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Neither for, nor against Mao: PCI-CCP interactions and the normalisation of Sino-Italian Relations, 1966–71

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the Italian Communist Party (PCI)'s interactions with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the years immediately preceding the normalisation of Sino-Italian relations. The present work highlights three aspects of this dynamic: the PCI's rewriting of its identity as a foreign policy making actor independent of the US and the USSR, and neither dismissive nor laudatory of Mao; the PCI's establishment of partnerships with actors at home and abroad to allow for its China-policy blueprints to come to fruition; and the efforts of PCI-affiliated intellectuals toward making a rapprochement between the PCI and the CCP possible.

KEYWORDS

Italy; China; Mao; East-West relations

Introduction

In March 1963, the editors of *Red Flag Magazine* (*Hongqi*, 红旗) issued 'More on the Differences Regarding Comrade Togliatti and Us', assessing Palmiro Togliatti's report to the 10th Congress of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). At the time, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organ took issue with Togliatti's use of Marxist-Leninist phraseology, allegedly employed to downplay his substitution of notions such as 'class struggle' and 'proletarian revolution' with 'new ideas' (*xin gainian*, 新概念) of 'class collaboration' and 'structural reform'.¹ Togliatti was also accused of invoking the advent of a 'peaceful competition' between socialist countries and the bourgeois ruling classes for the 'establishment of an economic and social order capable of satisfying all the aspirations of men', thereby excluding the need for a 'people's revolution' to occur anywhere in Europe.² Lastly, Togliatti was blamed for arguing that the existing contradictions between imperialist countries could be harmonised through the establishment of 'organic commercial and economic alliances among groups of states' – a statement clearly hinting at the economic reforms that Europe would undertake in the name of greater integration a decade later.³ Unsurprisingly, Togliatti's ideas were labeled as 'undecided and unclear'

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¹The Editorial Department of *Hongqi* [Red Flag], *Zai lun Taoliyadi tongshi yu women de fenqi – guanyu Liening zhuyi zai dangdai de ruogan zhongda wenti* [More on the differences between comrade Togliatti and us – Some important problems of Leninism in the contemporary world] (Beijing, 1963), 13–14.

²*Ibid.*, 15.

³*Ibid.*, 18–19.

(*moleng*, 模稜) at best, ‘preposterous’ (*huangmiu*, 荒謬) at worst. What the Chinese *nomenklatura* failed to predict, however, was that the PCI’s partial departure from Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy would contribute to the normalisation of Sino-Italian relations.⁴ By neither eulogising nor antagonising Maoist China, it is here argued that the Italian Communists helped bring Beijing closer to Rome – a first step toward transforming Sino-Italian relations into a testing ground for China’s broader engagement with the Western world.

The theme of Sino-Italian ties at the height of the Cold War has attracted the attention of historians Ennio Di Nolfo and Enrico Fardella, who have moved beyond the ‘bipolar paradigm’ to study the Cold War as a complex network of relations between major and minor powers.⁵ Fardella in particular has explored the normalisation of Sino-Italian ties by looking at China’s interactions with the Italian government between 1968 and 1970, later expanding the scope of his research to cover almost the entire duration of the Cold War (1949–89).⁶ The risk of solely focusing on the inter-governmental dimension of Sino-Italian relations, however, implies overlooking *inter-communist party ties* – a channel through which a communist single-party regime would interact with its political counterparts abroad, instead of having to deal solely with right-wing (and potentially hostile) governing parties. This has led historians to focus on the autonomous role that the PCI played in forging contemporary Italian foreign policy.

Works focused on the extra-European dimension of the PCI’s international relations include analyses of the impact of the Italian Communists on the decolonisation of Africa and their relationship with the Middle East and North Africa region, Cuba, and North Vietnam.⁷ Among those who have paid attention to the PCI’s ties to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Marco Galeazzi has offered an overview of the PCI’s engagement with Beijing, but only within the broader context of Italy’s relations with the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).⁸ With a more substantial focus on China alone, Guido Samarani and Sofia Graziani have explored the evolution of PCI-CCP ties, albeit not extending their research beyond the 1949–65 timeframe.⁹

These works testify that a significant number of documents from PCI archives have already been included in the historiography. None of the aforementioned works, however, has examined primary sources documenting PCI-CCP relations in the years immediately preceding the normalisation of Sino-Italian ties. This was a time of great

⁴Sylvia Sprigge, “De-Stalinization in the Italian Communist Party,” *The World Today* 18, no. 1 (1962): 23–9.

⁵Ennio Di Nolfo, *La Normalizzazione delle Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese* (Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli, 2010), 1–58; Enrico Fardella, “The Normalization of Relations between Italy and the People’s Republic of China,” in *Italy’s Encounters with Modern China: Civilizational Exchanges, Imperial Dreams, Strategic Ambitions*, ed. Giovanni B. Andornino and Maurizio Marinelli (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014), 117–46.

⁶Enrico Fardella, “A Significant Periphery of the Cold War: Italy-China Bilateral Relations, 1949–1989,” *Cold War History* 2, no. 17 (2016): 181–97.

⁷Paolo Borruso, *Il PCI e l’Indipendenza Africana. Apogeo e Crisi di un’Utopia Socialista* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2009); Luca Riccardi, *Il “Problema Israele”: Diplomazia Italiana e PCI di Fronte allo Stato Ebraico (1948–1973)* (Rome: GueriniStudio, 2006); Onofrio Pappagallo, *Il PCI e la Rivoluzione Cubana. La “Via Latino-Americana al Socialismo” tra Mosca e Pechino, 1959–1965* (Rome: Carocci, 2009); Elisa Giunipero, *Il Contributo Italiano alla Pace in Vietnam* (Milan: EDUCatt Università Cattolica, 2012).

⁸Marco Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi Non Allineati, 1955–1975* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2011).

⁹Guido Samarani and Sofia Graziani, “Yidali gongchandang yu Zhonghua renmin gongheguo: zhengzhi lianxi yu jiaoliu, 1949–1965” [The Italian Communist Party and the People’s Republic of China: political ties and exchanges, 1949–1965], *Lengzhan guoji shi yanjiu* [Cold War International History Studies] 1 (2015): 5–29.

historical relevance, however, as it witnessed the completion of the first cycle of the Cultural Revolution in the PRC and the relative decay of the Centre-Left in Italy— a background against which the PCI, as it is shown, attempted to implement its own PRC-focused foreign policy blueprints.¹⁰

The present work is divided into three sections. While section one examines the PCI's initial attempts at formulating an autonomous foreign policy targeting China, section two assesses how the PCI moved from theory to action, implementing a foreign policy strategy that could bring the Italian Communists closer to Kim Il-sung's Korean Workers' Party (KWP), while engaging with Italian Prime Minister (PM) Aldo Moro and the leftist-leaning current of the Christian Democracy (DC), known as *Sinistra di Base*, at the domestic level. The third and last section of this paper examines the contribution of lower-ranking actors within the PCI to the initial phase of the normalisation of Sino-Italian ties, making a contribution to our understanding of this relationship away from works which have mainly focused on the actions of individual, high-ranking PCI Central Committee (CC) members and their attitudes toward China.

