 24, 2015, from http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/chinese-american-movie-productions-is-444814

Matarazzo, R. (1955, December 12). 37 milioni di spettatori hanno visto i miei film. *L'Unita'*, p. 3.

Mathijs, E., & Sexton, J. (2011). *Cult Cinema: An Introduction.* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mazzanti, V. (2016). *Grande successo del China Film Forum 2016*. Retrieved December 7, 2016, from http://chinanewsitaly.com/4/2016/0909/1268.shtml

Meneguzzi Rostagni, C., & Samarani, G. (Eds.). (2015). *La Cina di Mao, l'Italia e l'Europa negli anni della Guerra fredda.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

MIBACT. (2014). *Coproduzione Italia-Cina, firmate le regole di attuazione dell'accordo*. Retrieved July 11, 2016, from http://www.cinema.beniculturali.it/Notizie/3089/90/coproduzione-italia-cina-firmate-le-regole-di-attuazione-dell-accordo/

Ministero dell'Interno. (2008, December 18). *Presentata la ricerca 'Analisi ed elaborazione dati sull'immigrazione cinese in Italia' .* Retrieved January 19, 2014, from http://www.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/notizie/immigrazione/0564_2008_12_18_rapporto_cinesi_italia.html

Ministero dell'Interno. (2008a). *Analisi ed elaborazione dati sull'immigrazione cinese in Italia.* Rome: Ministero dell'Interno.

Moliterno, G. (2000). *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture* (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005 ed.). London, New York: Routledge.

Moliterno, G. (2014). 'Mondo Cane' and the Invention of the Shockumentary. In P. Bondanella (Ed.), *The Italian Cinema Book* (pp. 172-180). London: British Film Institute.

Montaldo, G. (1980). La Cina delle meraviglie. In G. Gambetti (Ed.), *Marco Polo. Come nasce un film* (pp. 13-37). Torino: ERI Edizioni RAI.

Montaldo, G. (Director). (1982). *Marco Polo* [Motion Picture]. Italy, USA, Japan, China.

Montaldo, G. (1982, December 5-11). Una magica avventura insieme a Marco. *Radiocorriere TV*(49), pp. 40-51.

Montaldo, G., & Taricano, C. (2013). *Un marziano genovese a Roma.* Ghezzano: Felici Editore.

Morgoglione, C. (2006). *Amelio va alla scoperta della Cina ma "La stella che non c'è" delude*. Retrieved February 12, 2016, from http://www.repubblica.it/2006/09/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/cinema/venezia/intervista-amelio/intervista-amelio/intervista-amelio.html

Morto il regista e produttore Luciano Martino. Inventò i 'B movie' e il fenomeno Fenech. (2013). Retrieved July 11, 2016, from http://www.repubblica.it/spettacoli/cinema/2013/08/14/news/morto_luciano_martino_regista_di_commedie_sexy_anni_70-64781760/

Mosher, S. W. (1990). *China misperceived: American illusions and Chinese reality.* New York: Harper Collins.

Mr Felix Greene. (1985, July 2). *The Times*, p. 16.

Mu, Q. (2009, August 27). *The Final cut.* Retrieved January 5, 2015, from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2009-08/27/content_8621420.htm

Nebiolo, G. (1980). Marco e la Cina d'oggi. In G. Gambetti (Ed.), *Marco Polo. Come nasce un film* (pp. 9-11). Torino: ERI Edizioni Rai.

Nichols, B. (2010). *Introduction to Documentary, Second Edition.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ning, D. (1998). Solving Riddles and Concocting Riddles. In B. H. Sklarew (Ed.), *Bertolucci's "The Last Emperor": Multiple Takes* (pp. 213-220). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Nota di interpretazione dell'Articolo 10 dell'accordo di coproduzione cinematografica fra il governo della Repubblica Italiana e il governo della Repubblica Popolare Cinese. (2012). *Gazzetta Ufficiale*(237), 9.

