

Roads to Reconciliation

People's Republic of China, Western Europe and Italy
During the Cold War Period (1949-1971)

edited by Guido Samarani, Carla Meneguzzi Rostagni and Sofia Graziani

Italy's Communist Party and People's China ('50s-early '60s)

Guido Samarani
(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

Abstract In the '50s and early '60s the Italian Communist Party (ICP) was one of the main actors involved in informal and unconventional diplomacy between Italy and the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the presence in Italy of the largest Communist party in Western Europe undoubtedly acted as an important channel for unofficial Sino-Italian exchanges. This paper tries to trace the development of ICP-CCP relations focusing in particular on the Italian Communists' views and analysis of the CCP's historical experience. It also would like to show that ICP leaders generally viewed the CCP's revolutionary in a positive way, an evaluation which largely stemmed from the ICP's own national experience and its search for a more autonomous international role.

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Keywords ICP. CCP. China. Cold War years.

1 Introduction

In the '50s and early '60s the Italian Communist Party (ICP) was one of the main actors (together with the Italian Socialist Party) involved in informal and unconventional diplomacy between Italy and the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the presence in Italy of the largest Communist party in Western Europe undoubtedly acted as an important channel for unofficial Sino-Italian exchanges. Besides conducting pro-China action through official party media and in parliament, the ICP was particularly active in making its members, as well as the public/man in the street, aware of what was going on in East Asia. This was accomplished and maintained by various means such as organising cultural and scientific missions to Red China. Members of these missions included individuals and institutions closely connected with the ICP, the most prominent example being the Centro Cina (Samarani 2014).

During the '50s, especially after the end of the Korean War, a few Italian Communists had the opportunity to reside and work in the PRC.¹ In 1959, the ICP was able to send its own high-level delegation to China for the first time to meet leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officially, and sign a joint document formalising the establishment of direct bilateral relations. However, the Sino-Soviet split and the hardening of the CCP's ideological positions put a great strain on party-to-party relations, which cooled significantly after 1963. By then, the 'China question' was no longer just a matter for the ICP, and more generally, for Italian left-wing parties. Since 1964, some members of the government had been stepping up efforts to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. At the same time, emerging radicals and groups defending the pureness of Marxism-Leninism, who viewed the Chinese concept with interest from the point of view of the ICP's 'revisionism', provided new channels for disseminating China's ideological propaganda in Italian society (Pini 2011, 99-112; Meneguzzi Rostagni 2014).

Political relations between the Italian and the Chinese Communist parties were inevitably influenced by developments taking place within the world Communist movement. Indeed, up until 1957, close ties continued to develop, largely based on solidarity and common viewpoints. Italian Communists' appreciation of the Chinese revolution mainly stemmed from its peculiarities, from the way the CCP leaders defended their autonomy and pursued distinctive features in their revolutionary action (see for instance Bordone 1979). For them, as Gian Carlo Pajetta (1911-1990) – one of the leading members of the ICP at that time – would later state, “the peculiarities of the Chinese revolution, its weight within the world proletarian and revolutionary movement, and the problem of the autonomy of the party that guided that revolution were questions beyond dispute” (Pajetta 1976, 7).

As a matter of fact, the Italian Communists' attention to and appreciation of the distinctive features of the Chinese revolution at that time was a positive judgement on merits as well as method. Actually Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964), who was National Secretary of the ICP from 1927 until his death in 1964, was strongly committed to the search for and definition of an Italian road to socialism (the “*via italiana al socialismo*”), seeking a more autonomous role within the international Communist movement. It was in the wake of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) – which sanctioned the thesis of the plurality and diversity of the roads to socialism and opened up new opportunities for autonomy for Communist parties – that the ICP leaders started to feel, as Alexander

1 On this aspect, and more generally on the question of the visits made by Italian intellectuals to the PRC and their impressions during the '50s, see in particular De Giorgi 2017 and her paper in this volume

Höbel put it, that “the strongest communist party in the capitalist world’ could itself become an international political subject” (Höbel 2005, 516).

With a view to overcoming military blocs, and firmly anchored in the strategy of peaceful coexistence, Togliatti tried to fulfil his desire to carve out greater space for autonomous action where the USSR was concerned, by elaborating an original idea based on ‘polycentrism’. Such a perspective implied a re-assessment of the traditional leading role of the Soviet Union within the Communist movement and also sparked off the ICP’s interest in the non-European world, with initiatives such as the ‘non-aligned movement’, whose origins date back to the 1955 Bandung Conference (Galeazzi 2011; Pons 2012).

