

People and Words: Spaces of Circulation and Political Encounters in the Experience of Edizioni Oriente (1963-79)

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Abstract The 16 years of experience of the Italian publishing house Edizioni Oriente and its journal *Vento dell'Est* have been an attempt to reshape Italian communist strategy through timely translations of Chinese ideological documents. The texts produced and the activities of translators attempted to forge a new society aiming at the realisation of Chinese communist practices in twentieth-century Italy. The transformation of society that these actors attempted through their statements and their translations can only be proved by following their actions and outcomes in an effort to build knowledge of China – and to spread Western political knowledge in China – while giving new lifeblood to their political ideas, which were reshaped and reconfigured. The present analysis will pay attention not only to the role of politicians and translators in transmitting existing knowledge to create a new one in a different space but also to the reactions of target readers and society as a whole (Callon, Law, Rip 1986). The means used as a link between actors and society are texts, transmitting a message that makes them agents in their turn (Latour, Hermant 1996). The importance of texts is defined in a “space of circulation” (Raj 2017) in which ideas have an impact on society in all of its aspects.

Keywords Edizioni oriente. Vento dell'Est. Translation and politics. Activism in translation. Maoism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Engaged Translations? – 3 Edizioni Oriente. – 4 *Vento dell'Est*. – 4.1 Outline of the Magazine. – 5 Agents and Translators. – 6 A Common Goal through Various Means. – 7 Target Audience. – 8 Final Remark.



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1 Introduction

The lack of governmental contacts between Italy and China in the 1960s and the turn taken by the European Communist parties after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956 sharpened in a group of Italian activists and intellectuals close to left-wing ideas the need and the desire to revitalise and renew the ideas of the Italian Communist Party (ICP). They wanted to take distance from the so-called revisionism derived from Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin's deeds and escape the process of destalinisation that started in Europe.¹ It was therefore natural to turn to Maoist sources that could point a course to follow for a movement that seemed to have lost it.

This essay attempts to retrace the actions and ideological choices of a group of people, the founders of the publishing house Edizioni Oriente, who contributed personally and with their textual productions to renegotiating communist ideology in Italy. Their agency ensured cultural revitalisation and stimulated political discussion while contributing to the formation of China knowledge in Italy. Keeping contact with the Chinese Communist Party also ensured interest and curiosity on the Chinese side towards the political choices of what was then the largest European Communist Party – the Italian one. What this group of communists did in Italy, gathering their forces and enthusiasm around an editorial, political and cultural experience such as Edizioni Oriente and its magazine *Vento dell'Est*, far from being an isolated experience, can be read in the wake of a global movement – the Global Sixties – that found its expression in approaching Maoist thought in an attempt to break with pre-existing models and offer an alternative forged in activism and commitment (Lanza 2017, 12).

This essay, given the limited availability of relevant archival material on the activities of Edizioni Oriente, is based on the analysis of the magazine *Vento dell'Est*, whose editorials will be taken into consideration above all, as well as on secondary sources on the period covered and on the relations between ICP and CCP. Using the resources offered by oral history, interviews were also conducted for this study with two protagonists of the events narrated: Vittorio Regis, son of Maria Arena and Giuseppe Regis, and Silvia Calamandrei. Silvia Calamandrei, now acting as president of the “Piero Calamandrei” Municipal Library and Historical Archive in Montepulciano,

¹ After Stalin's death (1953) and Khrushchev's severe criticism of his actions, a policy of distancing from the cult of personality and Stalinist policies began in the CPSU and in the countries that were close to the CPSU, which was the cause of China's estrangement from those who followed this path.

which holds important printed materials related to the Edizioni Oriente experience, opened its doors to the author of the essay. Unpublished manuscript material was also consulted, such as the diary of Dino Morlacchi, a participant in a delegation organised by Edizioni Oriente in 1964.

Guido Samarani and Sofia Graziani review the relations between the two parties between the 1940s and 1950s and also define the role of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the Italian Communist Youth Federation in building relations with the CCP before 1956 through the Chinese Communist Youth League (Samarani, Graziani 2015, 11-14). And if the lack of institutional ties between the Italian Republic and the People's Republic of China could have constituted an obstacle to rapprochement between the two parties – for example, considering that Mao Zedong did not have the opportunity to meet any Italians with institutional positions, Presidents of the Republic or the Council in office, from the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1971 until 1976, the year of his death (Pini 2011, 161) – the role played by trade, cultural and, certainly, political delegations in the contacts between the ICP and the CCP should be valued. However, much more would have been done by the PCI in weaving the network of relations with the CCP if there had not been two conditions to restrain its work, one concatenated with the other: its proximity to the Soviet Union and the consequent hostility of the United States (Pini 2011, 198-200). The CCP, as a keen observer and careful analyst, could not fail to see the shackles that held the PCI in place. Yet it welcomed it and chose it as an interlocutor precisely because its strength was being a communist party in a capitalist Western society. The testimonies of the communists allow us to make significant inroads into the halls of dialogue and negotiation, and they certainly give the Chinese communists the opportunity to speak more openly and in a language that the interlocutor was comfortable and familiar with.

The experience of Edizioni Oriente as an intermediary and privileged space for the circulation of ideas in 1960s Italy is a phenomenon whose scope has not been sufficiently investigated. The founders of the publishing house, driven by strong ideological motivations, acted as translators, writers, envoys of political delegations, and cultural intermediaries, and voluntarily or involuntarily worked to shape what is still today the context in which relations between Italy and China at a political and cultural level move in a dynamic continuity. Meetings that originated in the political and journalistic spheres played a fundamental role in strengthening cultural relations between the two countries, as underlined by Laura de Giorgi's analysis of the material of Velio Spano, the first correspondent in China in 1949 for the newspaper *L'Unità* (De Giorgi 2018, 178-95). The contributors of Edizioni Oriente worked in such a way as to create around

the publishing house and its translations of Chinese materials a sort of “centre of translation” (Callon, Law, Rip 1986, 228), a place where words and the corresponding concepts could be elaborated to give a new form to Italian communism. The Italian communists that contributed to the peculiar experience of Edizioni Oriente, and of its magazine *Vento dell’Est*, were firmly convinced of the necessity to follow the steps of Chinese Maoism, as

an answer to the crisis of the International Communist movement, to the failure of the Soviet revolution, and the lack of revolutionary spirit of the Italian Communist Party. (Calamandrei 2017, 51-8)

During the 1960s the importance of the Communist Party in Italy was growing. From 1964 to 1972 the position of party secretary was held by Luigi Longo (1900-1980), an Italian politician who participated in the Resistance during the Second World War and that was close to Stalinist positions, and the ICP achieved a 26.9% share in the 1968 elections. In the 1970s, the ICP’s policies met with the hopes and expectations of a large section of the public, who placed high hopes in the newly elected secretary, Enrico Berlinguer (1922-1984), a charismatic character with a strong impact on the history of Italian communism, who was also a proponent, among other things, of the rapprochement with China after the break of the 1960s (Bordone 1979, 282-315). In 1976, the party won the elections with a 34.4% share.