Nowell-Smith, G., & Halbelstadt, I. (2000). Interview with Bernardo Bertolucci. In F. S. Gerard (Ed.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: Interviews* (pp. 241-257). Jakson: University Press of Mississippi.

Oakes, T., & Schein, L. (2006). Translocal China: An introduction. In T. Oakes, & L. Schein (Eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities and the Reimagining of Space* (pp. 1-35). Oxon, New York : Routledge.

O'Connor, J. J. (1982). *'Marco Polo' -- Italian Elegance Awash in American Sudsiness*. Retrieved November 10, 2015, from http://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/16/arts/tv-view-marco-polo-italian-elegance-awash-in-amercian-sudsiness.html

O'Leary, A., & O'Rawe, C. (2011). Against Realism: On a ' Certain Tendency' in Italian Film Criticism. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 16*(1), 107-128.

O'Regan, T. (1999). Cultural Exchange. In T. Miller, & R. Stam (Eds.), *A Companion to Film Theory* (pp. 262-294). Oxford: Blackwell.

Pagani, E. (2016, October 4). *Gli studenti italiani trovano l'America in Cina*. Retrieved from La Stampa: http://www.lastampa.it/2016/10/04/societa/gli-studenti-italiani-trovano-lamerica-in-cina-K6c0PAZtRFm8W1SJB2m5fO/pagina.html

Palmer, R. B. (1994). *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir.* New York: Twayne.

Pecorini, G. (1955a, September 26). Un'elegantissima Cina è venuta sulla Laguna. *Corriere d'Informazione*, p. 3.

Pecorini, G. (1955b, September 28). I veneziani si sono divertiti allo spettacolo dei cinesi. *Corriere d'Informazione*, p. 8.

Pelone, S. (n.d.). *Sergio Pelone - Biography*. Retrieved December 1, 2016, from http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1233855/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

People's Daily attack on Antonioni film. (1974, February 1). Retrieved June 21, 2013, from https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1974HONGK01175_b.html

Perra, E. (2011). *Conflicts of Memory: The Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy, 1945 to the Present .* Oxford: Peter Lang.

Persoli, R. (2008, January 20). *LA DISMISSIONE di Ermanno Rea e LA STELLA CHE NON C'È di Gianni Amelio*. Retrieved April 3, 2012, from Carte allineate: recensioni e testi: http://cartescoperterecensionietesti.blogspot.com.au/2008/01/la-dismissione-di-ermanno-rea-e-stella.html

Pini, M. F. (2011). *Italia e Cina, 60 anni tra passato e futuro.* Roma: L'Asino d'Oro.

Pisu, R. (1982a, December 5-11). Lo vedranno anche i cinesi, ma e' gia' ora superstar. *Radiocorriere TV*(49), p. 46.

Pisu, R. (1982b, December 19-25). Che maestri questi italiani. *Radiocorriere TV*(51), p. 52.

Pisu, R. (1984, June 24-30). Bertolucci girera' in Cina un film sulla vita di Pu Yi, l'ultimo imperatore celeste. *Radiocorriere TV, LXI*(26), 11-13.

Pollacchi, E. (2014). Spaces and bodies: The legacy of Italian cinema in contemporary Chinese film-making. *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 2*(1), 7-21.

Polo, M. (1931). *The Travels of Marco Polo - Translated in English from the text of L.F. Benedetto.* London: George Routledge & Sons.

Porcaro, E. (2013, October). *Un'intervista tv inedita. La Cina di Lizzani.* Retrieved October 2, 2014, from http://www.succedeoggi.it/2013/10/la-cina-di-lizzani/

Porro, M. (1978, May 9). Sergio Leone chiamato in Cina. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 15.

Porro, M. (2006a, September 6). Alla Cina di Amelio otto minuti di applausi. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 44.

Porro, M. (2006b, September 10). Placido rivela: Crialese battuto per un solo voto. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 43.

Prosciolti i dirigenti della RAI. (1989 , December 12). Retrieved July 10, 2015, from http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/12/13/prosciolti-dirigenti-della-rai.html

Puyi. (1987). *The Last Manchu: The Autobiography of Pu Yi, Last Emperor of China.* (P. Kramer, Trans.) New York: Pocket Books.