Repeated calls to unity (January–November 1966)

In 1966, while a 'constructed peace' kept Europe stable, the Cold War ravaged other endpoints of the Eurasian landmass: the escalation of the Vietnam War raised tensions between the two traditionally opposing camps; the frail cohesion of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) faltered with the outbreak of the Indo-Pakistani conflict; and in the PRC, Mao Zedong kept 'fighting with two fists', while entrusting the keys of a perpetual revolution against the CCP to Chinese youths.¹¹

China's rupture from the socialist camp presented the PCI with an opportunity to develop its own foreign policy stance for the first time since Palmiro Togliatti's passing in 1964. The PCI's intention to forge ties with the PRC was in line with its vision of reasserting Rome's equidistance from both Moscow and Washington DC.¹² Prior to adopting a strategic posture vis-à-vis China, however, the Italian Communists first needed to elaborate one. The 'elaboration phase' of this posture, while generally overlooked in the literature, began in January 1966 and lasted until November of the same year: a policy-making exercise which would pave the way for the PCI's effective engagement with the CCP throughout the late 1960s.

At the heart of an autonomous foreign policy targeting China was the Italian Communists' decision to uphold an intermediate position toward Mao. While on the one hand the PCI denounced Beijing for having undermined the unity of global communism and for having embarked on the self-imposed folly of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), on the other it praised the PRC for having

¹⁰Marie-Claire Bergère, *La Cina dal 1949 ai Giorni Nostri*, trans. Giorgia Viano Marogna (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 171–2; Giovanni Mario Ceci, *Moro e il PCI: la Strategia dell'Attenzione e il Dibattito Politico Italiano, 1967–1969* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), 66.

¹¹Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: the Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, 1999), 399; Joseph Yu-Shek Cheng and Franklin Wankun Zhang, "Chinese Foreign Relations Strategies Under Mao and Deng: a Systematic and Comparative Analysis," *Politics and Governance* 14, no. 3 (1999): 96.

¹²See: Luigi Longo, "Per la Pace, per Avanzare sulla Via Italiana al Socialismo per una Nuova Maggioranza Democratica e l'Unità delle Forze Operaie e Socialiste," in *Da Gramsci a Berlinguer: la Via Italiana al Socialismo Attraverso i Congressi del Partito Comunista Italiano, IV, 1946–1975*, ed. Daniele Pugliese and Orazio Pugliese (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1985), 20–3.

protected Vietnam against US aggression. Others within the PCI tried to understand the Maoist rationale behind the GPCR by comparing it to the situation that the USSR faced after the assassination of Sergei Kirov.¹³ While apparently contrasting, these messages were ‘calls to unity’ aimed at bringing Mao back into the inclusive framework of international socialism.¹⁴

The intellectual premises of this foreign policy approach came from the works of Giorgio Amendola and the late Secretary General Palmiro Togliatti.¹⁵ Amendola was among the first PCI leaders to recognise the need for the Party to engage with communist counterparts abroad, and to not be afraid of criticising their chosen course of action. He first elaborated his views at a PCI Central Committee meeting on 10 November 1961, when key PCI figures gathered to discuss policy priorities that had become available to them following the de-Stalinisation of the CPSU. To Amendola, the relative lack of foreign policy supervision from the CPSU finally allowed room for ‘polycentrism’, which was to become the guiding principle of the PCI’s foreign policy:

Polycentrism has now become necessary. It won’t weaken internationalism ... We Italian communists must take part in the discussion of every question and express our autonomous judgement on the policies of other parties, on the causes of their successes and failures The whole party wants to take part in international discussions.¹⁶

Building on Amendola’s views, Palmiro Togliatti emphasised the need for the PCI and other communist parties never to antagonise China: an idea which first emerged in his 1964 ‘Yalta Memorandum’, in which he warned Soviet leaders against ‘allowing the Chinese schism to widen irreparably’.¹⁷ With Togliatti’s death in 1964, however, it became difficult to determine who would carry his and Amendola’s foreign policy blueprint forward. After all, both the PCI Directorate and the party base were convinced that Togliatti’s interest in the international dimension of the PCI mandate had become the mere *apanage* of a party elite that had lost touch with its electorate.¹⁸

Enrico Berlinguer came to the fore as the most likely candidate for the protection of Togliatti’s legacy. By 1966, he had been managing the Party’s foreign affairs department for four years. Unlike several of the PCI’s militant leftist allies focusing on domestic class struggles, Berlinguer understood the significance of reshaping the identity of the PCI as a foreign policy actor within the Italian political sphere, especially in its dealings with an interlocutor as preponderant as China.¹⁹ On 1 January 1966, he articulated Botteghe Oscure’s foreign policy posture vis-à-vis Zhongnanhai in the editorial ‘La Coesistenza Pacifica’:

On the one hand, ... we cannot ignore the fact that a large-scale and calumnious imperialist campaign [targeting China] is currently taking place. On the other hand, we cannot allow for the position articulated by the Chinese comrades on issues of war and

¹³Mimmo Scarano, “Un Articolo di ‘Rinascita’: Tre Posizioni del PCI di Fronte a Mao,” *Il Giorno*, 24 September 1966.

¹⁴In the early 1950s, Mao integrated his nationalistic agenda with the CCP’s commitment to socialist internationalism. As a result of having attained greater confidence in the 1950s, however, Mao grew ‘more reluctant to accept the new leadership in Moscow within the socialist camp.’ See: Zhimin Chen, “Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 42 (2005): 41–2.

¹⁵Scarano, “Un Articolo di ‘Rinascita,’” 1966.

¹⁶Sprigge, “De-Stalinization in the Italian Communist Party,” 28.

¹⁷Luigi Barzini, “Communism, Italian Style, Has Nowhere to Go,” *The New York Times*, 13 February 1966.

¹⁸Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi Non Allineati*, 149.

¹⁹I’m here referring to the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP).

peace to be taken ... as positions of the communist movement in general, and of our party in particular. We must, therefore, openly voice our dissent²⁰

Berlinguer thus began to operate in 'solitary continuity' with Togliatti and Amendola – an initiative which required the PCI to signal its departure away from its domestic and international isolation in a more forceful manner.²¹ The PCI took advantage of two occasions in particular to do so: the PCI 11th Party Congress in January 1966; and the 45th anniversary of the establishment of the CCP in July of the same year.

The 11th PCI Party Congress took place three weeks after Berlinguer's publication of 'La Coesistenza Pacifica', and merely four days after the dissolution of the second Moro government.²² The event propelled the PCI back into the limelight, as it was the first Congress held in the aftermath of the CPSU's de-Stalinisation and the first to be led by Togliatti's successor Secretary General Luigi Longo, a moderate right-leaning Togliattian. The Party Congress also presented Berlinguer with the opportunity to show he possessed the diplomatic skill necessary to mediate between two competing camps that had formed within the PCI, one being the dissident wing of *sinistra interna* led by Pietro Ingrao, and the other being *destra comunista*, led by Giorgio Amendola and supported by Secretary Longo.²³ While members of the former faction strove to overthrow capitalism in Italy and covertly challenged Longo's leadership, members of the latter faction were right-leaning Togliattians who supported the notion of 'progressive democracy'.²⁴ While the details of the debate lie beyond the scope of this work, it needs to be noted that the 11th Congress ended with the PCI's ousting of Ingrao ('the heretic') and the exclusion of his *sinistra interna*: a political move which appeared to be going directly against the Party's intention of enhancing its internal cohesion while advocating for the unity of international communism.