In any case, it can be said that 1957 marked a turning point in the relations between Italian and Chinese Communists. From that year, as Pajetta clearly suggests, both parties began to develop along different lines, and their relationship – which had been based upon solidarity and identity of judgement – eventually fell apart, resulting in the breaking off of bilateral relations (Pajetta 1976).

In 1962 the Sino-Soviet split and the radicalization of Chinese politics and ideology led to the CCP’s condemnation of the ICP position on international politics, and especially of Togliatti’s idea of a transition to socialism through democratic and peaceful means (the “*via italiana al socialismo*”) branding it ‘revisionist’. However, Togliatti, despite being critical, refused to condemn the Chinese theses, and firmly rejected the idea of convening an international conference to condemn China, as proved by his 1964 memorandum written before his death in Yalta (Spagnolo 2007). Moreover, even in the years during which the political and ideological dispute between the two parties was vitriolic, the ICP leadership continued to support diplomatic recognition of the PRC as one of the main objectives of Italy’s foreign policy.²

2 Party to Party Relations: Meetings and Exchanges

In 1951 the CCP Central Committee (CC) set up a department, the External Liaison Department (*Duiwai lianluobu* or *Zhonglianbu*) to be specifically responsible for the CCP’s external affairs, under the direction of Wang Jiexiang (1906-1974), the first Ambassador to the Soviet Union after 1949 and who during the ’50s had attended the 1954 Geneva Conference and the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The department’s main task was to establish contacts with the Communist parties in socialist countries, thereby to strengthen the unity of the socialist bloc; it

2 Within this article, translations from the original Italian text into English are mine.

also developed relations with other Communist parties who were part of the international Communist movement, and even established contacts with socialist parties in Western capitalist countries (Zhu 2012; Zhao 2010).

The exchange of delegations soon became one of the most important forms of interaction that allowed direct contact between party leaders.

It was the 1956 national congresses of both the CCP and the ICP that provided the occasion for the first exchange of delegations between the two parties. More than fifty foreign delegations were invited to participate in the 8th CCP National Congress, which was held in Beijing in the second half of September. It was the first National Congress to be held after the founding of the PRC. Members of the Italian delegation were Giuliano Pajetta (1915-1988, Gian Carlo Pajetta's brother), and Davide Lajolo (1912-1984): the delegation was led by Mauro Scoccimarro (1895-1972), who delivered a speech at the Congress in which he praised the particular features and achievements of the Chinese Communist revolution, and emphasized that the CCP's invaluable experience could also serve as a lesson for the Italian proletariat. Scoccimarro took a similar approach during a long conversation between the Italian delegation and Mao Zedong during a side meeting. According to Franco Calamandrei (1917-1982), special correspondent of the ICP's party organ *L'Unità* in China from 1953 to 1956 (on his experience, see Calamandrei S. 2014), the conversation covered common history, the problems of the workers' movement and new issues raised by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) (Calamandrei F. 1956).

After returning to Italy, Scoccimarro reported the results of the CCP's 8th Congress at a meeting of the ICP CC, and argued that, thanks to the Congress, the world had come to know, for the first time, the principles and criteria upon which the Chinese revolution was based and the peaceful transition from the completed bourgeois democratic revolution to the socialist proletarian revolution. "The new fact - he stated - is the maintenance of the alliance with the national bourgeoisie: such an alliance was justified and logical during the period of the fight against imperialism and for national independence [...]; however, in the period of the building of socialism it seemed to many people impossible [...]. Here we can find the most original contribution of the Chinese Communist Party" (Scoccimarro 1956, 10; see also the review "L'VIII Congresso del Partito comunista cinese", published in *Le vie del socialismo*, 3 and 10-13).

Two months later, in December 1956, a CCP delegation was invited to Italy to attend the 8th Congress of the ICP in Rome. During the congress, as will be further explained below, Togliatti took up the theme of the "via italiana al socialismo", making it clear that socialism should be realised according to specific national conditions. The Chinese delegation was headed by Peng Zhen, then member of the CCP Politburo and Mayor of Beijing.