These were the launch years of the Cultural Revolution in China, and they were years in which the flourishing of publications with revolutionary intentions has been called the “Hundred Flowers publishing period” (Niccolai 1998b, 71).

In this scenario, Giuseppe Regis founded Edizioni Oriente in Milan in 1963 and it was in this sense a means, an actor in this endeavour. As an autonomous publishing structure, not controlled and not directly financed by China, it did, however, have its contacts in China and availed itself of the continuous support and collaboration of Italians who were in China and for whom it was easier to draw on first-hand material and news.² The business side was mainly taken care of by Fabio Matteini, the commercial agent of Edizioni Oriente and a staunch supporter of the cause. Matteini acted through a trading agency called Overtrade Srl, a brokerage firm that exported industrial products to China with the main purpose of supporting China and financing Edizioni Oriente (Calamandrei, Zazzara 2016, 10).

² Information on Edizioni Oriente, the activities of the magazine *Vento dell’Est* and the activities of their contributors have been extracted from a conversation with Silvia Calamandrei, a contributor to the magazine in the 1970s, which took place in Montepulciano (SI) on 20-21 June 2023.

Edizioni Oriente mainly aimed at the dissemination of CCP propaganda documents in Italy in opposition to Soviet and Italian communism and was active until the late 1970s. The publishing house translated material directly from Chinese (Pini 2011, 105) as well as published some magazines such as *Vento dell'Est*. In addition to funds coming from commercial contacts with China, the editions relied on subscriptions and distribution in a network of 'militant' bookshops all over Italy, and on the commercial intermediation activity carried out by Regis, who donated the Chinese side commissions for the purchase of newspapers and magazines from the official Guozi Shudian publishing house (Calamandrei, Zazzara 2016, 31). Articles to be translated came, from the most part, from Chinese press such as *Hongqi* and *Renmin Ribao* that Guozi Shudian sent to Italy.³

As exemplified by Maria Tymoczko's (2000, 23-47) theory of activist translation and Anthony Pym's (1998, 160-76) notion of embodied translators, translators might be considered as

social being[s] embodied with variant power relationships that can considerably enhance the translator's active agency in conflicting situations. (Guo Ting 2008, 2)

We hereby consider agency as the characteristic of being able to act for change, to be the medium of messages, ideas, and theories that have the power to modify existing concepts and relationships in an intertwining space. Activism in translation, as the characteristic of a translation or of a translator to be engaged in something, is seen as a "speech act" that participates in social and political changes (Tymoczko 2000, 26). The relationship between translation and politics has been analysed in both its meanings of translation as a contributor to the evolution and transformation of political practices on one side, and of the place of translation as a politicised object on the other (Evan, Fernandez 2018, 1-12). We will consider the first aspect of the question and pay attention to the intersection of translation with politics in a way determined by its providing accessibility to political information, and becoming an agent of political ideas. When a translation becomes a political act, it needs to reach its audience, otherwise its task will not be accomplished. Translation becomes then the way to fulfil

the need to establish a shared political language that allows understanding between a variety of social agents while encouraging social transformation, (8)

3 Interview with Vittorio Regis, Rome, 8 July 2023.

an idea well present in the work of Antonio Gramsci, the major Marxist leader of the ICP interested in the relation between language, translation, and politics. Gramsci noted the untranslatability between different systems, thus attaching great weight to translation as a means and agent of creating the political system. Gramsci's idea took into account what Lenin had previously stated on translatability: the need to

make the Russian experience available to foreigners with a translation that was meant to be a cultural and political work, (Lacorte 2018, 22-3)

a way to instruct and educate both the translators and the users of texts in a way that could make effective the work of transmission of knowledge. That also happens because Marxist ideas on translation have been seen as focused on translation as a passage between praxes (activities) and not only between linguistic structures (17) and, in Gramsci's opinion, each Communist party should undergo a "thoroughgoing translation" (26). This view will be taken into account in considering the role of the translations published by Edizioni Oriente, whose aim is the unity of theory and practice, and the possibility of the one being translated into the other.

Dominique Kirchner Reill (2014) in his essay *Partisan Legacies and Anti-Imperialist Ambitions: The Little Red Book in Italy and Yugoslavia* analyses the development of the Maoist wave that interested Italy during the 1950s and 1960s in all of its multifaceted manifestations. Stemming directly from the break between the Italian and the Chinese Parties, the whole range of events, recriminations, and activities organised by the Italian Maoists was part of a single project with which they attempted to bring the ICP back into the ranks of an anti-bourgeois and revolutionary struggle. A movement and a 'feeling' that wanted to counter the revisionists with various manifestations such as the organisation of Maoist marriages outside religion or the state, the press, leafleting, translations of texts that recounted Chinese communism, an ideology to be inspired by and put into practice.

2 Engaged Translations?

To decide if translations of the Edizioni Oriente fulfil or not what Tymoczko sees as the requirements of translator activism and engaged translations, we need to ascertain a few points. To be politically engaged, translations should have a "clear set of shared goals"; and should be produced by a group of translators that operate in the context of a wider cultural and political movement

which might include the production of other textual forms (theatre, literature of various types, pamphlets, speeches, manifestoes); (Tymoczko 2000, 42)

the audience should be wide enough as to ensure the spreading of the ideas conveyed through translations and texts should be chosen with clear political goals in mind, without excluding the possibility to manipulate them to make them closer to the target culture; translation methodology should be varied and flexible and chosen just to fulfil the final task and the immediate needs (42).

The essay will try to give evidence to these points and to show to which extent texts translated in *Vento dell'Est*, one of the major publications by Edizioni Oriente, were directed towards the same end, were working towards a common goal and were moving within the broader context of the Italian communist movement, with clear political intentions. We will consider in which way translations could reach a broad audience, helped by which other means of communication, and how they were enhancing a change, trying to reshape society, or at least the part of it involved in the creation of knowledge. We will notice, whenever possible, if terminology and lexicon have been 'manipulated' to fulfil the task of reaching a large Italian public.

Recalling Gideon Toury's assumption that "translations are facts of one system only: the target system" quoted in Tymoczko (2010, 3), we will have a close look not at the way translations in *Vento dell'Est* were done, but at the social change they were made for and at the society they were directed to. This leads us directly to the consideration of how *agency* in translation and translation studies means choices made and carried on by translators, visible both in what they choose to translate and in what they consciously omit, choices that come from acts of *resistance* and *engagement* in translation (8-11), and we find this particularly true when translations are political ones, made to operate social and political changes and to inform on political doctrines that are due to change the course of events. As Jean-Paul Sartre advocated, writing could be used to help effect certain changes in the Society that surrounds us (1948). It is of no use then to enquire into acceptable-adequate, domesticated-foreignised, literally-free translations when we talk about translations made to act a change. Those translations will necessarily end out as complex translations, adequate more to the target culture than to any linguistic paradigm (Tymoczko 2010, 16). Their complexity is strongly due to the very tight link with the target context. Activist translations are thus context-sensitive, linked to specific time, space, and political limits, and culturally structured. No escaping from a close look at all of these aspects is possible when dealing with translations that move from *resistance* and *activism* (234-5).