RAI. (1973a, February 4-10). Il servizio opinioni. Trasmissioni TV del mese di gennaio 1973. *Radiocorriere TV*, p. 112.

RAI. (1973b, April 29). Il servizio opinioni. Trasmissioni TV del mese di febbraio 1973. *Radio*, p. 128.

RAI. (1977, November 20-26). Delegazione cinese alla RAI. *Radiocorriere TV*(47), p. 147.

RAI. (1979, May 20-26). In TV il colore Antonioni. *Radiocorriere TV*, p. 20.

RAI. (1980, May 4-10). Marco Polo nasce difficile. *Radiocorriere TV*(19), p. 12.

RAI. (1982, March 14-20). In prima fila la First Lady. *Radiocorriere TV*(10-11), p. 44.

RAI. (1985, January 20-26). Anteprima a Pechino del kolossal della RAI. E ora Marco Polo parla cinese. *Radiocorriere TV*(3), p. 36.

RAI. (1988, September 4-10 September). Film in tv. *Radiocorriere TV*, p. 85.

Rai, ecco perche' tre dirigenti vanno processati. (1989). Retrieved March 6, 2015, from http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/07/25/rai-ecco-perche-tre-dirigenti-vanno-processati.html

Rampini, F. (2007). Da Simone de Beauvoir a Moravia: l'Occidente sedotto. In M. (. Capello, *La sindrome cinese* (pp. 7-27). Milano: Feltrinelli.

Rascaroli, L., & Rhodes, J. D. (2011). *Antonioni: Centenary Essays.* London: British Film Institute - Palgrave Macmillan.

Ratto, L. (2006). *Il benessere indifendibile.* Melegnano: Montedit.

Rea, E. (2002). *La dismissione.* Milano: Rizzoli.

Renmin Ribao Commentator. (1974). *A Vicious Motive, Despicable Tricks - A Criticism of M. Antonioni's Anti-China Film "China".* Beijing: Foreign Language Press.

Reportaziende. (2016). *RAI Cinema S.p.A.* Retrieved March 28, 2017, from http://www.reportaziende.it/rai_cinema_spa

Repubblica Italiana. (1945, November 3). Decreto legislativo luogotenenziale 5 ottobre 1945, n. 678 - "Nuovo ordinamento dell'industria cinematografica italiana". *Gazzetta Ufficiale*(132), p. 1.

Repubblica Italiana. (1947, May 30). Legge 16 maggio 1947, n. 379 "Ordinamento dell'industria cinematografica nazionale" . *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, pp. 1626-8.

Repubblica Italiana. (1949, December 31). Legge 29 dicembre 1949, n. 958. "Disposizioni per la cinematografia". *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, pp. 3601-7.

Repubblica Italiana. (1962, April 28). Legge 21 Aprile 1962, n. 161. " Revisione dei film e dei lavori teatrali". *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, pp. 1769-1772.

Reuters. (2017). *Paramount Pictures Strikes a $1 Billion Deal With Two Chinese Film Companies*. Retrieved March 25, 2017, from http://fortune.com/2017/01/19/paramount-pictures-china-film-investment/

Robiony, S. (1986, July 9). Bertolucci: Cina, mio laboratorio. *La Stampa*, p. 23.

Rome Film Festival. (2013). *China Day*. Retrieved November 11, 2013, from http://www.romacinemafest.it/ecm/web/fcr/en/home/rome-film-festival-viii-edition/tbs-panels/china-day

Rondi, G. L. (2000). Bertolucci: The Present Doesn't Interest Me. In F. S. Gerard (Ed.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: Interviews* (pp. 166-174). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Rossin, F. (2011). Partner. In A. Apra' (Ed.), *Bernardo Bertolucci: il cinema e i film* (pp. 187-191). Venezia: Marsilio.