This first bilateral exchange of delegations prepared the groundwork for further contacts in the years following. In April 1959, a high-level official ICP delegation travelled to China to develop bilateral relations at a time when China's domestic and external policies were radicalising, distrust and tension between Beijing and Moscow were growing, and the implementation of the Great Leap Forward across China was causing tensions among CCP leaders. It was an important political event that allowed Italian Communist leaders to observe first-hand some aspects of Chinese life. Invited by the CCP CC, the ICP delegation was headed by Gian Carlo Pajetta (1911-1990) and included party leaders like Antonio Roasio (1902-1986), Celso Ghini (1907-1981), Luciano Barca (1920-2012), Maria Michetti (1922-2007), Gerardo Chiaromonte (1924-1993) and Giuseppe Boffa (1923-1998) who was in charge of the *L'Unità* foreign news services and had been Moscow correspondent for the newspaper.

The delegation arrived in Beijing on 6th April and stayed in China for nearly a month, travelling to Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Anshan, and other cities and agricultural areas for scheduled visits to factories, large iron and steel plants, people's communes, schools, and cultural and social institutions. According to Italian archival sources, the delegation had meetings with CCP leaders at the highest level, including Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Wang Jiaxiang, Yang Shangkun, Chen Yi, and Liu Ningyi. During these meetings information was exchanged about the party's work and discussions focused mainly on the newly-established people's communes, industrialization, CCP policy regarding the national bourgeoisie, as well as the international situation and Italian domestic politics (see ICP Archives, quoted in Samarani, Graziani 2015, 17). Upon arrival in Beijing, the delegation was welcomed by Liu Ningyi and then met with Peng Zhen to whom Pajetta said that Italians and Chinese Communists could understand each other well because "we, as much as you, have always wanted to be a national party, closely linked to the national situation and at the same time to socialist internationalism" (see ICP Archives, quoted in Samarani, Graziani 2015, 17). The conversation with Peng Zhen soon turned to the current nature of imperialism: Peng Zhen outlined imperialism's strategic weakness stating that "in the case of a war today, there is no doubt on which side the victory would be". Pajetta emphasised instead that the political struggle for international *détente* and peace was the most suitable means with which to weaken American imperialism (see ICP Archives, quoted in Samarani, Graziani 2015, 17).

The journey consolidated the political relationship among parties, leading to the formal signing of a joint document, a ceremony covered by the national media. In July, the ICP's journal *Rinascita* dedicated an entire issue to the visit, with articles written by members of the delegation full of positive descriptions of the Chinese economy and society under the Great Leap Forward. Based on this response, it would seem that the delegation

members did not pick up any signs of hardship in China's countryside, or at least chose to keep it to themselves if they did. They also did not perceive the problems related to the implementation of Mao's policies and the emerging tensions within the CCP leadership group. For example, Giuseppe Boffa wrote that the visit to China left him with a clear understanding of the "decisive weight of China in the relations of power among the great social systems in which the world is divided. [...] What matters is not just the presence of 600 million people, but rather the powerful energies that these immense masses have in themselves, [masses] that today are being set in motion" (Boffa 1959, 557-8).

Later in the same year, a delegation headed by Girolamo Li Causi (1896-1977), with four others including Pietro Secchia (1903-1973) and Salvatore Cacciapuoti (1910-1992), travelled to China to attend the celebrations for the 10th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Upon arrival in Beijing, the delegation attended the official ceremony held at the Great Hall of the People, where a warm welcome message from Togliatti was read. In the message, Togliatti praised the CCP's achievements in the struggle for the national and social emancipation of the Chinese people and in socialist construction. He also described the successes of the CCP's 8th National Congress, the Great Leap Forward, and the people's communes as, "the guarantee that your [CCP] march forward will be increasingly rapid and victorious" and stated that, "the growing weight of your country is now felt in every aspect of world life" (see ICP Archives, quoted in Samarani, Graziani 2015, 18).

After the 1st October celebrations, the delegation was asked to attend a confidential meeting during which all foreign Communist party representatives were informed of current domestic political developments, and especially the recent purge and removal of Minister of Defence Peng Dehuai, for having criticised the party's general line and the economic conditions that resulted from the implementation of the Great Leap Forward. Afterwards, the Italian delegation visited Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, and other, minor urban centres, and had meetings and conversations with factory and local labour and political leaders, which gave them the impression that the CCP had complete control over the country's situation and a close and profound relationship with the masses. The members of the delegation were also struck by the enthusiasm they noticed in big factories and heavy industry plants as well as the patient, tenacious effort the overwhelming majority of the population was dedicating with great conviction to the construction of roads, dams and so on, with but primitive methods and tools.

On 13th October, upon their return to Beijing, the delegation had a meeting with Liu Shaoqi, then President of the PRC: Liu, according to the delegation's report, expressed the belief that the general tendency in international relations was toward *détente*, and also showed a 'warm interest' in Togliatti. From the visits and talks, the delegation had the impression

that the work done by the delegation headed by Gian Carlo Pajetta a few months earlier had been appreciated by Chinese leaders (Secchia 1959, folder 11.4).