Botteghe Oscure's internal struggles didn't go unnoticed in Zhongnanhai. Following the 11th CPI Party Congress, Chinese newspaper *Cankao Xiaoxi* endowed the PCI's ideological divide with new meaning, depicting it as a struggle between a pro-Soviet and a pro-Maoist faction, stating that 'the increase of Marxist-Leninist forces within the PCI' (Pietro Ingrao's *sinistra interna*) had become a threat to the 'revisionist faction' loyal to Luigi Longo.²⁵ The Secretary General was described as a leader under siege, 'incapable of doing anything' due to the influence that 'the Chinese Communist Party exerted on the PCI party base'.²⁶ The CCP's reactions to the PCI's initial calls for a united communist movement didn't turn out to be positive, either, as the PCI's ideologically strict but overall benevolent posture towards China was mistaken for an overt attack

²⁰ Enrico Berlinguer, "La Coesistenza Pacifica," *Rinascita*, 1, 1 January 1966.

²¹ Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi Non Allineati*, 15; Gian Carlo Pajetta believed the PCI to have been conditioned by "illusions" that the DC "harboured" about the domestic and foreign policy isolation of the Italian Communists. See: Gian Carlo Pajetta's report to the PCI Central Committee (CC), *l'Unità*, 15 February 1968.

²² "Una Maggioranza Compatta e Leale – dice Moro Accettando l'Incarico," *Avanti*, 26 January 1966.

²³ Lucio Magri, *Alla Ricerca di un Altro Comunismo: Saggi sulla Sinistra Italiana* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2012), 54. While members of the former faction strove to overthrow capitalism in Italy and covertly challenged Longo's leadership, Robert C. Doty, "Italy's Reds Face Threat of a Split," *The New York Times*, 23 January 1966; Magri, *Alla Ricerca di un Altro Comunismo*, 55.

²⁴ Robert C. Doty, "Italy's Reds Face Threat of a Split," *The New York Times*, 23 January 1966; Magri, *Alla Ricerca di un Altro Comunismo*, 55; "Il PCI Non Sopporta Alcun Dissenso – Ribadito il Monolitismo Comunista," *Corriere della Sera*, 29 January 1966.

²⁵ Extracts from *Cankao Xiaoxi*, 1966, Partito, Estero, 0536/1408, Fondazione Gramsci (FG), Archivio Partito Comunista (APC).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

against the CCP and the validity of its socialist experience. The CCP thus accused Secretary Longo of having failed to fully understand Mao's motives, and blamed him for having described the policies of the CCP as 'not intelligent'.²⁷

After having been accused of political monolithism in the aftermath of Pietro Ingrao's ousting, Botteghe Oscure was compelled to reflect upon its political identity and the future of its political legacy: a process which caused the Italian Communists to become caught up in another intra-party ideological debate. Now that a right-leaning group had prevailed within the PCI, but Marxist-Leninist conservatism was regaining the upper hand in France and Russia, would the PCI be able to carry out its autonomous foreign policy strategy?²⁸ In order to engage with the CCP and other communist parties abroad, would the PCI be able to synthesise 'internationalism' and the idea of 'nation', ultimately bringing Mao closer to its ideological camp?²⁹

To solve these internal conundrums while breaking the impasse it had entered with the CCP, on 7 July 1966 the PCI CC celebrated the 45th anniversary of the establishment of the CCP by issuing a call to unity to its interlocutor:

Even in Italy, ... the political fight aimed at letting our country refuse any understanding, any solidarity, any complicity with the North American aggressors continues. ... To counter the aggressions of imperialism, to protect the rights and support the strife of the Vietnamese people and of other oppressed or brutalized peoples, ... today more than ever it has become urgent to [maintain] unity within the international communist movement.³⁰

Emphasis was placed on presenting Italy in general and the PCI in particular as forces unaffected by Cold War dynamics. Once again, the PCI's ultimate aim was to bring Mao back into the overarching framework of communist internationalism out of certainty that it would have been impossible for him to achieve his *desiderata*, had he continued to antagonise the USSR. As pointed out by the director of *Rinascita* Giancarlo Pajetta, the CCP needed to ease tensions with the CPSU not in a spirit of subordinate loyalty to Moscow, but merely in recognition of the quality of the USSR's socialist experience:

Us Italian communists ... believe we are [making a contribution] even to parties which are more advanced [than us] in their socialist experience. We nonetheless believe that we'll be able to continue doing so insofar as we [can] demonstrate to have fully grasped what the fruit of the Soviet comrades' experience means to us. And this is ... because of the characteristics specific to the Soviet experience [which] ..., with its history and scope, still expresses itself in a compelling fashion³¹

Notwithstanding the PCI's *bona fide* in wishing to engage more fruitfully with the CCP, by August 1966 the GPCR loomed large on any attempt to foster Sino-Italian inter-communist party ties.³² Aware of the possible CCP isolation that was to come, the Italian Communists sought to understand China's situation more

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid. See also: Marco Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi Non Allineati* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2011), 149.

²⁹This is reflective of another PCI debate that took place in 1966. It concerned the PCI's foreign policy designs vis-à-vis the communist parties of countries belonging to the NAM. See: Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi non Allineati*, 148–9.

³⁰PCI CC to CCP CC, 7 July 1966, Partito, Estero, 0536/1571, FG, APC.

³¹Giancarlo Pajetta, "Il Congresso di Mosca," *Rinascita*, 14, 2 April 1966.

³²Mario Alicata, "La Cina e noi," *l'Unità*, 25 September 1966.

thoroughly, but had not been receiving first-hand accounts from the PRC since August 1964, when PCI member Aldo Passigli visited Beijing to meet his wife Primrose Gigliesi and report on the status of the local Italian community.³³

Botteghe Oscure thus opted to monitor the situation from afar, which was made possible by the PCI Secretariat's access to the Xinhua News Agency bulletin and to publications from Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Towards the end of 1966, while it had become clear that these publications were critical of Maoist China and the GPCR, the PCI continued publishing translated articles to illustrate the senselessness of Mao's isolation as seen by other communist regimes.³⁴ By this time, PCI leaders looking at the GPCR either 'justified' it by comparing the situation in China to that of the USSR in 1934, 'understood' it by placing it within a Marxist ideological framework, or 'severely condemned' it by disproving its Leninist foundations.³⁵ Granting visibility to articles from socialist newspapers critical of China, however, increased bilateral diplomatic tensions. As an unfavourable situation for the PRC continued unravelling at the UN, CCP Party organs immediately took issue with the Christian Democrat director of the United Nations General Assembly 20th Session Amintore Fanfani, the Christian Democrat Prime Minister of Italy and leader of a 'Western puppet regime' Aldo Moro, and Pope Paul VI.³⁶

The PCI thus sought the help of a reporter from *Rinascita*, Augusto Livi, to learn about the GPCR's most recent developments.³⁷ In October 1966, by looking at the GPCR through Augusto Livi's reports, the Italian Communists came to the sobering conclusion that the CCP had ignored their calls to solidarity after having become irreparably obsessed with the search for the country's 'superstructural unity' – a mistake which Livi believed the USSR had made, unlike Italy³⁸:

This is not about justifying [Mao's] gross errors. Rather, it is about bringing the subject back to the framework of the superstructure, and to the issues which the Italian Communist Party had to confront when it rejected State atheism, State aesthetics, and mono-partitism as the sole way to socialism. ... the distortions taking place in China will be neither understandable, nor surmountable, if we don't tackle a broad ideal debate on the function of the revolutionary party and on the way in which, often mistakenly, this function has been understood in the USSR.³⁹

Augusto Livi's account corroborated the idea by which the Italian Communists, too, could make a contribution to shaping China's socialist experience, also motivating the PCI to carry on with the formulation of its autonomous 'China policy'. With the end of the foreign policy 'elaboration phase' for Botteghe Oscure, however, time had come for the Party to allow for its foreign policy designs to enter an 'implementation phase', getting the PCI and the CCP to talk to each other, rather than *past* one another. As it is argued in the following section, the

³³Aldo Passigli, August 1966, "Report from China," Partito, Estero, 0536/1604-1611, FG, APC.

