

Chiang Kai-shek and His Time

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Difficult Years: Italy's Policy Towards Chiang Kai-shek's China, 1945-49

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Abstract This article deals with Italy's policy towards Chiang Kai-shek's China from the end of the second world war to Chiang's defeat in 1949. It will first introduce some general questions and aspects related to Italy's foreign policy in the postwar years and then it will discuss some trends and problems about Italy's policy towards China, taken in consideration two main periods: first, the period from the last months of the war to the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty in February 1947; second, the post-1947 period to Communist victory and the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Summary 1 Italy's Foreign Policy in the Early Postwar Years. – 2 Italy's Policy Towards China: the First Period. – 3 Italy's Policy Towards China: the Second Period. – 4 Conclusions.

Keywords Italy China postwar years. Italy. China. Chiang Kai-shek. Postwar years.

In the aftermath of the second world war, Italy's international position was a very weak one: actually, although in summer 1943 Mussolini had been overthrown, the Badoglio Government with the support of King Victor Emmanuel III had been able to disengage the country from the alliance with Nazi Germany and with Japan, and Italy had achieved the status of a co-belligerent nation, Italy was however perceived by the major victorious powers as a defeated enemy country. During the negotiations that would lead to the drafting of the Italian peace treaty, a punitive approach had prevailed and in February 1947 (signing of the Paris treaty) the Italian Government had been compelled to accept a sort of diktat: territorial losses (Dalmatian territories and the Istria peninsula, African colonies, Dodecanese islands), heavy reparations to pay, severe limitations especially in the military field (Lorenzini 2007, 169). From the end of the war and for more than two years Italy was thus subject to the armistice terms and to foreign occupation, and foreign troops (basically American) would leave the country only at the end of 1947.

Italy's international status sharply contrasted with the aspirations nurtured by the Italian antifascist political class, by the diplomatic corps and by many Italian opinion makers: in their opinion, Italy had to recover the role of a middle-rank power which would exert its influence in the two

traditional areas of Italy's foreign policy: the European continent and what was called "an enlarged Mediterranean" (possibly widened to some parts of Africa and the Middle East). Thus, the recognition of the nation's international status and the revision of the most severe clauses of the peace treaty became the main goal of Italy's foreign policy after the end of the second world war and especially after the signing of the Paris peace treaty in early 1947.

It must particularly be stressed – as a general question but also as an important aspect, as we will see, in the bilateral relations between Italy and China – that Italian politics and diplomacy considered Italy's admission to the United Nations (UN) as a fundamental step in the process of the recognition of its international status: actually, the first application for the admission as a member of the UN was presented by Italy in May 1947 and was rejected mainly for some juridical controversies. Following applications were presented then many times starting from that of October 1947, but always met the veto of the Soviet Union, clear results of the growing contrasts between Washington and Moscow.

Only in 1955 such a dream will become a reality and Italy was admitted to the UN (for the development of Italy's foreign policy after the end of the war, see Monzali 2011, 47-65; Varsori 2001).

This article deals with Italy's policy towards Chiang Kai-shek's China from the end of the second world war to Chiang's defeat in 1949. It will first introduce some general questions and aspects related to Italy's foreign policy in the postwar years and then it will discuss some trends and problems about Italy's policy towards China, taken in consideration two main periods: first, the period from the last months of the war to the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty in February 1947; second, the post-1947 period to Communist victory and the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Main sources I have used in my paper are: general studies about Italy's foreign policy; selected memoirs left by Italian foreign ministers and diplomats; published diplomatic documents and in particular the *Documenti diplomatici italiani* collection (DDI, Italian Diplomatic Documents), series X and XI, which covers the post-war years.

1 Italy's Foreign Policy in the Early Postwar Years

Italy's post war foreign policy was clearly rooted in an antifascist spirit even if the lack of expert and talented diplomatic personnel made quite necessary, in the years 1946-50, to resume activities of quite a few diplomats who had made their career during the fascist period.

A leading personality in the new Italian foreign policy was Carlo Sforza (1872-1952), who had been Italian Minister in China during the late

Qing-early Republican period. Sforza became the Foreign Minister in early 1947, taking the position which had been of Alcide De Gasperi (from July to October 1946) and, for a very short period (from October 1946 to February 1947), of Pietro Nenni: he will be Italy's foreign minister and the main actor in the Italian diplomacy from February 1947 to July 1951, thus a very crucial period for Italy and a very fundamental one in the history of Italy-China relations during the post-war period.