The last contact at delegation level occurred in August, 1961, when a politically lower-level delegation of the ICP composed of Umberto Scalia, Otello Nannuzzi, Giorgio Milani, Enzo Roggi, and Vasco Jacoponi was sent to the PRC on a study journey. The delegation travelled throughout China (Beijing, Qingdao, Zhengzhou, Luoyang, Sanmenxia, Shanghai), visiting a few people's communes and modern industrial complexes. During this visit they were able to observe, and later to report to the ICP centre, the difficult socio-economic conditions of the country, and the extreme poverty in the countryside. Moreover, during meetings and talks, which avoided discussions on general policy, the Chinese posed weighted questions, with veiled allusion to ICP policy (see ICP Archives, quoted in Samarani, Graziani 2015, 19).

By then, ideological divergences had indeed started to beset relations among Communist parties, as was evident at various international meetings held in 1960 (including the Beijing meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions and the Moscow meeting of 81 Communist parties), which clearly revealed the seriousness of the Sino-Soviet dispute and its impact on relations within the international Communist movement.

The occasion for a direct and open attack by the Chinese Communists was provided by the 10th National Congress of the ICP held in December 1962. It was here that the Chinese delegation, headed by Zhao Yimin, branded the Italian policy (the 'via al socialismo attraverso le riforme di struttura', road to socialism through structural reforms) as 'revisionist', presenting a critique that would soon turn into a public condemnation of the ICP, and especially of its leader Togliatti. Between December 1962 and March 1963, two articles appeared in China's official party press condemning the Italian party for its alignment with Moscow and for the 'via italiana al socialismo' (Höbel 2005, 542-55).

Togliatti immediately requested that the ICP be given the opportunity to reply to the critiques, without producing a break in the relations between the two parties. In fact, Italian Communists were insistent in inviting the CCP to send a delegation to Italy to exchange views and explain respective positions (see ICP Archives, quoted in Samarani, Graziani 2015, 19). Togliatti would also firmly reject the Soviet idea of a collective condemnation of China, an action the Chinese leaders regarded with respect, seeing it as a sign that the ICP was not completely dependent on the Soviet Union.

However, from then on until 1980, even though the Italian and Chinese Communist parties never reached the point of a formal break, bilateral contacts were practically non-existent.

3 Looking at the CCP and People's China: Italian Communists' Analysis and Memories

As stated above, it was in 1956 that the first bilateral exchange of delegations between the ICP and the CCP took place. As has been pointed out, the 20th Congress of the CPSU and Nikita Khrushchev's report and secret speech had a tremendous impact on Communist parties worldwide, greatly influencing their views on the question of war and peace and the different paths the transition from capitalism to socialism could take within each country (Benvenuti 1983, XXI-XXII). The 20th Congress was followed by protests and revolts in Poland, and especially Hungary during the second half of the year: the revolts led to Soviet military intervention in Hungary in the last part of the year, which resulted in János Kádár's rise to power. At the same time, the crisis in the Middle East in October-November 1956 seemed to confirm the existence of new, and growing tensions in the context of the Cold War, after the emergence in previous years - marked by the end of the war in Korea, the Geneva Conference and the Bandung Conference - of more optimistic views about the future of the world.

It was in this period, during which the ICP leadership was torn between its search for autonomy and alignment with Moscow, that the 8th National ICP Congress took place (8-14 December 1956).

Before the 8th Congress however, the Secretary of the ICP, Palmiro Togliatti, had clearly expressed, on different occasions, his views on the results and the historical meaning of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, with particular reference to the problem of the 'national roads to socialism'. In his speech to the ICP CC on 13th March 1956, Togliatti stressed the importance of acknowledging that there were different roads to socialism and quoted the Chinese experience, together with that of Nehru's Indian National Congress, as examples of other possible paths. He indicated that any mechanical application of the 'Soviet model' to other experiences would provoke potentially serious problems and imbalances, and conceded that the ICP had made an obvious mistake in joining Moscow in its total condemnation of the Yugoslavian experience in 1948 (Togliatti 1968a, 15-17). On 24th June 1956, in his speech at the ICP CC in preparation for the 8th National Congress, Togliatti emphasised that it would be a big mistake to expect that People's China would follow the same path as the Soviet Union, because great differences existed between them in political tradition, economic structure and methods of organization (Togliatti 1968b, 66-7).