³⁴"Mosca: Articolo della Pravda sul Socialismo e l'Eredità Culturale," *l'Unità*, 17 September 1966.

³⁵Matthew E. Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Scarano, "Un articolo di 'Rinascita'," 1966.

³⁶"Furioso attacco di Nuova Cina: Pechino ingiuria il Papa, U Thant e Fanfani," *Il Tempo*, 23 September 1966.

³⁷Augusto Livi, October 1966, "Additional Letter," Partito, Estero, 0536/1639-1652, FG, APC.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 1651.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 1651–2.

domestic and international circumstances necessary for the Italian Communists to bring the CCP closer to the PCI would materialise with the unfolding of US-USSR *détente*.⁴⁰

Asymmetric alliances (December 1966–December 1969)

By December 1966, the PCI recognised that the issuing of congratulatory letters to the CCP hardly counted as part of an ‘original and autonomous’ China policy.⁴¹ It was time for the PCI to reopen its channels of direct communication with the CCP, especially after China’s schism from socialist internationalism increasingly looked like a *fait accompli*, and after the DC’s ‘secret diplomacy’ had proven a failure.⁴²

The isolation of the PRC at the height of the first cycle of the GPCR compelled the PCI not to immediately entertain relations with the CCP, but to set the ground at home and abroad for a PCI-CCP rapprochement to happen as soon as the dust started settling in the PRC. Domestically, the PCI attempted to shape the Italian coalition government’s China policy by taking advantage of Prime Minister Aldo Moro’s opening to the Italian Left and by engaging in foreign policy dialogues with the DC’s leftist current, known as *Sinistra di Base*. Internationally, the PCI fostered ties with Kim Il-sung and the KWP, often visiting Pyongyang with the intent of never losing sight of Mao. While the term ‘asymmetric alliance’ has been previously used to describe the PCI’s forging of stronger domestic ties with the Italian government, as demonstrated by the political relationship Enrico Berlinguer entertained with Aldo Moro, in this section this expression is employed to refer to the relationship that the KWP entertained with the PCI – an initially marginalised partner that the Korean comrades soon began to trust more than the CCP and the CPSU.⁴³

The PCI started moving autonomously on the Cold War chessboard as early as 5 December 1966, when Enrico Berlinguer led a PCI delegation to Hanoi.⁴⁴ While a thorough analysis of the PCI’s ties with the Vietnamese Workers’ Party (VWP) at the height of the Vietnam War is beyond the scope of this work, what is important to note is that the occasion constituted an opportunity for the PCI to

⁴⁰Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi non Allineati*, 148–57.

⁴¹Sprigge, “De-Stalinization in the Italian Communist Party,” 25.

⁴²Togliatti was the first Italian politician to send an envoy to Beijing after it became clear that the Communists had won the Chinese Civil War. See: Letter of Introduction for Velio Spano, 29 July 1949, FG, FPT, *Corrispondenza Politica*; For commentary on China’s schism, see: “Un discorso di Novotný – Praga con Mosca contro Pechino,” *Corriere della Sera*, 26 September 1966, *Archivio storico del Senato*; Chinese archival resources reveal that this strategy had merely consisted of getting Mayor of Florence Giorgio La Pira to send one letter and one telegram to Zhou Enlai to wish him a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. See: “1964 nian shengdan jie Yidali Foluolunsa shizhang zhi Zhou Enlai zongli hedian chuli yijian” [Processing advice on the Christmas 1964 telegram by the mayor of Florence Giorgio La Pira to Premier Zhou Enlai], *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaobu dang’an guan*, 24 December 1964, 117-01228-03, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, DAG FMPRC. See also: “Yidali Foluolunsa shizhang zhi Zhou Enlai zongli de dianbao” [Telegram from mayor of Florence Giorgio La Pira to Premier Zhou Enlai], *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaobu dang’an guan*, 5 January 1965, 117-01450-01, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, DAG FMPRC.

⁴³Roberto Gualtieri, “Moro e Berlinguer: Alleanze Asimmetriche nel Decennio della Distensione,” in *L’Italia dal 1943 al 1992: DC e PCI nella Storia della Repubblica*, ed. Roberto Gualtieri (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 165–203; Michele Rossi, Note on the meeting with Comrade O Man Soh, 23 April 1969, Partito Estero, 0308/1171, FG, APC.

⁴⁴PCI Directorate to CCP CC, 14 December 1966, Partito, Estero, 0536/1656, FG, APC.

be seen by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be striving to achieve its foreign policy aims independently.⁴⁵ It also became an opportunity for Botteghe Oscure to expose Hanoi to Socialism with Italian characteristics, as demonstrated by the decision of the Holy See to nominate Berlinguer as an informal spokesperson for Pope Paul VI.⁴⁶

In Vietnam, the PCI appeared to have very little room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis the Italian government, given that Ambassador Giovanni D'Orlandi, together with his US and Polish counterparts, had been very actively engaged in the drafting of a peace deal. A Cold War theatre in which it could act in solitary autonomy with the added benefit of never losing track of Mao, however, was the DPRK. After having been monitoring Pyongyang's response to Mao's anarchic drift on *Rodong Sinmun* articles as published on *Pravda*, Botteghe Oscure opted to send PCI leaders to Pyongyang four times between 1966 and 1969.⁴⁷ This was done to ensure that the GPCR was not part of a more widespread Northeast-Asian communist malaise, to explore the political implications of the Sino-Soviet split for the unity of global communism, and to invite the KWP to a new International Conference organised under the auspices of the PCI.

The first PCI delegation to the DPRK, led by Enrico Berlinguer, met with KWP CC member Kim So-sen on 19 December 1966 to discuss the DPRK's 'clear disapproval' of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁸ What emerged from the meeting was that the KWP, too, had been issuing repeated calls to unity to the CCP in the hope of maintaining socialist internationalism intact and bringing the GPCR to standstill.⁴⁹ On the following day, Kim Il-sung welcomed the PCI delegation in his private residence to discuss these matters further.⁵⁰ While admitting having grown somewhat critical of the CPSU, Kim Il-sung confirmed Kim So-sen's message, emphasising that political tensions between the CCP and the KWP had further intensified:

For what concerns the CCP: we have many divergences with the Chinese comrades. There are many things that we cannot accept; ... but above all, we cannot accept the accusation

⁴⁵See: Elisa Giunipero, *Il contributo italiano alla pace in Vietnam*, (Milan: EDUCatt, 2012), 47.