Rubeo, U. (2009). Un rinnovamento senza sosta. In C. di Carlo, & G. Tinazzi (Eds.), *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema* (pp. 282-287). Venezia: Marsilio.

Russel, P. L. (1988). Necessary Attachments, Necessary Losses: The Role of Loss in the Repetition Compulsion. unpublished paper.

SACIS. (1973). Rapporto sullo svolgimento delle riprese nella Repubblica popolare cinese del film-documentario "Chung kuo - Cina. Roma.

Said, E. (1978 / 1991). *Orientalism.* London: Penguin Books.

Sala, I. M. (2016). *'No ghosts. No gay love stories. No nudity': tales of film-making in China*. Retrieved September 23, 2016, from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/sep/22/tales-of-film-making-in-china-hollywood-hong-kong#comment-83805361

Salvadori, M. L. (1990). *Storia dell'eta' moderna e contemporanea. Dalla restaurazione a oggi. Volume terzo, 1945-1993.* Torino: Loescher.

Samarani, G., & De Giorgi, L. (2011). *Lontane, vicine: le relazioni fra Cina e Italia nel Novecento.* Roma: Carocci.

Sanguinetti, T. (. (1999). *Italia Taglia.* Massa: Transeuropa.

Sani, D. (2015). *Censura 2015*. Retrieved September 23, 2016, from http://china-files.com/it/link/46320/censura-2015

Sansa, G. (1955, June 7). Sbalordito il pubblico di Parigi dagli attori del teatro cinese. *Corriere della Sera*, p. 3.

Saunders, T. J. (1995). Art, ideology, and entertainment in Soviet cinema -- Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953 by Peter Kenez / Movies for the Masses by Denise J. Youngblood / The Red Screen edited by Anna Lawton / and others. *Canadian Journal of History, 30*(1), 85.

Schlesinger, P. (2000). The Sociological Scope of 'National Cinema'. In M. Hjort, & S. Mackenzie (Eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (pp. 19-31). New York: Routledge.

Selvaggi, C. (2010). Il cinema globale di Gianni Amelio. Il ribaltamento. *Psicobiettivo, 30*(3), 149-176.

Shambaugh, D. (2013). *China Goes Global: The Partial Power.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Shaw, D. (2013). Deconstructing and Reconstructing 'Transnational Cinema'. In S. Dennison (Ed.), *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating Transnationalism in Spanish and Latin American Film* (pp. 47-65). Woodbridge: Tamesis.

Silvestri, S. (2001, Jul - Aug). A skeing of reversals: The films of Gianni Amelio. *New Left Review*(10), 119-132.

Small, P. (2010). The new Italian film history. *The Italianist, 30*(Film Issue), 272-277.

Socia, D. (2014). *Rivedere Chung kuo. Per un'allegoria della Cina*. Retrieved February 8, 2017, from http://www.china-files.com/it/link/37340/rivedere-chung-kuo-per-unallegoria-della-cina

Sorlin, P. (1996). *Italian National Cinema 1896-1996.* London, New York: Routledge.

Steger, M. B. (2013). *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stiglitz, J. (2006, April 13). *Development in Defiance of Washington Consensus.* Retrieved January 13, 2014, from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/apr/13/comment.business

Storaro, V. (1998). The Story of a Photographic Ideology. In B. H. Sklarew (Ed.), *The Last Emperor: Multiple Takes* (pp. 57-63). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Sun, H. (2009). Two China? Joris Ivens' Yukong and Antonioni's China. *Studies in Documentary Film, 3*(1), 45-59.

Sun, H. (2009). Two China? Joris Ivens' Yukong. *Studies in Documentary Film, 3*(1), 45-59.

Taormina Friends Club. (2016). *Jun.15 - C'e' sempre un perche'*. Retrieved August 3, 2016, from http://www.taormina.it/jun-15-ce-sempre-un-perche.html

Tassone, A. (2009). La storia del cinema la fanno i film. In C. di Carlo, & G. Tinazzi (Eds.), *Fare un film e' per me vivere. Scritti sul cinema* (pp. 172-191). Venezia: Marsilio.