The main slogan of the ICP 8th National Congress clearly indicated that the party was determined to confirm and develop its political strategy regarding the 'Italian road to socialism'. In his political report, the party secretary stressed that in most socialist countries the building of a new economy and society had largely progressed with success, while in both Poland and Hungary serious problems had arisen. Spontaneous, popular protests broke out

in both cases, due mainly to the process of adjusting to the system, and to the actions of counter-revolutionary forces. He then maintained that in order to achieve real consolidation of international relations, the existence of a socialist world should be recognised and accepted by the imperialist powers, in the first place by ending the ban against People's China (Togliatti 1983a, 23-25).

In Togliatti's view, the political conclusions of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, with its emphasis on the possibility that different roads could lead to a socialist society, would be well received in China, since the CCP had a long tradition of autonomy, and had built its success on wide popular support.

At the 8th Congress of the ICP, Peng Zhen (the head of the CCP delegation) was welcomed with warmth and exceptional enthusiasm by all Congress delegates. His attitude and style impressed everybody and the ICP's official newspaper, *L'Unità*, defined his approach as eloquent, penetrating, and persuasive, and described him as a participant who never stopped listening with extreme attention to the speakers, showing absolutely impartial interest in every topic, with an 'attentive and grave' expression, which was 'always serious and impassive'. In his welcome address to the Congress, Peng Zhen reminded his audience of the great strength of the ICP, as well as its prominent position within the international Communist movement. He praised the revolutionary tradition of the Italian people who - he said - thanks to their strength and unity with other democratic forces, had struggled against fascism and later achieved great things (the creation of a Republic, the drawing-up of the Constitution and the development of democracy). Then he touched upon the issue of world peace at a time of increasing international tension, and stressed the importance of the international unity of the workers' class. At the end of his speech, he also praised efforts made thus far to establish and expand contacts between Italy and China, and to contribute to mutual understanding and confidence, which in turn would certainly lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations (*L'Unità*, 11 December 1956, 8-9).

In his memoirs, Emilio Rosini (1922-2010), in charge of accompanying the Chinese delegation to Vienna after the end of the Congress, remembers how, during the trip to Vienna, he formed the clear impression that Peng Zhen was quite dissatisfied with his talks with ICP leaders, especially since the CCP did not at all welcome the way in which Chruščev had denounced Stalinism. According to Rosini, the delegation was made up of 3 people: Peng Zhen, an interpreter and a third, unidentified person. The main reason for the delegation's trip to Vienna was to meet some Chinese who were active within the Partisans of Peace (later, the World Peace Council), a movement fighting for world peace and strongly backed by the Soviet Union (in 1956 the offices of the movement were in Vienna) (Rosini 2003).

A somewhat different view about Peng Zhen was expressed by Luciano Barca, elected at the 8th Congress onto the ICP Central Committee. In charge of taking care of Peng Zhen, Barca remembers him as a man of

great culture, who was fascinated by Roman civilisation and never tired of visiting Roman ruins (Barca 2005, 1: 166-9)

The outbreak of the Sino-Soviet dispute in the late '50s further restricted ICP interaction with China, narrowing its breadth of manoeuvre. However, it was in this complex situation, when the Sino-Soviet alliance was already deteriorating, that the Italian Communists sent a high-level delegation to China with the aim of exchanging views with CCP leaders, and signing a joint document that would formalise the establishment of direct bilateral relations. It was the first and last ICP delegation to travel to China to officially meet CCP leaders, apart from conventional exchanges of delegations at national party congresses and minor delegations.

Luciano Barca was a member of the ICP delegation to China in 1959 led by Giancarlo Pajetta, a member of the Direzione (a kind of Politburo) and the Secretariat of the ICP. In his memoirs, Barca stressed that deciding to make the journey to China while a secret dispute was going on between Moscow and Beijing, "was in itself a relevant political act", and nothing less than a "calculated act of autonomy by Togliatti". This is how the Soviet leaders actually read the initiative, as demonstrated by the fact that upon arrival in Moscow, the Italian delegation found that no leaders or officials from the foreign section were there to meet them (Barca 2005, 1: 202; Barca 1959, First series, envelope 2 and Travel notebook, 1).