⁴⁶In his "Report from China" (August 1966), Aldo Passigli complained about the PCC's lack of understanding of what he referred to as 'the most basic terms of our situation, including the influence of the [Catholic] Church' (0536/1608). This was testament to the idea by which the Italian Communists had come to accept the influence that the Roman Catholic Church exerted over Italian society, and had started deeming it acceptable for a large share of their electorate to be both communist and of Catholic faith. See: Passigli, Report from China, 1608. In addition, a translation of an article from *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "Il Papa e i comunisti italiani", Partito, 0551/2636-2637, FG, APC; Quotes Secretary Luigi Longo's call for the Catholics to join forces with the communists in the run-up to the Congress of the PCI of 1966. For a glimpse of the broader debate on how 'the Italian way of Socialism' did not coincide with the implementation of "state atheism," see the position upheld by Lucio Lombardo Radice during the 1966 XI PCI Congress in: XI Congresso Nazionale, "Il Dibattito", in: Da Gramsci a Berlinguer: la Via Italiana al Socialismo Attraverso i Congressi del Partito Comunista Italiano IV, 1965-1975 by Daniele Pugliese and Orazio Pugliese (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1985), 64-5. See also: "È Possibile ' il Dialogo Cattolici-Comunisti,'" *l'Unità*, 2 October 1968. For a document quoting parts of an Enrico Berlinguer interview for *Rinascita* in which he mentioned having been contacted by high-ranking figures of the Holy See who had "specific requests [for the PCI] to transmit to the Hanoi government," see: Partito, Estero, 0551/2646, FG, APC. See also: Holy See Secretariat of State to Antonello Trombadori, 21 November 1966, Partito, Estero, 0537/969. In: Elisa Giunipero, *Il Contributo Italiano alla Pace in Vietnam* (Milan : EDUCatt, 2012), FG, APC; Carlo Galluzzi, *La Svolta. Gli Anni Cruciali del Partito Comunista Italiano* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer 1983), 122-5.

⁴⁷As an example, see: "Sull'organo del Partito Nord-Coreano: Duro Attacco agli 'Scissionisti Trotskisti,'" *l'Unità*, 19 September 1966.

⁴⁸Enrico Berlinguer, 19 December 1966, "Report on the First Meeting with the Korean Comrades," Partito, Estero, 0536/1737, FG, APC.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Enrico Berlinguer, 20 December 1966, "Meeting with Kim Il-sung in his Private Residence," Partito, Estero, 0536/1738-1748, FG, APC.

of no longer being a socialist country ... that the Chinese comrades direct against the USSR. We told Chinese comrades: 'give us concrete evidence of your accusations', but they haven't provided us with anything other than rhetoric.⁵¹

Of particular interest was Kim Il-sung's view of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), about which he talked at great length:

We don't know what will happen; the confrontation is now open, and is framed around three points: (1) the united front question, namely the question of which is the main enemy (imperialism or revisionism?); (2) the question of who should lead the Cultural Revolution (the Party or the Red Guards?); (3) the Maoism question (a Chinese internal affair, or an international problem?). ... we're against Maoism and Lin Biao's interpretation of the Cultural Revolution, because a man's conscience can't be transformed by force.⁵²

The Great Leader also welcomed Berlinguer's idea of organising another International Conference to restore the unity of global communism. Yet, he'd only join the Conference if it brought together *all* of the world's communist and labour parties – a difficult task to achieve, given that the CCP would not participate in the presence of the CPSU, and that communist parties from the rest of the world would not join in the absence of both the CPSU and the CCP.

What was to be done about China, then? Kim Il-sung suggested the Italian Communists set aside existing ideological divergences, and not overtly oppose the CCP. After all, the KWP leader had been silently opposing the CCP for almost a decade by preventing Maoism from entering the DPRK, but would have never taken an *openly* accusatory stance against Mao.⁵³ Kim's implicit request was for Berlinguer and the Italian Communists, therefore, to act accordingly.

However sensible, Kim Il-sung's advice did not resonate with the Italian Communists' *idée fixe* of initiating autonomous foreign policy action. Barely a month after Berlinguer's visit to Pyongyang, progressive PCI member Franco Bertone turned to *Rinascita* to voice the PCI's determination not to keep silent on the anarchic drift of Maoism, even at the expense of moving further away from the CCP:

[The international labour movement] cannot be a mere spectator. ... it should not merely follow the events and strive to understand them, but express a political judgement.... The accusations of 'interference' that may be directed against a display of interest [in the Chinese situation] surely cannot be accepted.⁵⁴

Later in the year, Bertone's views were backed up (yet softened) by Secretary General Luigi Longo, who placed emphasis on the need for the PCI to act as a protagonist of the global communist movement and, when necessary, become more vocal in denouncing Mao's mistakes⁵⁵:

Faced with all the issues that ... concern the communist and labour movement and its unity, we can't hold our position as critics and foreign mentors; instead, we want to be

⁵¹Ibid., 1743.

⁵²Ibid., 1748.

⁵³Ibid., 1748.

⁵⁴Franco Bertone, "Partito, Esercito e 'Guardie Rosse' – Inquietante Aggravarsi della Lotta Politica in Cina," *Rinascita* 2, 13 January 1967, 4.

⁵⁵Bertone was a progressive communist, after all, which allowed him to be more explicit in his denunciations.

interlocutors and protagonists of each debate To us, discussing doesn't mean saying 'no' to unity; on the contrary, it means looking for ways to achieve it and consolidate it.⁵⁶

Little did Longo know, the CCP was fast approaching the zenith of its international isolation, and would not wish to interact with Western interlocutors, let alone critical ones. As testament to this, on 15 March 1968 the PCI Secretariat received a *communiqué* from the Italian branch of Xinhua News Agency, confirming that the CCP party organ would no longer send its bulletin to foreign countries 'due to technical and organizational reasons'.⁵⁷

The Italian Communists thus appeared to be giving up on their ambitions to engage more meaningfully with the CCP. Yet, they knew Beijing coveted nothing more than obtaining diplomatic recognition at a bilateral and multilateral level, and that the only way to foster friendly relations with the CCP consisted in helping it achieve its political goals. At the time, with China's complete isolation on the one hand, and the possibility for PCI members to travel to China only in secret on the other, it became evident that the only way in which the PCI's China-policy blueprints could come to fruition would consist in sharing them with the Italian government.⁵⁸ A domestic 'asymmetric alliance' for the PCI thus started taking shape alongside the international one that had already been established with Kim Il-sung.

On 12 December 1966 the PCI Directorate sent a letter to the President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, requesting that the Minister of Foreign Affairs report directly to the Commission on issues concerning Italy's stance on the PRC's accession to the United Nations (UN). By voicing its commitment to the PRC's accession rights, the PCI hoped to turn Togliatti and Amendola's 'intermediate position' into the guiding principle of the Italian government's tentative China policy:

... with regards to the position Italy upheld during the voting sessions [concerning the PRC's accession to the UN], [we believe this] to be profoundly wrong and contrary to the UN principle of universality and the requirements of peace. It is absurd and unacceptable that the entry into the UN of a nation as big as China has to be contingent upon ascertainment measures of any kind. ... a new system of international relations cannot be forged without the participation of the People's Republic of China, and primarily without the restitution to the People's Republic of China of the UN seat to which it is entitled.⁵⁹

The letter was indicative of the level of confidence that the PCI reached after having devoted time to intra-party ideological debates, monitoring China's situation from afar, and keeping track of what Mao wished to gain from the international community. From this moment on, it became clear that the PCI's communist battles 'would be fought within the realm of foreign policy'.⁶⁰

The PCI's China policy had thus formally entered its 'implementation phase'. A question that arises, then, is how responsive the Italian government was to the PCI's stated foreign policy preference. Archival documents reveal that while the PCI's

⁵⁶Luigi Longo, "Non Mentori Estranei ma Protagonisti," *Rinascita* 43, 3 November 1967, 4.