In a 1963 typewritten unpublished document on the Chinese general situation by Emilio Sarzi Amadè (1925-1989), foreign correspondent

of the Italian communist newspaper *L'Unità*, who had been living in China for a few years from 1957 to 1961, we find an interesting note on communist translations from Chinese to Italian (Sarzi Amadè 1963).⁴ In Beijing, he writes, in 1963 there were pro-China and anti-China Italians. Among the pro-China people, he counts two translators who were working at Radio Pechino, and who were probably the authors of the translations of Chinese articles in Italian, since no Chinese was still able to render Chinese texts into good Italian. The level of those translations, remarks Sarzi Amadè, was far superior to the level of translations from Edizioni Oriente.

Among the translators in China in the 1950s was a group to which Maria Arena, wife of Giuseppe Regis and co-founder of Edizioni Oriente, belonged. To the activities of these translators is dedicated an essay by Xu Lanjun in the volume that tells the story of the translations and dissemination of Mao's *Little Red Book* (2014, 76-96).

The relationship between Chinese-Italian political delegations, cultural relations on the one hand, and publications on the other around the half of the twentieth century was close and bidirectional (De Giorgi 2017, 170-93). Organisations for the dissemination of ideas such as *Servire il Popolo*, *Nuova Unità*⁵ or the much more significant enterprise of Edizioni Oriente were the voice of political, ideological, and cultural ties between Italy and China, and made use of a specific vocabulary and popular material that is interesting to analyse. Maoist propaganda, Boria summarises in *Between Dreams and Power Struggles: Maoist Propaganda in China and Italy in the Years of the Cultural Revolution* (2014), produced three types of material: that published in China for Chinese use, that published in China for international dissemination, and that published abroad for foreign use. Leaving aside the first category, it is interesting to see which words and slogans China used abroad to export its propaganda, or how foreign publications translated concepts and terminology of purely Chinese phenomena into their languages. Mao's *Little Red Book*, for example, was published by the Beijing Foreign Language Publishing House in Italian in 1967 shortly after the Chinese publication and was republished in Italy by the publishing houses Feltrinelli, Einaudi, Avanzini and Torraca, Edizioni Oriente, Lara, Samonà and Savelli, Dedalo or Il Quadrato, Mondadori, Newton Compton, and Longanesi. Alongside the official publications, a large group of publications proliferated, free from national conditioning and, although of more

⁴ Sarzi Amadè, E. (1963). *Situazione in Cina (fine ottobre 1963)*. APCI, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, MF 492, f. 2329, 1963. Roma: Fondazione Gramsci.

⁵ *Servire il Popolo* is the title of a publication started in 1968 that tried to convey the contents of Maoism to its readers. The publication was alive until 1975. *Nuova Unità* started to be published in 1964 and brought the subtitle of *Rivista di politica e cultura comunista* (Communist Culture and Politics Magazine).

restricted circulation in the circle of followers, certainly more authentic and with a stronger impact on the conscience of individuals (Castelnovi 2014, 7). Xu Lanjun (2014, 76-96), in his essay *Translation and Internationalism*, gives a well-informed account of how translations of Mao's works were carried on and of how translations committees were arranged, in China and abroad. The need for an ideological exchange was felt on both sides. Not only would the Italian communists undertake a systematic and passionate translation of Chinese documents, as we shall see in the experience of the Edizioni Oriente publishing house, but also the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would manifest the need to know the material produced in Italy. It was in March 1961 that the CCP requested that various materials and documents produced by the ICP be sent to Peking. The documents requested, as we read in an archive document of the ICP, would be: the collection of the newspaper *L'Unità* from 1944 to 1954; the complete collection of the magazine *Rinascita* from the beginning of its publication to 1956; pamphlets with Togliatti's speeches;⁶ materials of the fifth, sixth, and seventh ICP Congress and materials of national Party conferences in 1945, 1947, and 1955. It is therefore presumable that extensive translation and analysis of Italian documents was underway in Beijing, which would then be used to tackle any bilateral discussions with texts in hand.⁷ The Chinese, in fact, and Mao himself will always be described as 'well informed' about the Italian situation, the activities of the ICP, and the political debate in Italy.

Wang Ning (2018, 467) notes that in twentieth-century China translation is closely related to revolution and has played a pivotal role in the democratic revolution before 1949, in the socialist revolution after 1949, and in the post-socialist revolution since the beginning of the 1990s. Translation, Wang assumes, is and has always been the key to China's modernisation, the construction of the Chinese cultural new world, and the transmission of Western concepts to China in a way meant to shape Chinese ideology without setting aside the Chinese cultural base. Mao Zedong himself received Marxism through the words of translators who had embedded it with Chinese Confucianism, to transform it into what has been called Maoism.

⁶ Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964) was an outstanding Italian politician, and secretary of the ICP from 1927 until the year of his death in 1964. Togliatti worked hard to transform the ICP into a mass party, adhering to a democracy based on widespread participation and mobilisation of citizens. He hoped that the entire communist movement worldwide could work together to overcome the division of the world into opposing blocs. Togliatti considered the common interests of the entire human race to be of paramount importance, which had to be put before class and state interests, and gave importance to achieving global peace. According to Togliatti, states were to aim for peaceful coexistence, working together to promote disarmament and to pursue political and economic goals.

⁷ *Appunti sui rapporti fra il PCC e il PCI negli ultimi anni 1963.*

The pragmatism in this operation highlights the agency of translators and translated texts.

The importance given by the PRC to translation has been emphasised on several occasions. In the above-mentioned essay on the influence of Mao's *Little Red Book* on the world, Xu Lanjun writes:

From its founding in 1949, the young People's Republic of China fully recognized the importance of translation and treated it as a significant part of its cultural diplomacy and exchange. In hopes of creating a global language of the Maoist revolution, the Chinese government subsidized the publication and distribution of numerous foreign-language publications, such as *China Pictorial*, *China Reconstructs*, and *Peking Review*. But none of these could rival Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book* in visibility and influence. (2014, 76)

Xu continues:

I further argue that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) treated systematic translation as an important way to transcend and transgress the boundaries of First World capitalism, Second World socialism, and Third World development, and as a result, one essential element of the monumental project to 'export Chinese revolution to the world' was to transmit to a global audience a wide range of Chinese literature, and in particular Mao's writings. (76)

The choice of languages to translate into often depended on the availability of experts who mastered those languages. Until 1954, for example, only English, Russian, German, and French translators were available in China, and this constrained the choice of the target audience for translations by the Chinese Foreign Languages Press, which, to find a solution to the impossibility of exporting translated materials, planned recruitment campaigns for translators in India, Indonesia, Latin America, and Arabic-speaking countries in 1959. The available translators belonged to three different categories:

overseas Chinese who came back to New China; foreign experts from both capitalist and socialist countries and short-term foreign translators. (82)