According to Barca, the CCP leaders warmly welcomed the delegation, and reserved special treatment for Pajetta, as if he were a head of state. During a meeting with Liu Ningyi (then President of China's Federation of Trade Unions), which took place upon their arrival in Beijing, Pajetta presented the delegation's requests and expectations from the visit: to exchange information with the CCP on the party's work, the issues related to the people's communes and industrialization, and on the international situation. Pajetta also stated that Chinese policy regarding Catholics was one of the problems the delegation wished to discuss with Chinese leaders. The delegations had meetings and long conversations with the highest-ranking leaders of the CCP: the Mayor of Beijing Peng Zhen, the Foreign Minister Chen Yi, Liu Shaoqi, and finally, Mao Zedong. The conversations were initially formal, but gradually became more frank and focused. As soon as the issue of peaceful coexistence was introduced, divergences surfaced, with Pajetta defending the result of the 20th Congress and Togliatti's (and the ICP's) position on the offensive nature of the struggle for world peace. The conversation with Chen Yi (7th April) mainly covered the international situation, with particular attention for East and Southeast Asia, and touched upon recent events in Tibet, and relations with India. Chen Yi defined US imperialism as the most ferocious in the world and pointed to the differences between the strategy and tactics of US imperialism, stating that, while strong from a tactical point of view, it was strategically weak, and for this reason was to be considered both a paper and an

iron tiger. Afterwards, the delegation had a meeting with Peng Zhen (8th April), to discuss several issues related to China's domestic politics, such as the development of class relations and class struggle, the policy regarding counter-revolutionaries, the nationalization of industry, the Hundred Flowers movement, and finally, the creation of the people's communes, one of the most controversial issues in China's relations with the USSR. Given that the communes were the emblem and symbol of a different road to socialism from the one taken by the USSR, the Italian delegation seemed particularly interested in understanding what the people's communes really were (Barca 2005, 1: 202-25).

Scheduled visits took place in Beijing University, two people's communes in Manchuria, and the metallurgic kombinat in Anshan and Shanghai. Upon returning to Beijing, the delegation met with Liu Shaoqi (17th April) and discussed topics related to war and peace, international *détente* and the relations between Communist parties. Stimulated by Pajetta's statement that the ICP did not expect the solution of national problems to come from outside, Liu Shaoqi - while defending the unity of the Socialist bloc - argued that every party should solve its problems according to the experience acquired in its own country and not according to any other parties' will. During talks with Mao Zedong, polemic allusions emerged from Chairman Mao when he, probably alluding to Togliatti's 'via italiana al socialismo', stated that a peaceful transition to a new system of relations was difficult and in all class fights it is not possible to seize power without a struggle (Barca 2005, 1: 221).

As for Giancarlo Pajetta, in an article written for the ICP's monthly, *Rinascita*, in 1976 he reiterated his impression that the Chinese political line was diverging from the positions of the 20th Congress, and more generally from the policy of the other Communist parties on the themes of *détente* and peace, as well as on the possibility of a democratic road to socialism. The Italians clearly perceived that there was a concealed polemic and that the Chinese might want to sound out the Italians' real positions. According to Pajetta, talks were dominated by diplomacy and allusion, so much so that upon their return to Italy, while reporting and confirming a strong appreciation for, and positive judgement of, the CCP leaders and the Chinese road to socialism, the members of the ICP delegation did not hide their serious worries about the future (Pajetta 1976, 7-9).

And in 1978, in a long interview with Ottavio Cecchi about his experiences in the field of ICP foreign policy, Pajetta recalls (Pajetta 1978, 135-6):

In 1959, I was in China with a party delegation. I soon got the impression that China's political line was clearly diverging from that of the Soviet Union. [...] During that visit we met with Peng Chen [Peng Zhen], Teng Hsiao-ping [Deng Xiaoping] [...], we met with Liu Shao-chi [Liu Shaoqi], Chen Yi and finally we were received by Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong]

himself, with whom we had a long conversation. During these talks we defended the positions of Togliatti, which, after all, were also the Soviet position about foreign policy and international prospects: *détente*, non-inevitability of war, the search for a national and peaceful road to socialism in our country. On these themes we encountered coolness, we were asked insidious questions, and more than once we had to reply firmly to polemical allusions towards us. We discussed for entire days, even the nights, on every sentence of the final communiqué. To the extent that I left Comrade Barca and others with the task of going on, begging them to let me sleep and to call me only if they encountered problems for which the Chinese would request my intervention.