⁵⁷Bensasson to PCI Secretariat, 15 March 1968, Partito, Estero, 0552/1032, FG, APC.

⁵⁸PCI Secretariat, 27 April 1967, Partito, Estero, 0545/1110, FG, APC.

⁵⁹PCI Directorate to President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, 12 December 1966, Partito, Estero, 0536/1653-4, FG, APC.

⁶⁰Alberto Cavallari, "Il PCI Punta sulla Politica Estera," *Corriere della Sera*, 30 January 1966.

growing international influence could be attributed to efforts made by the Italian Communists alone, the PCI's relevance within the Italian political sphere was largely contingent upon the readiness of Prime Minister Aldo Moro and the DC leftist current known as *Sinistra di Base* to initiate dialogue with Botteghe Oscure on political and foreign policy matters – two phenomena potentially favoured by the beginning of US-USSR *détente* in 1968.

Détente had eased Cold War ideological tensions. It was a strategic component of US foreign policy, as it sought to protect the bipolar order and to 'contain' the Soviet threat through dialogue in an era of waning US leadership. At the same time, *détente* was a foreign policy strategy through which the Kremlin, too, sought to prop up its own unstable leadership within a frail socialist camp. Yet, it was a strategy which ultimately accelerated the decline of USSR primacy within said socialist camp, especially in the wake of the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.⁶¹

Both of these aspects of *détente* had a profound impact on Italian politics, intertwining with political and social dynamics that came to destabilise the traditional domestic party-system.⁶² The attenuation of anti-communist sentiments in the US and Europe, the crisis of the international communist movement (due to the Czech affair and the Sino-Soviet split), and the emergence of a divide between Europe and the United States eliminated any resistance against parliamentary and social compromise that could potentially be found between the Centre-Left and the PCI.

Prime Minister Aldo Moro immediately grasped the momentousness of the opportunities brought by *détente* to the realm of Italian politics. Now that communist parties across Europe were less of a concern for Washington DC, and that the Italian coalition government had been weakened by the 1968 election outcome, it was no longer advisable for the DC and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) to base the legitimacy of their leadership on purely anti-communist grounds.⁶³ What was needed, instead, was 'careful consideration' of the instances of the Italian Communists.⁶⁴ This was how Moro's signature initiative, *strategia dell'attenzione*, came into being – an 'attention strategy' through which the government sought non-ministerial cooperation, having acknowledged the PCI as a force to be reckoned with.

The DC made clear that the only limit to Aldo Moro's *strategia dell'attenzione* would be the inclusion of the PCI in a coalition government. The Italian Communists, however, did not seek to reach governmental ranks, as they were aware of the privilege that derived from being part of the opposition vis-à-vis the liability of playing a weaker role as part of a multi-party government.⁶⁵ The PCI thus continued advocating for its foreign policy autonomy, elaborating nuanced critiques of Mao's political moves while at the same time calling on the Italian government to push for Italy's diplomatic recognition of China, and China's accession to the UN.

⁶¹An intervention which marked the PCI's political departure away from the CPSU, once and for all. See: Gualtieri, *L'Italia dal 1943 al 1992*, 166.

⁶²For more on upheavals and labour protests, see: Sergio Turone, *Storia del Sindacato in Italia (1943–1969): dalla Resistenza all' "Autunno Caldo"* (Bari: Laterza, 1973).

⁶³Peter Lange, "What Is to Be Done About Italian Communism?" *Foreign Policy* 21 (Winter 1975–76): 237; Giovanni Mario Ceci, *Moro e il PCI: la Strategia dell'Attenzione e il Dibattito Politico Italiano, 1969–1969* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), 25–7.

⁶⁴Gualtieri, *L'Italia dal 1943 al 1992*, 169.

⁶⁵Luigi Longo, "Nuove Forme di Unità e di Collaborazione Internazionale," *Rinascita* 44, 10 November 1967.

Aldo Moro's openness to the PCI was also reflected in the actions of representatives from the DC's leftist current, *Sinistra di Base* (the members of which were known as *basisti*), who showed great interest in the foreign policy proposals of the Italian Communists. The *basisti* invited PCI representatives to two of their congresses in April and May 1969, the second of which was entirely dedicated to foreign policy issues.⁶⁶ On that occasion, the *basisti* heavily criticised the leading currents of the DC for having been unable to formulate a coherent foreign policy strategy for the DC in particular, and for Italy in general.⁶⁷ They believed the alliance between the Christian Democrats, the Italian Socialist and the Republicans to have become 'partially void', transformed into a mere game of 'power partition'. This called for the DC to engage more proactively with the PCI, and to do so especially on foreign policy matters, as there was a need for the DC-PSI government to treat Third World countries on a par, and to ensure the PRC would be admitted to the UN.⁶⁸ Luigi Granelli in particular seems to have acknowledged the nuances of the PCI's foreign policy stances, praising the party not only for being 'representative of important masses' within Italy, but also for possessing 'reputable international influence'. Granelli then called on the DC to follow the PCI's example by starting to focus on foreign policy issues, too, emphasising that the value of the PCI's 'discourse on the East' could no longer be 'underestimated' by the DC in general and by the government in particular.⁶⁹

Positive progress notwithstanding, by 1969, the PCI was confronted with the negative impact of its attacks against the CCP (irrespective of Kim Il-sung's advice) on its foreign-policy aims. On 14 January, PCI Foreign Affairs Commission delegate Renato Sandri visited the Embassy of the PRC in Bern to deliver an official invitation to the Central Committee of the CCP, hoping that a delegation from Beijing would join the PCI's upcoming party Congress.⁷⁰ Upon having illustrated the 'PCI Theses from the X Party Congress' to the ambassador, Sandri was accused of being the representative of a party that had become a 'US lackey'.⁷¹ Urged to leave, Sandri asked his interlocutor to at least allow the PCI and the CCP to maintain friendly relations while 'agreeing to disagree' on certain ideological aspects – a plea to which the ambassador replied: 'You only have one option. Publicly proclaim your acceptance of the thought of our great President.'⁷² Compared with previously held meetings, Sandri reported having detected 'formal ungraciousness' in the manners of his host, and the 'transformation into hate' of what he previously believed to be mere 'political fervour'.

Ungraciousness notwithstanding, the occasion constituted a watershed moment for both the PCI and the CCP, as the two parties had gone back to talk *to* each other, rather than *past* one another. In the summer of 1969, the CCP took the initiative of sending a few diplomats back to their foreign posts, thereby dispatching Huang Cheng back to Paris. In the view of Asian diplomats stationed in Beijing, Huang Cheng's return to Paris signalled the CCP's intention to forge diplomatic ties with Italy. This meant that China had come to recognise France and its transalpine neighbour as bulwarks of that 'intermediate position' that Togliatti had envisioned

⁶⁶Silvano Bacicchi to PCI Secretary Office, 14 May 1969, Partito, DC, 0307/2779-2781, FG, APC.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 2781.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 2780.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Renato Sandri to Armando Cossutta, 17 January 1969, "Note on Sandri's Visit to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China," Partito, Estero, 0308/1113-1115, FG, APC.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 1114.