Sforza clearly indicated that the main focus of his action would be the international rehabilitation of Italy and its firm stand within the western political and economic bloc headed by the United States. Sforza made particular efforts to create a solid and competent team within the Ministry and relied for that in particular from June 1948 as his general secretary on Mr. Vittorio Zoppi, a recognized expert of Africa. Zoppi was asked to work in order to resume the former prefascist policy to consult regularly Italian ambassadors in the main countries and include their evaluations as part of the Ministry Foreign affairs decision-making process. Sforza also basically confirmed the decision, taken in the previous years by the former Italian foreign ministers, to appoint some political men representative of the different political parties which were supporting the government, instead of professional diplomats, to lead some of the most important Italian embassies abroad: that's the case of Alberto Tarchiani (Washington), Manlio Brosio (Moscow) and also Sergio Fenoaltea in China (Giordano 1992; Di Nolfo 2006; Zeno 1999).

2 Italy's Policy Towards China: the First Period

During the first period (last months of the war to the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty), contacts were organized between the new democratic Italian government, headed by Alcide De Gasperi, and Chiang Kai-shek.

Italy was at that time represented in China from January to July 1946, by a low level diplomat (*chargé d'affaires*), Mr. Enrico Anzilotti, who resided for some months in Chongqing and then, from May 1946, in Nanjing.

It was only in July 1946 that the first Italian ambassador to China in the postwar period settled in Nanjing: he was the above mentioned Sergio Fenoaltea (1908-95), who discussed with Chinese foreign minister Wang Shijie and Chinese diplomats problems related to the future of China-Italy relations. A special meeting was organized, in particular, on August 14, 1946 at the Chinese Embassy in Paris among the Italian Prime Minister (and concurrently Foreign Minister), De' Gasperi, and the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Shijie, in order to evaluate solutions to pending problems within Italy-China relations and at the same time to look at possible Chinese support to Italy's requests and demands at the Paris Peace conference (Mae 1994c, document 153).

As indicated, Fenoaltea was a political personality rather than a professional diplomat: he was a member of one of the then Italian moderate parties and had been Undersecretary to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Bonomi Government, 1944). He was formally appointed in March 1946 as the first Italian ambassador to China after the end of the war. Actually, the diplomatic who had been initially chosen was Francesco Frasoni (1886-1974), nominated as the Italian representative to China on November 9, 1945, but he declined due to the reasons which have never been clarified. Frasoni later became general secretary of the Ministry from November 25, 1946 to May 31, 1948: after his resigning, he was substituted by Vittorio Zoppi.

Fenoaltea was able to assume his functions in China only in July 1946, due to the serious difficulties Italy was at that time meeting in finding financial resources and also to find a ship to transport the newly appointed ambassador, with his family and staff and all his belongings, to China. He will basically lead the Italian embassy in Nanjing for more than 3 years, from July 1946 to the fall of the Chiang Kai-shek government and the birth of the People's Republic of China.

In this period, two main questions were at the center of Italy's policy towards China and Italy-China relations.

The first question. During the last months of the war, before Japan's surrender, the problem of Italy's possible entry into the war against Japan was raised: a participation which was regarded basically as symbolical by many countries, including the United States (which in any case seemed to support almost in theory such a choice), but which was regarded as rather important by Italy in order to demonstrate its complete break with its past and confirm its firm stand to the democratic and antifascist front.

Various sources maintain that the US Department of State clearly indicated to the Italian ambassador in Washington, Tarchiani, that Italy's declaration of war against Japan will surely enhance Italy's international profile and facilitate Italy's passage as a co-belligerent country to an allied country. It must be also said that such a choice will surely be welcomed by China, who obviously considered in a positive way a further strengthening of the anti-Japanese front (Borzoni 2004, which stresses the role of Roberto Prunas, till November 25, 1946 the powerful general secretary of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; Mae 1992a, document 304; Mae 1992b, document 332; Mae 1994a, document 85; Mae 1994b, document 93: reply to 85).

As we know at the end this option did not become concrete.

The second question. The problem of the contents of the peace treaty between the two countries within the larger context of the Paris peace treaty (Italian colonial legacy in China, repatriation of the Italians, Italian properties, etc.). At the end, within the above mentioned Paris Peace Treaties of February 1947, a special section (Section V), articles 24, 25 and 26 concerned "Italy's Special Interests in China".