Not everyone in Italy was happy with the way the ideas of Chinese communism and the terms used to delineate and describe them were transmitted and reworked. Franco Fortini,⁸ in a speech at the Milan

⁸ Franco Fortini is an intellectual and poet who first came to China in 1955 as part of an important cultural delegation led by Piero Clamandrei. Fortini is the author of *Asia*

conference *Il Punto sulla Cina* (4-5 November 1972), lamented the Italian side's uncritical acceptance of Chinese terminology:

For example, we uncritically accepted the term 'ultra-left' which, as you know, has a very precise meaning in China compared to the definition of 'ultra-left' during the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, the ultra-left were fairly well-determined and precise groups whose documents, by the way, have also been published. Well, when the Chinese today speak of 'ultra-left', they do not only mean the ultra-left, they do not only refer to those groups that were so called in 1968-69. There is an ideological extension (I don't want to judge it, but I must point it out) of the concept of ultra and left. And so I don't know if we behave correctly by assuming that terminology equally and believing we are covering the same ground. While it may be that those theses that the Chinese now call 'ultra-left' were not classifiable as such, even just two or three years ago.⁹

Besides the Chinese Foreign Languages Press, the other Chinese actor in establishing and maintaining international contacts and cultural exchanges through translations and dissemination of Chinese material was the International Bookstore 中国国际书店, whose official transcription was Guozi Shudian. The Guozi Shudian was founded in 1949 and its main task was to carry out "cultural exchanges between the new China and other countries" (Xu 2014, 83). In the 1950s, the agency acted mainly as a 'trade organisation', carrying out mainly commercial activities. The turning point came in 1959, when Guozi Shudian detached itself from the Ministry of Culture to belong to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the China Cultural Council and to be engaged in more purely political cooperation and distribution activities, to enter capitalist countries with content and ideology to accelerate the socialist revolution in the world. The International Bookstore's activity was massive and had a huge international impact:

Maggiore, a report of his trip to China. Cf. Yang 2022, 159-72.

⁹ "Per esempio, abbiamo accettato acriticamente il termine di 'ultrasinistra' che, come voi sapete, in Cina ha un significato ben preciso rispetto alla definizione che di 'ultrasinistra' si dava durante la rivoluzione culturale. Durante la rivoluzione culturale gli ultrasinistri erano dei gruppi abbastanza ben determinati e precisi e qualificati i cui documenti, tra l'altro, sono anche stati pubblicati. Ebbene, quando i cinesi oggi parlano di 'ultrasinistra', non intendono soltanto dire *quella* ultrasinistra, non si riferiscono *soltanto* a quei gruppi che così erano denominati nel '68-'69. La loro è una estensione ideologica (non la voglio giudicare, ma la devo rilevare) del concetto di *ultra* e di *sinistra*. E quindi non so se noi ci comportiamo correttamente assumendo pari pari quella terminologia e credendo così di coprire la medesima realtà. Mentre può darsi che quelle tesi che i cinesi oggi denominano di 'ultrasinistra' non siano state classificabili come tali, anche solo due o tre anni fa" (Fortini 1972, 92-6; italics in the original). If not otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

International Bookstore claimed that it had established a business relationship with 738 agencies in 91 countries and offered 75 exhibitions in 37 countries to broaden the influence of Chinese books and journals. (84)

Creating an international network of distributors of Chinese material abroad was one of the goals of International Bookstore, both by establishing branches abroad and by forging links with bookshops and agents interested in promoting the revolution. In this, Guozi Shudian was certainly a very important driver for the founding of Edizioni Oriente, which will necessarily tie the story of its survival to its history.

3 Edizioni Oriente

In 1955, the original anthology of Mao's writings was made available by Rinascita Press, but in general, there was little commitment to understanding and exploring Chinese reality (Calamandrei, Zazzara 2016, 29).

The reason also lies in the fact that after the 20th Congress of the PCUS and the Soviet turn against Stalinism, pro-Chinese orientations became an intolerable ideological deviation within the ICP and there was no interest in following the developments of the Chinese experiment. Maoism then became a way to engage in anti-revisionist and anti-reformist polemics, to interpret communism in an orthodox manner, even if always remaining in a minority position. But China became a way to keep the hope of a utopia alive, and Edizioni Oriente appealed to all those who felt the need for China's knowledge. The publishing house also tried to give a new course to Italian communism, which was suffering from the Soviet turn. Translating timely Maoist documents was an attempt to change the course of events in Italy and give a new shape to communist thought at a time of crisis and sectarian splits.

Giuseppe Regis, founder of Edizioni Oriente,¹⁰ was an economist, and he had previously been in China¹¹ with his wife Maria Arena from 1957 to 1961, when Arena had been invited by the Ministry of Foreign Trade to teach Italian to party cadres, to cultivate a diplomatic class

¹⁰ Edizioni Oriente is the name of the publishing house but also of a magazine that was published from 1963 to 1966. In 1966, the title of the magazine changed to *Quaderni delle Edizioni Oriente* which came out from 1966 to 1977. As a publishing house, in addition to *Vento dell'Est*, which came out from 1966 to 1979, Edizioni Oriente also published other books.

¹¹ Cf. Deng, X. (1957). *Letter by Deng Xiaoping* (January 30, 1957) in reply to a letter by Velio Spano (December 19, 1956). Fondo Spano Gallico, s. 6, b. 17, f. 110. Roma: Fondazione Gramsci. Deng agrees to welcome Giuseppe Regis to China.

capable of interacting with Italians with a view to greater openings (Samarani, De Giorgi 2011, 120). The two were supported by the ICP with a commitment to support and strengthen the position of the People's Republic and the CCP Party in Italy. They began working more directly for the Chinese cause since relations between the two parties broke down in the 1960s (Calamandrei 2016, 39).

The very activity of Edizioni Oriente, that played an important role in maintaining relations with Mao's China at a time of crisis in relations between the two Communist parties, was viewed with great suspicion by the ICP because taking an interest in China was not considered an orthodox activity within the ranks of the party, so much so that Fabio Matteini, who at the ICP congress in 1966 said that the door to dialogue with China had to be kept open, was expelled from the Party. The expulsion from the Party, and Matteini's consequent dismissal, brought him closer to Giuseppe Regis, who offered him to collaborate with Overtrade Srl.