⁷²*Ibid.*

almost a decade earlier.⁷³ As yet another testament to the positive effects that the PCI's interactions with the Italian coalition government had on growing Sino-Italian engagement, on 14 July 1969 (for the first time in the timeframe examined) the Italian MFA Secretary General Casto Caruso instructed the Italian ambassador to the UN Piero Vinci to vote in favour of the PRC's accession to the UN, explicitly stating that this would be a way for the Italian government to 'eliminate one of the many diverging points that the opposition [i.e. the PCI] use[s] to put the government in a difficult position'.⁷⁴

These developments, rather than being ends in themselves, were soon seen as prelude to a time often celebrated as the beginning of the 'golden age' of PCI-CCP bilateral engagement – namely, the years of both parties' initial rapprochement.

Rapprochement (January 1970–October 1971)

In the early 1970s, *détente* reached a new pinnacle.⁷⁵ The PRC's improvement of ties with Yugoslavia and Hungary, together with the decision to maintain Warsaw as the capital of Sino-US dialogue, signalled the reversing of China's isolation.⁷⁶

The historiography documenting Italy's role in this delicate passage of the Cold War generally focuses on Prime Minister Aldo Moro's and Enrico Berlinguer's efforts in giving substance to the inter-governmental dimension of Sino-Italian ties.⁷⁷ Yet, as the actions of key DC figures in 1970 and 1971 were constrained by the inescapability of Atlanticism, while the PCI CC was preoccupied with administrative elections and with determining Italy's posture in the Mediterranean, what is often overlooked is the way in which a micro-cosmos of lower-ranking PCI affiliates contributed to the development of a new phase of PCI-CCP 'rapprochement' – an inter-communist party dynamic which helped favour the normalisation of inter-governmental ties between the PRC and Italy.⁷⁸

In April 1970, Giorgio Signorini from the communist-leaning newspaper *Paese Sera* was visiting the PRC. Documenting his trip to Berlinguer, Signorini confirmed to have met with Wang Shou-tao, CCP CC member and vice-president of the CCP office for Central and Southern China. With reference to Wang Shou-tao's hospitality, Signorini commented:

I don't want to overestimate the importance of the meeting, but ... Beijing has made the conscious decision of going back to an autonomous position ..., rejecting the creation of groups and small groups obedient to China within Western communist parties. They've gone back to a certain degree of realism: [resuming] talks with actors that matter, giving up on the radical manoeuvres of the politics of rupture⁷⁹

⁷³Crema to Nenni, 26 June 1969, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116468> (accessed 11 April 2017).

⁷⁴Ambassador Caruso to Ambassador Vinci, 14 July 1969, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116469> (accessed 11 April 2017); "Italian Policy towards the People's Republic of China," 27 November 1968, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116465> (accessed 11 April 2017).

⁷⁵Pons, *Berlinguer e la Fine del Comunismo*, 38–9.

⁷⁶Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Italian Republic and the People's Republic of China, 28 November 1970, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116477> (accessed 11 April, 2017).

⁷⁷Fardella, "Negotiating Sino-Italian Normalization."

⁷⁸Moro to Saragat, 2 November 1970, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116475> (accessed 7 June 2017). In a letter from 9 May 1970, the PCI and PSIUP leadership jointly provided a list of their most imminent policy priorities, indicating only domestic and regional ones. See: Co-signed PCI-PSIUP Letter on International Matters, 9 May 1970, Partito, Estero, 067/499, 503, FG, APC.

⁷⁹Signorini to Berlinguer, 29 April 1970, Note on Signorini's meeting with Wang Shoutao in Canton, Partito, Estero, 070/1461 bis, FG, APC.

The PCI had thus become an actor that ‘really mattered’ to Wang Shou-tao, allowing PCI leaders finally to start seeing the effects of their foreign policy blueprints after years of debating, implementing, and adjusting. It also became evident that the meeting had taken place under the auspices of the CCP, as it would have been otherwise improbable for Signorini, a PCI-affiliated reporter, to be welcomed by a member of the CCP CC himself.

Other correspondents from PCI party organ *l'Unità* were equally committed to allowing Botteghe Oscure to strengthen its ties to Zhongnanhai. Reporter Alberto Jacoviello was one of the most involved in the process, acting as an unofficial advisor to both Longo and Berlinguer.⁸⁰ On 16 June 1970, Jacoviello followed up an invitation to Paris by Sung Chih-kuang, *chargé d'affaires* of the PRC to France. Jacoviello's visit was designed for him to re-open a channel of communication that had originally been established by his colleague from *l'Unità*, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi.⁸¹ Jacoviello's notes from the meeting with Sung Chih-kuang, unlike Renato Sandri's discouraging account from Bern, indicated that CCP representatives:

... demonstrated great interest in our opinions on the topics that we've covered When we asked whether it would have been possible to re-establish normal contacts [with the CCP], either through official or non-official means, they answered that ... things needed to proceed ‘one small step at a time’; yet, they've also insisted in making us aware of the fact that ‘inviting a communist deputy and the head of the PCI CC foreign service to lunch ... already constitutes a small step’.⁸²

Sung Chih-kuang mentioned that his meeting with Jacoviello and Macciocchi would be evaluated in Beijing under the overarching framework of inter-communist party ties, also confirming that CCP officials were willing to meet with PCI officials whenever the latter had wished to see the former.⁸³ Furthermore, Sung added that Beijing would issue visas to Jacoviello and Macciocchi, who were set to visit the PRC between November and December 1970. What is worth noting from Jacoviello's account, however, is that this new phase of PCI-CCP engagement took place at a time when the CCP was yet to establish ‘contacts with the French Communist Party’, thereby highlighting the CCP's growing trust of the PCI as an authoritative voice of the Western European Left.⁸⁴

As previously shown, the DC's leftist currents (which had taken foreign policy matters to heart) had come to appreciate the effects that the PCI's foreign policy initiatives had brought upon the development of Sino-Italian ties.⁸⁵ This general appraisal was once again made evident one month after Jacoviello's visit to Paris, when he met with the then-President of the Italian Senate Amintore Fanfani, who claimed to ‘hate the Socialists’ due to their ambition of acting ‘as intermediaries

⁸⁰As an indication of the Party's early recognition of the value of Jacoviello's inquiries abroad for the fulfillment of the PCI's foreign policy objectives, see: Meeting to discuss about the PCI's policies towards Arab and African countries, speech by Maurizio Valenzi, 1 March 1960, Partito, Estero 0468/2295-2303. Referring to liberation movements across the Third World, Valenzi noted that Arab and African countries could rely on the PCI's help, also adding: ‘... us Italians can provide them with help as anyone else. As an example of our contribution, take: the inquiries of Jacoviello – our comrades' trips to Tunisia and other African countries – Palermo and Luzzatto joining the Mogadishu process – Spano's meeting with Nasser – the Belgrade conference,’ FG, APC.