As mentioned above, this visit to China by the delegation of the Italian Communist Party contemplated the solemn signing of a protocol as previously agreed. Pajetta accepted, but only on condition that nothing contradicted ICP positions, and that an explicit mention was made of the “*via italiana delle riforme di struttura*” (the Italian road of structural reforms). The Chinese demanded that mention be made of the people’s communes. Barca was in charge of negotiating the text, a long process that forced Italians to work day and night and that revealed Chinese dissent regarding the Italian positions (peaceful coexistence and “*via italiana*” to socialism). The Italian delegation made every effort to reach a consensus without breaking up the talks. According to Barca, the Chinese considered Italian recognition of the original experience of the people’s communes to be a point that could not be given up (for the Italians it was a delicate point, as it had led to a change in China’s relations with the USRR) and bound this point to their own acceptance of a mention of Togliatti’s structural reforms, “an unusual term in Marxist and Communist literature” (Barca 2005, 1: 218).

Misunderstandings and divergences were finally resolved, albeit only formally, with a compromise, and on 19th April, Pajetta and Deng Xiaoping signed the joint document in a solemn atmosphere, in the presence of Mao Zedong. The picture appeared in the CCP official newspaper, *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), the following day. Pajetta then left China to return to Rome, while the other members of the delegation continued the trip around China. While in Xi’an they were informed that Liu Shaoqi had been elected President of the People’s Republic, but were reassured that it would in no way change Mao’s role (Barca 2005, 1: 217-24).

Within the ICP delegation, which went to China in 1959, and more generally within the Italian Communist Party itself, while everybody else was supporting the PRC’s international cause there was disagreement, with some members holding a rather flexible view of Chinese internal politics and ICP-CCP relations while others took a narrower view.

One such member was Giuseppe Boffa, who had been working in Mos-

cow from 1953 to 1958 as correspondent of *L'Unità*. In his memoirs he writes about the 1957 Moscow Conference, stating that the meeting between Togliatti and Mao Zedong was very disappointing: "I don't really know what Togliatti was actually expecting from this meeting. But I do know that around the Communist world many considered the Chinese with a favourable eye: the prestige of their revolutionary victory was still intact [...] The taste of the "Hundred Flowers" and the "Hundred Schools" was everywhere at that time [...] But in Autumn 1957 Mao changed his mind: "Flowers" and "Schools" were cut when they had just started to grow" (Boffa 1998, 50-1).

Despite the growing divergence between Italian and Chinese Communists, one important point should be considered: during the 1960s, the Italian Communist Party continued its political battle for Italian recognition of the People's Republic of China. The ICP leader, Palmiro Togliatti, in a talk given at the 9th National Congress of the ICP (January-February 1960), argued (Togliatti 1983a, 205) that:

The great People's Republic of China can no longer be kept out of the debate on the main international issues just to give satisfaction to the American militarist cliques [...] The Italian people, in large part, cannot understand why the People's Republic of China is still not recognized by Italy and why Italy does not support China's admission to the United Nations.

Two years later, at the 10th ICP Congress, which marked an important step forward in the political debate between the two parties, the final political report approved by the Congress affirmed that, "it is indispensable that China is given its place within the United Nations" (Decimo Congresso PCI 1962, "Risoluzione politica"). At the same time, Togliatti was determined to defend the party's political positions against criticism from the 'Chinese comrades' (the reference was to the speech at the Congress given by the CCP representative, Zhao Yiming), indicating that the Italian Communists had great consideration and respect for Chinese Communists, but they did not agree with the CCP's vision of the problem of war and peace, and their critique of the 'peaceful coexistence' (Togliatti 1983b, pp. 386-389).

Togliatti also expressed deep concern regarding the recent military clashes between China and India, and their potential to produce a serious weakening in the anti-imperialistic struggle, and asked that the two sides find a peaceful solution to the conflict as soon as possible (Togliatti 1983d, 329-30).

In the debate that followed Togliatti's opening report, Giancarlo Pajetta gave a speech in which he was highly critical of certain CCP positions as expressed by Zhao Yiming. Pajetta maintained that the 'structural reforms' that were part of the ICP strategy were not at all contrary to the struggle for socialism, but rather a part of it. He then strongly criticised

the positions of Albania's Party of Labour headed by Enver Hoxha, asking why "such positions are encouraged by some". Finally, Pajetta found fault with the CCP's radical critique of, and 'anathemas' against, the views of the Yugoslav comrades, while at the same time he recognised that the ICP, too, had reservations about some of their positions (Pajetta 1968, 159-67).

A few weeks after the conclusion of the ICP's 10th National Congress, between late 1962 and the early months of 1963, two long editorials from the *Renmin ribao* and *Hongqi* (Red Flag) harshly criticised the positions that had emerged from the Congress, paving the way for an intense and fierce debate ("Sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi" 1962; "Ancora sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi" 1963).