"There was an enormous curiosity to learn about his [Mao] thought and work, to be inspired and taught, to learn about the policies and positions of the Chinese Party and government", says Regis in an interview (Niccolai 1998a, 70-6), and the lack of information on contemporary China was the reason for founding Edizioni Oriente and starting the publication of nine editorials from 1963 on the divergences in the international communist movement and the magazine *Vento dell'Est* which reproduced documents, travel reports, surveys and articles translated from the Chinese language, on developments in China. Another major attempt of Edizioni Oriente was the publication from 1966 to 1978 of *Quaderni della stampa cinese* (Chinese Press notebooks) with translations by Grazia Cerchi¹² of Xinhua articles. In addition to this, several volumes of Mao's works and other books on other topics were published (Niccolai 1998a, 70-6). The purpose of Edizioni Oriente, which is well reflected in the magazine *Vento dell'Est*, was precisely to publish authentic material, official texts, and the voice of the CCP that was to speak unfiltered to Italian communists to educate them and mark the new course.

Edizioni Oriente stopped his activities in 1979, after Mao's death. The reason, as explained by Regis, was that after the political turn of Deng Xiaoping, the opinions of the publishing board changed and became less homogeneous.

After all, the new leader's openness to 'getting rich is glorious' put those who had championed the cause of Chinese communism in great difficulty. In addition to ideological and political reasons, already by

¹² Grazia Cerchi (1937-1995) was a communist journalist and writer, founder of the journal *Quaderni Piacentini*, one of the magazines that gave most impetus to the development of Maoism in Italy (Gabbas 2022).

the early 1970s, with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and China and China's subsequent entry into the United Nations, the economic intermediation activities of Regis and his group were no longer of any use to the Chinese. China's membership of the United Nations made it a less mysterious country and access to sources of information became easier and more immediate.

As early as 1973, Edizioni Oriente had transformed itself from a publisher into a political-cultural institute, continuing to publish *Vento dell'Est* and the *Quaderni*, but this time alongside publications on China by major publishers such as Feltrinelli and Einaudi, giants and mainstream publishers on the Italian scene (Calamandrei, Zazzara 2016, 34). The new board of the publishing house consisted of Maria Arena, Filippo Coccia, Mireille De Gouvillie, Paola Forti, Gigi Lodigiani, Edoarda Masi, Fabio Matteini, Giuseppe Regis, and Nicoletta Stame, who were joined by Silvia Calamandrei, Luca Meldolesi and Alessandro Russo from 1975. However, this was the phase in which trust in the CCP began to falter, and the scholars in a work of reconsideration of their experiences and rethinking no longer felt that they belonged to that thought in which they had believed so much. In Fabio Matteini's private archive, we read:

Whatever decision is taken, it must be taken without fear of the possible consequences and therefore without being opportunistic to avoid them. They [CCP] may publicly label us as a poisonous herb or whatever, they may stop sending us newspapers and books, they may refuse us any delegation or invitation, they may even hinder the commercial work that some of us do with China, but none of this should affect us at all. I am not for sale. All this, while reaffirming our friendship for the Chinese peasants and workers and our faith in the Chinese revolution. (Calamandrei, Zazzara 2016, 35)

Edoarda Masi's writings and opinions have also always been characterised by a strong and far from blind intention to learn more about China and evaluate it critically (Gabbas 2022). Matteini will express in his writings a strong disappointment with the Chinese turnaround after Mao's death and will do so by describing the social and economic change he personally experienced in so many small contacts with the Chinese: from not even accepting a cigarette to becoming corruptible, from the desire to progress all together to the widening social gap. The disappointment expressed is the same as that of Edizioni Oriente and is the reason why the work of disseminating Chinese ideology and knowledge about what was happening in Maoist China has come to a standstill and disillusionment (Calamandrei, Zazzara 2016, 15).

4 *Vento dell'Est*

In 1966 the publication of *Vento dell'Est* began on the initiative of Maria Arena. The title was taken from Mao's phrase 'the east wind prevails over the west wind', a thesis in which Arena believed. The magazine published historically conditioned documents, but Regis took pains to ensure that the magazine was not an expression of the political line of a few and that it continued to give space to Chinese affairs. For this, she was also often challenged, so much so that it once happened that Arena and her contributors were sequestered in the editorial office for two days. However, she wanted to give space to intellectuals with no ties to anyone such as Aldo Natoli, Silvia Calamandrei, Lisa Foa, Edoarda Masi, and Enrica Collotti Pischel, who were sidelined by all the sectarian groups in Italy. Arena wanted to give voice to different positions, as long as they were in favour of moral principles and social goals in line with Mao's thought. Arena was strongly convinced that the east wind could enrich the west wind, which mistakenly believed itself to be the holder of truth. She wanted at all costs to give a voice to what came from China that did not find sufficient space in the Italian society of the time, and in this, she was an important figure in the work of encounter and exchange between Chinese and Italian politics (Collotti Pischel 1988, 346).

Vento dell'Est systematically wrote about China, aiming for the least possible stereotypical analysis of Chinese facts. The depth to which magazines like *Vento dell'Est* were led came precisely from the attempt to go beyond the common viewpoint and in line with the ICP (Niccolai 1998b, 71).

The editorial board consisted of Maria Arena, Filippo Coccia, Mireille De Gouville, Edoarda Masi, and Giorgio Zuchetti. The composition of the editorial board, which would change several times over the years, is important to understand how the relationships between the magazine's promoters evolved and how their ideological outlook and commitment to the content to be conveyed changed. From issue 4, Mario Cannella would take over the editorship, he would only be on the editorial staff until issue 7. From issue 8 onwards, the editorship remained with Arena, De Gouville and Coccia. The year 1977 was to be a turning point for the magazine and one of the great changes that, although they presaged an improvement in the editorial conditions and an increase in the quality of the content, would instead be the last flashes of life for a magazine that could no longer find the motivation to go on. In 1977, from issue 44 to issue 50, the editorship was enlarged with new members – Silvia Calamandrei, Luca Meldolesi, and Alessandro Russo – who were very active in translating and choosing the material to be published. From issue 51 [fig. 1], with a new publisher (Gabriele Mazzotta from Milan), Maria Arena, Mireille de Gouville, and Silvia Calamandrei will remain in

the editorship. Issue 53 of September 1979 was to be the magazine's last issue. Matteini's commercial activities, aimed mainly at financing Edizioni Oriente, were interrupted and there were no longer the conditions to continue the publishing experience. Mao's death also marked a period of internal ruptures within the CCP in China. The Foreign Language editions, which had leaned on one or the other figure, no longer had the conditions to survive at the time of the changing of the guard. Edizioni Oriente, for example, relied logistically on Guozi Shudian, and with its closure, the activities of the Italian publisher can no longer survive either.

4.1 Outline of the Magazine

The journal, a quarterly, opens with a first issue in which out of a total of seven articles, three are translations of texts written by Mao Zedong, one is by Shoici Sakata, one by Wu Guanhui, and one by Liu Danian (the conclusion is signed by "c.p."). Browsing through the index of the 53 issues, it is evident how the contents move from translations from Chinese to original studies, reflections, and criticisms by the journal's contributors.