⁸¹Jacoviello to Longo, 16 June 1970, Partito, Estero, 070/1463, FG, APC.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 1464–5.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 1465–6.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵Guido Formigoni, “Marcora, i Problemi della Pace e della Politica Internazionale,” in *Giovanni Marcora: Milano, l'Italia e l'Europa*, ed. Emanuele Bernardi (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2010), 214.

between the Communists and the Christian Democrats'. Instead, he argued, there was a need for DC and PCI members to talk directly to each other to avoid misunderstandings on foreign policy matters.⁸⁶ Jacoviello also noted the impression that Fanfani wished to establish contacts with figures at the highest levels of the PCI's hierarchy – such as Longo and Berlinguer – an observation which possibly hinted at the added value that the PCI's non-ministerial advice could bring to the Italian government, particularly at a time when Fanfani was 'very concerned about the fraying [of the DC] into currents'.⁸⁷

The normalisation of Sino-Italian diplomatic relations became official on 6 November 1970. While Prime Minister Moro complained with President Saragat about having been somewhat 'pressured' into recognising the PRC after Canada had taken the lead on the issue, Botteghe Oscure celebrated the fulfilment of one of its long-term foreign policy goals.⁸⁸ The PCI CC sent a cable to the CCP CC, wishing for China to enter a phase of 'fruitful development'.⁸⁹ Yet, the Italian Communists were aware of the fact that their work was far from being over, and while Prime Minister Moro wished for China's admission to the UN to be delayed as much as possible, the PCI sought to take advantage of recent events to call on the Italian government to bring the 'only and legitimate' PRC government to its UN seat, thereby not contradicting its decision to recognise the PRC as a party with which to entertain diplomatic relations.⁹⁰

Jacoviello and Macciocchi were thus sent to China to strengthen the PCI-CCP communication channel that had been re-opened in Paris, while at the same time allowing Jacoviello to author a series of reports on the PRC for *l'Unità*, where he set to document 'the great and tiresome and hard-fought travail' that the PCI had undergone to find its 'autonomous and original' place within the international and labour communist movement.⁹¹ In a letter sent to Luigi Longo from Shanghai, Jacoviello confirmed to have found CCP key figures still 'stuck to their positions', yet 'interested in listening' to the PCI.⁹² In an attempt not to displease the CCP while Jacoviello and Macciocchi were in the PRC, PCI-affiliated author Emilio Sarzi Amadé wrote to the then-director of *l'Unità* Aldo Tortorella that it would have been best for party organ contributors to tone down their vitriolic critiques of the CCP, given that these had allegedly caused 'some semi-opened doors' in Beijing 'to shut down completely'.

The 1st Commission of the PCI CC, having harnessed the potential of PCI initiatives on Sino-Italian ties, gathered in Rome to determine the future of Italian foreign policy and to elevate the PCI's China policy to governmental status, transforming it into 'an element of national unity'.⁹³ In particular, the PCI was to continue denouncing US

⁸⁶Conversation between Jacoviello and Fanfani, 14 July 1970, Partito, Estero, 070/581, FG, APC.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸Moro to Saragat, 2 November 1970, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116475> (accessed 7 June 2017).

⁸⁹PCI CC to CCP CC, 6 November 1970, Partito, Estero, 070/1471, FG, APC.

⁹⁰See: Sergio Segre to the PCI Secretariat, 31 October 1970, Partito, Estero, 070/1469, FG, APC; Moro to Saragat, 2 November 1970, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116475> (accessed 7 June 2017); Romano Ledda, "C'è una Sola Cina: i Diritti della Repubblica Popolare Cinese alle Nazioni Unite," *Rinascita* 39, 1 October 1971; "Dichiarazione di Berlinguer," *l'Unità*, 6 November 1970.

⁹¹Aldo Tortorella, "Appunti sugli Articoli di A. Jacoviello di Ritorno dalla Cina," Partito, Estero 070/1622, FG, APC.

⁹²Jacoviello to Longo, 17 November 1970, Partito, Estero 070/1477-1478, FG, APC.

⁹³Sarzi Amadé to Tortorella, November 1970, Partito, Estero, 070/1470, FG, APC; Cossutta to PCI, 23 April 1971, Partito, Estero, 0158/0660, FG, APC.

government circles for the pressure they had exerted on the Italian government throughout the 1960s, both in Parliament and at the UN, and to dissolve the Atlantic 'bloc of political power' that the DC had been supporting. To Secretary Longo, for instance, time had come to remind Nixon that Italy – one of its most trusted allies – had chosen to recognise the PRC, and that he should be held accountable for the ambiguity shown towards the issue China's recognition.⁹⁴

The PCI thus hoped to favour China's admission to the UN in the same way it had taken gradual steps towards favouring the normalisation of Sino-Italian ties. Yet, it soon became clear that the 'China question' at the UN would be difficult to entangle by solely relying on inter-communist party ties. After all, it was on that occasion that the Italian government abstained from voting, being too exposed to the influences of US *diktats* to act as independently as the Italian Communists had wanted. On 25 October 1971, when the PRC was admitted to the UN, politician and journalist Romano Ledda bitterly observed:

To claim that the Italian government has made a fool of itself is reductive; ... we have very rarely been exposed to such a crushing humiliation, and very rarely there had been such a glaring renunciation of the exercise of our autonomy of judgement ... and [autonomy] of stance vis-à-vis our 'biggest ally'.⁹⁵

In his invective against the Italian coalition government (which the PCI had spent three years directly advising), Ledda took issue with the inability of the DC and the PSI to recognise the magnitude of their diplomatic mishandling of the China question. To Ledda, the Italian government had once again given proof of its structural inability to move beyond Cold War dynamics, and it had done so at a time when it instead hoped to 'overcome two opposing blocs' and achieve 'neutrality', even.

The normalisation of Sino-Italian ties, however, had not happened in a vacuum. While apparently marginal to the inter-governmental dimension of Sino-Italian relations, the PCI's efforts towards strengthening inter-communist party ties with the aim of making normalisation possible are indicative of the structural and ideational capabilities the PCI employed to act as a 'State within the State', thereby seeking to shape the agenda-setting phase of Italy's 'China policy'.⁹⁶ PCI-CCP interactions, albeit seemingly inconsequential, enhanced the process of Sino-Italian bilateral dialogue in both an iterative and incremental fashion, and while it would be unusual for Western observers to value inter-communist party interactions over inter-governmental ones, there is a need to remind ourselves of the centrality that the bureaucracies of real socialism – the PRC *in primis* – would grant to inter-party dialogues. At the very least, there is reason to believe that the Italian Communists' openness had contributed to making the Western world more accepting of Maoist China.

⁹⁴Romano Ledda, "C'è una Sola Cina: i Diritti della Repubblica Popolare Cinese alle Nazioni Unite," *Rinascita* 39, 1 October 1971.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶Marco Galeazzi notes that the PCI 'seen by many as almost like a State', had caught 'the interest and the consideration of the West as well as that of the the extra-European world ...' See: Marco Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi Non Allineati*, 192. See also Antonio Varsori, "Prefazione." Preface to Marco Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il Movimento dei Paesi Non Allineati*, 7.

Conclusion

This study documents the Italian Communist Party's interactions with the Communist Party of China in the years leading to the normalisation of Sino-Italian relations. The main objective with this paper was to fill a historiographical void; yet, a series of secondary purposes lay at the heart of this study. One was to analyse the internal debates that enabled the PCI to create its autonomous China policy. Another one was to show how, at the height of the CCP's international isolation, the PCI established partnerships with actors at home and abroad to never lose sight of China's situation and to allow its 'China policy' blueprints to come to fruition. Last but not least was the goal of examining ways in which the PCI-CCP rapprochement, rather than being a product of Aldo Moro's or Enrico Berlinguer's efforts alone, was made possible by the actions of a number of PCI-affiliated intellectuals and reporters who interacted with CCP officials at a time when the CCP had started to appreciate the value of the PCI's 'intermediate position'.

Notes on contributor

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