Articles 24, indicated that “Italy renounces in favour of China all benefits and privileges resulting from the provisions of the final Protocol signed at Peking on September 7, 1901 and all annexes, notes and documents supplementary thereto, and agrees to the abrogation in respect of Italy of the said protocol, annexes, notes and documents. Italy likewise renounces any claim thereunder to an indemnity”. Article 25 stressed that “Italy agrees to the cancellation of the lease from the Chinese Government under which the Italian Concession at Tientsin [Tianjin] was granted, and to transfer to the Chinese Government of any property and archives belonging to the municipality of the said Concession”; and Article 26 maintained that “Italy renounces in favor of China the rights accorded to Italy in relation to the International Settlement at Shanghai and Amoy [Xiamen], and agrees to the reversion of the said Settlements to the administration and control of the Chinese Government” (text in Unts, 49, 1950, 18-19; Italian text in Lorenzini 2007, 169; see also Mae 1993a, document 372; Mae 1993b, document 610; Mae 1997, document 423; Cm 1998a, 832; Cm 1998b, 988)

3 Italy’s Policy Towards China: the Second Period

During the second period (from the 1947 Peace Treaty to the fall of Chiang Kai-shek’s government), two different political and diplomatic questions became central in Italy’s foreign policy towards China and in Italy-China relations: first, Italian analysis and evaluation of China’s political and military situation and China’s future perspectives, based largely on the reports sent by Ambassador Fenoaltea and also by reports provided by Italian ambassadors in Washington and in Moscow; second, the question of a new treaty of friendship and cooperation to be agreed between Italy and China in substitution of that signed in 1928.

Considering the weak international position of Italy and especially its difficulties to build an autonomous foreign policy in China, Fenoaltea managed to have its own vision of the Chinese Civil war and to transmit it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was obviously looking to establish new positive and friendly relation with Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang but at the same time he seemed willing to find and to suggest in some way that Italy should take a kind of cautious attitude towards the Communists, provoking critical comments by some Italian political actors who saw in such an approach a kind of equidistance position between the Nationalists and the Communists. Fenoaltea’s views seemed also to be influenced by his desire to do his utmost to protect the small Italian community and the Italian interests – however limited – on the spot.

In his periodical reports sent to Rome about the development of the political and military situation in China between 1948 and 1949, Ambassador Fenoaltea tended to stress some points:

- The growing deterioration of the “economic, military and psychological” situation in Nationalist China. Fenoaltea stressed that Chiang Kai-shek had no real chance to maintain a real control in Manchuria and also in Central China and that while Chiang Kai-shek’s troops had been able to control Communist expansion they are subject to a heavy military pressure by the Communists especially in various areas (Mae 2000b, document 357; Mae 2000c, document 408; Mae 2005, document 328);
- United States attitude towards Chiang Kai-shek: the Italian ambassador reported how Americans in China largely considered Chiang as a old and intransigent leader who continues to refuse to listen to military and political suggestions advanced by Washington; at the same time, however, he notes that Americans were quite aware that there seems to be no real alternatives to Chiang and that in China there were no moderate and anti-Communist forces which at the same time are anti-Communist and have a popular support. Fenoaltea is also rather critical of the American endorsement of Chiang Kai-shek which seems to him due mainly to the desire of President Truman to find a mediation with the opposition (Republican Party) and to appease Nanjing in order to get its full support in American’s political and military plans and strategies regarding Japan;
- He stresses that within the international community in China there is people who suspect the United States are prepared, if the military and economic situation for Chiang Kai-shek is going to become more and more critical, to assume directly the leadership of the Chinese troops or almost to create within China some special areas completely controlled by American armed forces with the idea to maintain such positions for a long time;
- Fenoaltea also indicates that there are no concrete perspectives of a possible mediation between Chiang and Mao Zedong, especially considering that the Chinese Communist Party at this moment has no real interest to give to Nanjing any chance to reorganize its forces nor to give to the Americans a concrete hope that there will be in the future an anti-Communist China.