The journal's tasks were to spread knowledge and disseminate not only Maoist theoretical texts but also material on an incredible variety of topics, from the class struggle and the differences between the capitalist and socialist ways or the critique of structuralist linguistics in the second issue to scientific experiences and philosophy for the masses in the third. Silvia Calamandrei, in an article about the magazine, writes:

Vento dell'Est wanted to educate these young people and let them understand better the complexity of the history of the Chinese revolution, but did not stand against this wave of juvenile enthusiasm: Mao, Giap, Ho Chimin and Che Guevara were mixed in the slogans of the student demonstrations, as references to the willingness to change radically the world and the system. (2017, 51-8)

From the critique of thinking in images or revolution in the historiographical field in the third issue to a selection of documents on the Cultural Revolution in the first issues of 1967 and the rural and industrial experiences of Dazhan and Daqin or the work of foreign missionaries in China in the second half of the nineteenth century, *Vento dell'Est* covers a variety of topics on China and on the need to be inspired by it. It is in issue 6 that the first literary texts appear with Lu Xun and the fate of nationalist literature. Issue 7 sees articles by non-Chinese authors for the first time: Sidney Rittenberg and Helene Marchisio. Issue 8 is entirely dedicated to agrarian and

industrial economics and focuses on Maoist experiences. Issue 9 of 1968,¹³ a year of upheaval and revolution in Italy too, begins with an article on the Cultural Revolution and one on education and sees the collaboration of Francoise Paron on the editorial board. It announces the publication of an anthology of Mao's writings and volume IV of his selected works by mid-year, while many texts have already been translated and published by Edizioni Oriente. Issue 10 carries an article entitled "Fen Shui Ling - Dialoghi del film" (Fen Shui Ling - Movie Dialogues).¹⁴ The opening to the cinema is a sign of an experience of theoretical commitment that openly fits into the wake of activist translations. Issues 11 and 12, in a single volume, continue the discussion on the Cultural Revolution and open up to Chinese foreign policy, with articles on Chinese support for revolutionary movements around the world and a statement by Mao on supporting the struggle of African Americans against violence. Issue 13 presents a dossier on teaching and intellectuals in China, and the more target-reader-oriented line is expressed in an article on Nenni's initiatives and the "stunts of the Italian revisionists and China". Issue 14 presents a fairly theoretical layout of Lin Biao's report to the IX Congress of the CCP, the experiences of criticism, struggle, and transformation in Maoist China and opens up to France ("The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt in France") and Japan ("The Struggle of the Japanese Students"). It is interesting to note in issue 15 for the first time the appearance of an article on the workers' struggles at the Italian automotive factory Fiat, in a clear attempt at comparison and sharing. Issue 17 bears the index of the fourth volume of *Mao's Selected Works* and translates documents on revolutionary methods. It also talks about the economic crisis in Italy. Issues 19-20 present *Importanti direttive del Presidente Mao* (Major directives from Chairman Mao) with an interesting layout of articles and commentary notes, continuing the structure already begun at the end of year III with *Documenti di lotta-critica-trasformazione* (Struggle-critic-transformation documents), *Note informative* (Information notes) with a story from Mag-neti Marelli, *Rettifiche e discussioni* (Corrections and discussions) and *Schede* (Datasheets), with articles on Italian events. Issue 21 is the diary of the Edizioni Oriente delegation with its visits and meetings. Issue 22 continues to study the Chinese experience through the study of Maoist documents from the selected works of Mao Zedong. The information note this time concerns Campania region. Issue 23 offers a focus on the factory and its management. Commentary and

¹³ Issue 9 of the journal is preserved in two different versions, both bearing an essay on the Cultural Revolution as the core of the publication.

¹⁴ Fenshui Ling (分水岭) is a propaganda movie by Jun Li produced in 1964 by the August 1st Film Studio.

study articles appear alongside the translations. Issue 24, in addition to notes on Chinese international politics, offers a focus on medicine in China and Mao's views on medical and health aspects. In addition to an interview with Zhou Enlai, issue 25 reports on the political debate in China and other articles by Jacoviello, Palmierini, and Spazzali, a red relief lawyer. Again, a delegation is presented in issue 26 with its visits, interviews, and remarks. Issue 27, in addition to notes on the political debate in China, reports foreign scholars' articles on China and communism. Issue 28 of *Vento dell'Est*, from page 43 to page 183, bears the proceedings of a conference organised by Edizioni Oriente in Milan on 4-5 November 1972. Invited to the conference were all those who had taken part in delegations to China from 1970 to 1972, to take stock of their knowledge of China based on the direct experiences of those who had visited the country at a time of transformation and change, at the height of the cultural revolution, and to be able to organise future work on a more solid and shared basis. Among those attending the conference were delegates from Edizioni Oriente, as well as delegates from *Il Manifesto* and the Italy-China Association. The conference was therefore an opportunity both to reflect on issues of methodology in the encounter with China and to make more concrete observations based on data and snapshots from travels. The hope, writes Maria Arena in the preface of the Proceedings, was to build a common understanding of China's current development during the Cultural Revolution and to avoid mistakes in future encounters. The tenor of the interventions is that of a useful discussion both on the contemporary Chinese situation and on how to make the experience of those who participated in delegations to China as useful as possible for the dissemination of knowledge about China and its people. Edizioni Oriente is certainly identified as an instrument for the dissemination of real and fact-based knowledge, and some speakers (e.g. Barbara Nogara) hope that it can be as less dogmatic as possible to reflect on the China they touched and knew. More travel notes in issue 29, which is meagre. Issue 30 reflects in the round on popular communes and world history. Issue 31 reports documents by Chinese political leaders on the Communist Party with forays into the Chilean question.

From issue 44 of 1977, a turning point for the journal, the names of the translators appear at the end of the articles. Thus we have the signatures of Silvia Calamandrei, Alessandra Lavagnino, Filippo Coccia, Alessandro Russo, Claudia Pozzana, Marco Müller, Giorgio Casacchia, Nicoletta Stame, Giuseppe Regis, Mireille de Gouville and Flavia Pansieri. The focus on translation work had certainly always been secondary in order of priority to the importance of the group working together for a common cause. A group of collaborators, often chosen for their ability to be more in touch with things Chinese, such as Calamandrei who published a letter from China in issue 37,

would always take precedence over the individuality of the translator, who did not work for personal lustre or individual activity, but to fulfil his duty as a member of a group working in the ranks of a larger movement. In issue 37 of *Vento dell'Est*, Calamandrei writes:

Dear Maria, I waited a while to reply to you because I wanted to send you something concrete and instead I am quite behind in my work. The language course has now become quite burdensome [...] on the other hand, learning the language better is indispensable for following the debate better and understanding reality better. So I find myself in a bit of a vicious circle because if I do my homework I don't have time to read newspapers and magazines well, but on the other hand I still spend too much time reading and so I need to study [...] there is a mine of things that would be worth translating and putting together. The main risk is to be overwhelmed by it, so the effort I wanted to make is to pull together some of the impressions gained in this month and a half to set the work in a more orderly manner. (1975, 146-7)

This can be seen as a relevant aspect of activist translation: considering the general cause more important than the individuality of translators.