Terzani, T. (1998). *La porta proibita.* Milano: Longanesi.

The man who screwed an entire country: The Berlusconi era will haunt Italy for years to come. (2011, June 9). Retrieved January 9, 2014, from The Economist: http://www.economist.com/node/18805327

Thorley, J. (1979). The Roman Empire and the Kushans. *Greece & Rome, 26*(3), 181-190.

Tinazzi, G. (1974). *Michelangelo Antonioni.* Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

Tobagi, W. (1970). *Storia del movimento studentesco e dei marxisti-leninisti in Italia.* Milan: Sugar.

Tobing Rony, F. (1998). The Last Emperor. In B. H. Sklarew (Ed.), *The Last Emperor: Multiple Takes* (pp. 137-145). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Tomba, L. (2002). *Storia della Repubblica popolare cinese.* Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

Totaro, D. (2010). *Zabriskie Point (1970): A Scene by Scene Analysis of a Troubled Masterpiece*. Retrieved December 3, 2014, from http://offscreen.com/view/zabriskie_point_1970

Trading Economics. (2015a). *China industrial production*. Retrieved June 25, 2015, from http://www.tradingeconomics.com/china/industrial-production

Trading Economics. (2015b). *Italy industrial production*. Retrieved June 25, 2015, from http://www.tradingeconomics.com/italy/industrial-production

Travers, J. (2000). *La fabuleuse aventure de Marco Polo (1965)*. Retrieved February 26, 2015, from http://frenchfilmsite.com/movie_review/La_Fabuleuse_aventure_de_Marco_Polo_1965.html

Tremonti, G. (2008). *La paura e la speranza.* Milano: Mondadori.

Treveri Gennari, D. (2013). Blessed Cinema: State and Catholic Censorship in Postwar Italy. In D. Biltereyst, & R. Vande Winkel (Eds.), *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorschip Around the World* (pp. 255-271). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Turturici, A. (2017, October 10). *Storia dell'insegnamento del cinese nelle università italiane*. Retrieved from saporedicina.com: https://www.saporedicina.com/storia-dellinsegnamento-del-cinese-nelle-univerista-italiane/

Tutto esaurito a Pechino per Bertolucci. (1988, August 23). *Corriere della Sera*, p. 16.

Uhalley, S. J., & Wu, X. (. (2001). *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (East Gate ed.). Armonk (New York), London: Wipf & Stock.

Un film epic, colossal e bancario. (1986, April 4). *La Stampa*, p. 25.

Unesco Institute for Statistics. (2011). *Feature Films: Cinema infrastructure - Capacity.* Retrieved April 13, 2014, from http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=56&lang=en

Valentini, C. (1997). *La storia di Dario Fo.* Milan: Feltrinelli.

Vasile, V. (2004, December 9). Ciampi agli imprenditori: l'Italia metta radici in Cina. *L'Unita'*, p. 9.

Verdone, L. (Director). (2005). *Le immagini e il tempo: Michelangelo Antonioni* [Motion Picture]. Italy.

Vergani, O. (1955, October 1). Rarissime volte abbiamo assistito a spettacolo piu' alto e semplice. *Corriere d'Informazione*, p. 3.

Vettori, G. (1973). *La sinistra extraparlamentare in Italia.* Rome: Newton Compton.

Vice. (1958a, November 13). Cade la cortina di bambu' davanti alla macchina da presa. *Avanti!*

Vice. (1958b, November 13). La muraglia cinese. *Il Messaggero*.

Vigorelli, G. (1958). *Domande e risposte per la nuova Cina.* Caltanissetta-Roma: Sciascia.

Vitali, V., & Willemen, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Theorising National Cinema.* London: British Film Istitute.

Vitella, F. (2013). Technological innovation and filmmaking culture. Italian personnel facing widescreen revolution. In A. Bertolli, M. Panelli, & A. Mariani (Eds.), *Il cinema si impara? Sapere, formazione, professioni. Can We Learn Cinema? Knowledge, Training, the Profession* (pp. 267-275). Udine: Forum.