Fenoaltea considerations about the Guomindang regime serious difficulties seem to be largely shared by Italian ambassadors in Washington and Moscow. For instance, Manlio Brosio, who became the Italian Ambassador in Moscow in late 1946-early 1947 in substitution of Quaroni, reminds us of a long talk in early 1948 in Moscow with the Chinese ambassador Fu Bingchang (Fu Pingsheung 1895-1965). Brosio stresses that Fu had informed him that the war on the Manchurian front had turned quite in favour of the GMD troops and that actually Communist agrarian reform is not so popular as usually depicted in the west. Brosio indicates that Fu’s views seem rather optimistic and that, even if the Communist troops

have been defeated in the area of Mukden, this does not mean at all that this may represent a starting point in the defeat of the People's Liberation Army (Mae 2000a, document 81; see also Foo [Foo Yeh Wah, granddaughter of Ambassador Fu] 2011).

In early January 1949, Fenoaltea in another detailed report on the Chinese situation indicates that the situation is becoming worse, it is quite probable that Chiang Kai-shek is preparing to leave his political power and that a peace will be signed between Nationalists and Communists. According to him, American diplomats here in China seem to be convinced that at the end the Chinese Communist Party will moderate its political conditions to gain a peace agreement because they are aware that China will need USA's economic assistance and support (Mae 2006a, document 2).

However, only few weeks later, the Italian ambassador notes that the Chinese Communist Party seems no more interested in a negotiated peace with the Guomindang government: "That's not surprising, the game is over even if it will take long time before the Communists will be able to take over all the country" (Mae 2006b, document 206; Mae 2006c, document 213).

In the following weeks Fenoaltea send a series of despatches further stressing the extraordinary advance of the Communist troops (see for instance: Mae 2006d, document 557; Mae 2006e, document 663; Mae 2006f, document 750; Mae 2006g, document 1097).

However, in April 1949 the Italian Government decided to sign a new Treaty of Friendship with Chiang Kai-shek Government.

4 Conclusions

In the aftermath of the second world war and the first post-war years was rather weak: from the end of the war and for more than two years Italy was subject to the armistice terms and to foreign occupation, and foreign troops (basically American) would leave the country only at the end of 1947. Italy's international status sharply contrasted with the aspirations nurtured by the Italian antifascist political class, which thought that Italy had to recover the role of a middle-rank power which would exert its influence in the two traditional areas of Italy's foreign policy: the European continent and the Mediterranean. Thus, the recognition of the nation's international status and the revision of the most severe clauses of the peace treaty became the main goal of Italy's foreign policy after the end of the second world war and especially after the signing of the Paris peace treaty in early 1947.

Within such a general context, Italy's relations with Chiang Kai-shek's China were marked during those years by some fundamental questions and aspects: the problem of Italy's possible entry into the war against Japan, a participation which was regarded basically as symbolical by many

countries but was considered fundamental in Italy in order to demonstrate its complete break with its past; the problem of the contents of the peace treaty between the two countries within the larger context of the Paris peace treaty (Italian colonial legacy in China, repatriation of the Italians, Italian properties, etc.); after the signing of the Paris Treaty in 1947: Italian evaluation of China's political and military situation and China's future perspectives, based largely on the reports sent by Ambassador Fenoaltea; second, the question of a new treaty of friendship and cooperation to be agreed between Italy and China in substitution of that signed in 1928, which was obviously linked to the above mentioned evaluation. As already indicated, few months before Chinese Communists' victory in the civil war against the Nationalists (April 1949), the Italian Government decided to sign a new Treaty of Friendship with Chiang Kai-shek's Government for some main and important reasons:

- The need to obtain China's support to the Italian request to be admitted to the United Nations, considering that Chiang Kai-shek's Government was one of those which had signed in 1945 the Charter of the newly established United Nations;
- The need not to weaken Italy's relations with the United States, which were considered fundamental for the future of Italy.

Between late 1949 and the first half of 1950, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the break of the Korean War and China's participation into the Korean conflict, an intense political debate was developed in Italy about the problems if continue to support Chiang Kai-shek or open the path to a dialogue with Mao's China. The final decision, largely criticized especially by the Italian Communist Party but also by various associations and personalities of different political and cultural areas, was to continue to support the Republic of China in Taiwan, before in late 1970 the process of normalization of the formal relations between Rome and Beijing was made possible (on these questions, see Meneguzzi Rostagni, Samarani 2014; Pini 2011; Samarani, De Giorgi 2011; Cm 1998c, 760).

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