5 Agents and Translators

The translators and contributors of *Vento dell'Est* were often in China, from there they selected the material and sent it to Italy for publication. However, they did not always do this with satisfaction. Indeed, Calamandrei continues:

Setting up work here is rather difficult because you understand China better but you lose the sense of what is needed and what is understandable in Italy. In short, one can no longer do that work of translating (in the best and broadest sense) the Chinese experience into the Italian one, which is one of the greatest merits of *Vento dell'Est*. That's why I think it's not good to stay here for too long, even though for me it is a very valuable educational experience. But I feel that the most urgent things are in Italy. (1975, 146-7)

The editorial board, although in different configurations, consisted of people who were able to select material in Chinese and, above all, translate it. In editorial meetings, they discussed how to translate into Italian concepts with Chinese characteristics and tried to unravel all the allusions behind the selected essays. They used to choose texts from a great variety of journals and magazines as *Renmin Ribao* 人民

日报, *Guangming Ribao* 光明日报, *Hong Qi* 红旗, *Wenyi Bao* 文艺报, *Jingji Yanjiu* 经济研究, *Lishi Yanjiu* 历史研究, *Xin Jianshe* 新建设, *Kexue Tongbao* 科学通报 (*Vento dell'Est* 1965, 88). In *Vento dell'Est*, there was a strong need to process the texts and decode every facet of them. Vittorio Regis, son of Maria Arena and Giuseppe Regis, says that what was perhaps missing from the magazine was an exchange and comparison with scholars and translators from other countries. The debate remained essentially in Italy and the only time when an opening to the outside world took place was the delegations sent to China. These were experienced as a moment of study, training, and discussion. Maria Arena, whenever she had the opportunity, interacted with her Chinese comrades to clarify doubts and verify interpretations of Chinese texts.¹⁵

Silvia Calamandrei recalls that Regis encouraged people to go to China, especially to see the Chinese reality. For this reason, *Vento dell'Est* constantly organised trips that always had a preparatory moment in which Regis made people think about what the right questions to ask would be, taught them to go beyond stereotypes to investigate reality more deeply, invited them to dig into the apparent mediation of official Chinese documents to search for the contradiction from which the mediation stemmed. The delegations organised by *Vento dell'Est* were not “visits to an ideal country”, but “an attempt to make contact, to verify, to confront”, to check theory in practice and, above all, in a very diverse practice and reality (Colloiti Pischel 1988, 347).

Contributors such as Mireille de Gouville and Filippo Coccia had access to the Chinese press and chose the texts to be published from the many that they read and sifted through on the spot. Mireille de Gouville leaves an important testimony of the translation activity within *Vento dell'Est*:

Sources of information on China were non-existent here in Italy, which is why the magazine *Vento dell'Est* was created. Everything that was published in China was not brought to Italy, there was nothing. I started working on it straight away, from France, as I could translate directly from Chinese: within the magazine, Filippo Coccia and I were the main translators. Masi also translated some things [...]. We had the presumption of being a competent, professional, and qualified source of information, at the service of the left in general, with the hope of maintaining this authoritative character. (Niccolai 1998b, 77)

Coccia's skills, it is also said in the presentation of the first issue of the magazine, help to ensure the quality of the translations.

¹⁵ Interview with Vittorio Regis, Rome, 8 July 2023.

Correctness in the use of technical terminology is a concern of the journal, and sinologists help to ensure this. We speak here of sinologists because the editorial board of *Vento dell'Est* was made up of people who went on to play a very important role in the dissemination of knowledge about China and research on China: Filippo Coccia (1934-1997), for example, was a professor of contemporary Chinese history at "L'Orientale" University in Naples and author of some of the most important studies on the policy of reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping since 1978; Mireille De Gouville taught Chinese language at the University of Bergamo; Edoarda Masi (1927-2011) was a translator and essayist, a profound connoisseur of Chinese culture and lecturer of Chinese at various Italian universities; Silvia Calamandrei is a scholar, translator and an expert on Chinese matters. Students, or collaborators in China, also had the power to propose monographic issues according to the needs of the moment, either for urgency felt in the field as during the Cultural Revolution, or, as in the case of the last issues (45-46 and 46-47) to delve into aspects of the past when the present was not yet decipherable. In issue 44 of January 1977 it is said that time was needed to process what was happening. Issue 44 of *Vento dell'Est* marks a turning point for the fortunes of the magazine. The death of Mao, and the arrest of the Gang of Four, brought confusion among the magazine's contributors, who tried to figure out which side was the 'right' one, that Chinese 'right side' that they had pledged to know and pass on to the Italian public.

A significant signal in this issue, writes Silvia Calamandrei, was a box of the Guozi Shudian (the worldwide distributors of the Chinese press and publications) announcing that the magazines *Xuexi yu Pipan* 学习与批判 and *Zhao Xia* 朝霞 had been suppressed and that other magazines would suffer delays. The first two were publications edited by the Chinese Leftists, from which *Vento dell'Est* had translated a lot of materials. The apologies for the delays and the announcement that subscriptions would be refunded showed that the Regis were still in touch with the official Chinese channels, and used this transitional period (the Hua Guofeng phase) to publish two double issues (45-46 and 47-48) (Calamandrei 2017, 51-8).

The texts were chosen from magazines and newspapers, sometimes also from what was perceived during the talks of various delegations that collaborators such as Maria Arena, Filippo Coccia, or Mireille de Gouville followed as interpreters. In the small group of editors that lasted the longest in the journal's history, Maria Arena represented the most charismatic personality and was able to engage scholars and contributors to offer contributions to the journal, while Coccia and de Gouville, who were younger, ensured the selection of essays and articles directly from the Chinese press, without necessarily having to go through the Guozi shudian's decisions regarding materials for foreign countries. This gave *Vento dell'Est* a degree

of autonomy from Chinese priorities (Calamandrei 2017, 51-8). The presence of student-collaborators in China, who were able to have access to news as soon as it was published in the Chinese press, on the one hand, guaranteed *Vento dell'Est* a high degree of reliability about sources and first-hand material, but on the other hand, somehow did not foster the emergence of a critical sense about the events analysed, and carried forward a biased and aligned point of view, because it was also strongly emotionally involved in the events. Silvia Calamandrei continues:

A lot of fresh documents and interviews on this struggle were provided by a group of Italian students that were living at the time in Beijing, to whom I belonged and with whom I kept contacts after coming back to Italy. I would mention especially Alessandro Russo and Claudia Pozzana, who are now teaching at Bologna University. The involvement in this battle was passionate: we were not observers, but wanted to be part of this struggle, defending the results and the continuity of the Cultural Revolution that the capitalist roaders wanted to dismantle. (2017, 51-8)

Maria Arena could be described as an unconventional sinologist. She had studied Chinese in the 1940s and 1950s and, once in China, “became a highly sensitive point of reference for Chinese social and intellectual reality” (Collotti Pischel 1988, 344). She was extremely interested in the real life of China of which she always had a keen perception and was always ready to offer a point of view and support in understanding China to those who managed to get to Beijing and were lucky enough to meet her (344).