As Luciano Barca would later remember,

the seriousness of the CCP attack against Togliatti lies not so much in its motivations [the CCP accusing Togliatti of revisionism], but rather in the fact that the joint agreement stipulated in 1959 is totally undermined [...] and because the attempts carried out by the ICP in such a very difficult situation in order to keep a line of communication open with a great communist party considered by Moscow to be an enemy, are misconceived. (Barca 2005, 1: 306)

In October 1963, a long resolution approved by the ICP CC denounced the "mistaken views of the Chinese comrades", and criticised the CCP's vision of Asia, Africa and Latin America as the "stormy center of world revolution" ("Per una nuova avanzata e per l'unità del movimento comunista internazionale" 1968).

In his *Memorandum on Issues Relating to the International Working Class Movement and Its Unity* (the so-called 'Yalta memorandum', written as a reminder for a scheduled meeting with Chruscev), on the one hand Togliatti denounces the 'divisive actions' of the CCP, while on the other he stresses that quite a few Communist parties around the world had replied to such actions with ideological polemics and propaganda and not in a political and constructive way (Togliatti 1968c; see also Hobel 2005 and Spagnolo 2007).

Again, in the late '60s, Luigi Longo, then secretary of the ICP, expressed in a series of articles a strongly critical opinion of CCP positions but stressed at the same time the need to be very careful and cautious, given the divisions among the various Communist parties, about the possibility of convening an international conference of communist and workers parties (Longo 1968).

4 Conclusions

In addressing the political ties and exchanges between Italy's Communist Party and People's China in the '50s and early '60s, this paper has tried to trace the development of ICP-CCP relations focusing in particular on the Italian Communists' views and analysis of the CCP's historical experience. The paper shows that ICP leaders generally viewed the CCP's revolutionary experience and politics in a flexible way, attributing a positive judgment to its nationally-rooted peculiarities. This evaluation largely stemmed from the ICP's own national experience and its search for a more autonomous international role.

At the same time, light is shed on the complexity of party-to-party relations as they fell within the broader framework of the international Communist movement that, from the second half of the '50s, began to show its limits and lose its cohesion. In this respect, the events unfolding in 1956 marked a crucial historical moment. The issues that began to be addressed and debated at that time (i.e. de-Stalinization, peaceful coexistence and the thesis of the plurality of the national roads to socialism) soon revealed the existence of profound divergence of opinion among Communist leaders worldwide.

Differences in the viewpoints of Italian and Chinese Communist leaders could be felt as early as the 8th National Congress of the ICP held in Rome in December 1956. Then, at the 1957 Moscow conference, Italian leaders realised that distinctly different positions were becoming apparent between the two parties. Influenced by the escalating Sino-Soviet dispute and the radicalization of China's internal and external politics, relations between the ICP and the CCP eventually deteriorated, ending with the abrupt condemnation by the CCP of Togliatti's policy in late 1962/early 1963.

Yet awareness of emerging divergent positions on crucial issues such as 'peaceful coexistence' did not prevent the ICP leadership agreeing on the important decision to send a high-level delegation to China in 1959. This initiative proved the ICP leaders were attentive to the PRC and its international influence as well as that they were committed to reaching a consensus on issues on which the Chinese and Italians had already taken up clearly different positions.

As Qiang Zhai emphasised based on CCP senior leader Bo Yibo (1908-2007)'s memoirs (Qiang Zhai 1996), the 1958-59 period was particularly important in the shaping of Mao Zedong's views on the question of 'peaceful evolution', especially after the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles', statements about encouraging a peaceful change of the Communist system. In Qiang's opinion, Mao's apprehension about the future development of China was closely related to his analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet system: he basically believed that Dulles' idea that peaceful evolution within the Communist world could be brought about, was already taking effect in the Soviet Union with Khrushchev.

Above all, as the paper shows, even after the CCP's condemnation of the Italian Communists' positions in 1963, Togliatti opposed the idea of a collective condemnation of China, and at the same time the ICP continued to support the PRC's international cause, carrying on the political battle for diplomatic recognition within Italy. This on the one side will pave the way, thanks also to the efforts by Pietro Nenni, leader of the Italian Socialist Party, to the recognition of the PRC by Italy on November 1970; on the other side, it will maintain a thread, however thin, between the two parties, creating the conditions that led to the reprise of bilateral relations before with Enrico Berlinguer's visit to China in 1980 (see for instance Bordone 1983).

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