Vitti, A. C. (2009). *I film di Gianni Amelio.* Pesaro: Metauro.

Wang, Y., & Gao, S. (2008). *Recurrence of Dispute over Pu Yi's From Emperor to Citizen*. Retrieved January 8, 2016, from http://www.chinaipmagazine.com/en/journal-show.asp?id=297

Welch, D. (2010, March 29). *Geely buys Volvo. Believe it or not, it could work.* Retrieved January 13, 2014, from http://www.businessweek.com/autos/autobeat/archives/2010/03/geely_buys_volvo_believe_it_or_not_it_could_work.html

WHO. (n.d.). *Mental Health*. Retrieved October 28, 2016, from http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/mental-health

Willemen, P. (2006). The National Revisited. In V. Vitali, & P. Willemen (Eds.), *Theorising National Cinema.* London: British Film Institute.

Williams, L. R. (2005). *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Wong, J. (2016). *What Wanda Would Want With Viacom's Paramount*. Retrieved October 3, 2016, from http://www.wsj.com/articles/what-wanda-would-want-with-viacoms-paramount-1468492249

World Bank. (2015). *GDP growth (annual %)*. Retrieved June 25, 2015, from http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG

World Bank. (2015a). *Manufacturing, value added (annual % growth)*. Retrieved June 25, 2015, from http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.IND.MANF.KD.ZG

Wren, C. (1982, May 9). *On Location with Marco Polo.* Retrieved November 11, 2015, from http://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/09/magazine/on-location-with-marco-polo.html?pagewanted=all

Xiao, Z. (2013). Prohibition, Politics and Nation-Building: A History of Film Censorship in China. In D. Biltereyst, & R. Vande Winkel (Eds.), *Silencing cinema. Film censorship around the world.* (pp. 109-130). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Xinhua. (2016). *China introduces film industry law*. Retrieved December 19, 2016, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/07/c_135812127.htm

Ying, N. (1982, June 6-12). Un impasto di storia e di verita'. *Radiocorriere TV*(23), pp. 52-3.

Young, D. (2006, October 9-15). The Missing Star (La stella che non c'è). *Variety*, 74.

Yuen, L. (2013). *Unable to Cope: China's Inadequate Care of the Mentally Ill*. Retrieved January 22, 2016, from http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/07/unable-to-cope-chinas-inadequate-care-of-the-mentally-ill/278170/

Zagarrio, V. (Ed.). (2010). *Carlo Lizzani: un lungo viaggio nel cinema.* Venezia: Marsilio.

Zhang, T. (2009). The legend of a filmmaker and a country – fifty years of Ivens and China. *Studies in Documentary Film, 3*(1), 35-44.

Zhang, Y. (2010). Transnationalism and Translocality in Chinese Cinema. *Cinema Journal, 49*(3), 135-139.

Zhang, Y. (2012). Directors, Aesthetics, Genres. Chinese Postsocialist Cinema, 1979–2010. In Y. Zhang (Ed.), *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (pp. 57-74). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Zhu, P. (2011). Destruction, Moral Nihilism and the Poetics of Debris in Jia Zhangke's Still Life. *Visual Anthropology, 24*(4), 318-328.

Zonta, D. (2006, August 17). Amelio: cerco in Cina l'Italia operaia. *L'Unita'*, p. 16.

视频: 黄海波携手'邦女郎'《事出有姻》成都热拍 看东方. (2012). Retrieved May 9, 2013, from Youku.com: http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNDEyNTQ3Mzg0.html

Interviews

Bigazzi, L., 2016. Skype interview with Luca Bigazzi. 23 July.

Montaldo, G., 2014. Interview with Giuliano Montaldo. Rome, 13 June.

Pelone, S., et al., 2014. Interview with Sergio Pelone, Sandro Cecca and Alessandro Minisola. Rome, 11 June.

Tovoli, L., 2014. Interview with Luciano Tovoli. Rome and Venice, June-July 2014.