Arena began working at Edizioni Oriente around 1963-64, doing documentation work and disseminating in Italy documents that the Chinese were publishing, and that constituted material that could give rise to stimulating considerations since it was only obtainable by subscription to the Beijing Review, a magazine published in English, not easy to access in Italy.

Maria translated the Chinese texts and published them in poor Italian, but when she spoke of her work she had the look of a person engaged in a task of universal value: this consciousness was in her. (Collotti Pischel 1988, 345)

In addition to the above-mentioned Giuseppe Regis and his wife, the French sinologist Mireille De Gouville (Samarani, De Giorgi 2011, 122), Aldo Natoli, Lisa Foa, Luca Meldolesi, Nicoletta Stame, Silvia Calamandrei, Gianni Sofri and others collaborated with Edizioni Oriente. Contributors mainly came from the Communist Party, the left wing of the Socialist Party and Catholic circles, and other minor

formations. Several members of the Giambellino “Luglio ‘60”¹⁶ group began working for Edizioni Oriente to disseminate in Italy political material produced by the Chinese and other revolutionary movements such as the Vietcong.

An unpublished testimony of the activities of the “Luglio ‘60” group is that of Dino Morlacchi, who left a diary of his participation as a member of an Edizioni Oriente’s delegation to China in 1964 together with other comrades such as Gino Montemezzani.¹⁷ The trip to China had been organised with the support of the publishing house, and its feasibility was proof, for the participants in the delegation, that the group of ICP dissidents had taken the right, orthodox path, close to the correct positions for full adherence to communism and a revival of a revolutionary perspective in Italy (Morlacchi 2015, 63). The support of Edizioni Oriente had also enabled the opening of a group office at Giambellino in Milan.

The delegation thus ends up on the front page of *Renmin Ribao*, which headlines: *Chairman Mao Meets the Italian Delegation of Edizioni Oriente*, and shows a photo of the delegation immediately below the photo of the meeting with Sudan’s Head of State Ibrahim Abboud. Present at the meeting were, among others, Wu Xiuquan 伍修权 and Zhao Yimin 赵毅敏, members of the CC of the CCP. The delegation of the Edizioni Oriente publishing house was, it is said, invited to China by the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries for a friendly visit, also in view of its participation in the International Labour Day celebrations on 1 May. The head of the Italian delegation was Dino Livio Frangioni (*Renmin Ribao* 1964, 1).

Morlacchi’s testimony is didactic and chronicle-like and does not report the contents of the discussions during meetings, maybe written in a different notebook or, probably, torn from the diary (Morlacchi 2015, 64).¹⁸ What we may notice is the resemblance between the formalities and agenda of this delegation and those of the institutional delegations of ICP members. At the time of the break between the ICP and CCP, groups like “Luglio 60” kept the Chinese Communist Party’s relations with Italy alive and were treated with consideration

¹⁶ The group “Luglio ‘60” was a minor extremist political formation that detached itself from the ICP and gave rise to an autonomous movement in the Milan outskirts named Giambellino.

¹⁷ Gino Montemezzani, a truck driver, was an official of the PCI from which he left together with other comrades to found the “Gruppo Proletario Luglio 60” of Lorenteggio, an autonomous communist movement that pursued extra-parliamentary relations with the CCP. Montemezzani is the author of *Come stai compagno Mao?* (How are you, Comrade Mao?), an autobiography of the years 1927-70 published by Edizioni LiberEtà, Rome, 2006.

¹⁸ Manolo Morlacchi refers in his volume to “three diaries”. The author was shown two small notebooks, one with detailed notes of the trip (and with the remains of some pages torn out), and a diary.

and respect, if even Mao himself wanted to meet them. Certainly, Morlacchi and the other participants in the delegation were aware of the political weight of their undertaking in the Italian context, and yet there are not many traces of this in Morlacchi's diary, perhaps, as Manolo Morlacchi suggests in his volume *Fuga in Avanti* (Escape Forward), for fear that confidential information about the talks with the CCP's top leader would leak out to the Soviet Union during the return trip from China (2015, 65).

The participation of figures such as Dino Morlacchi and Gino Montemezzani in a delegation organised by Edizioni Oriente testifies to the breadth of the publishing house's interests since such trips had little to do with the publishing world and the publication of translations of Chinese texts. Edizioni Oriente nourished, with Chinese support, the interest in Maoist China of Italian intellectuals, politicians, and dissidents who wanted to get closer to ideas considered more orthodox and introduce them in Italy to feed those groups that had broken away from the ICP.

And yet the way 'foreigners' visited China, whether for long residencies or short trips on the occasion of organised delegations, fit the script of what Paul Hollander, in his essay *Political Pilgrims*, calls "techniques of hospitality": "techniques of hospitality" refers to the measures taken so that guests were persuaded, through sense evidence and lived experiences, that what they were seeing was good and right; attempts were made to influence guests' perceptions by convincing them that their eyes were seeing a reality that fully represented the country they were visiting (1988, 463).

6 A Common Goal through Various Means

Vento dell'Est was not an isolated experience, it did not work without more general coordination and a broader purpose. In the editorial of issue 17, for example, we find a document against repression signed by other journals such as *Corriere del Vietnam*, *Ideologie*, *Quaderni Piacentini*, *Resistenza*, *Giovane Critica*, *Nuovo Impegno*, *Rendiconti*. The magazine was therefore part of a circuit working for the same cause. As pointed out by Marco Gabbas (2022), Maoism in Italy, during a period defined as the "Long Sixties",¹⁹ developed through numerous small groups and different parties that often tried to win over the peasant world as well as Italian emigrants who had moved abroad in search of better living conditions. The delegations to China that

¹⁹ Cf. Gabbas 2022, 4: "The phrase 'Long Sixties' has become usual to define radical movements in the Western world spanning approximately from the Fifties to the Seventies".

were periodically organised were study and fact-finding occasions to learn about and convey the Chinese reality. Participants were not only members of the editorial board but came from the most varied backgrounds, or rather, they gathered communists working in other areas of the country's cultural and political life, who through their participation would then disseminate content and participate in the Chinese cause. In issue 39 of the magazine, there is a testimony of Nobel Prize winner Dario Fo and his wife Franca Rame's participation in a delegation: the world of theatre entered the Chinese cause, as did the 1975 delegation.

An attempt was also made to disseminate material and testimonies through the visual arts. In 2011, Matteini himself published a three-volume book of photographs taken during the years of the Cultural Revolution entitled *1966-1970 Xin Zhongguo shi nian-sheying jiben* 一九六六 一九七零年新中国十年-摄影记本 (*1966-1970 Ten Years of New China - Photographic Records*) to spread the image of a pure, concrete, essential China through shots that convey hope, love and a strong attachment to the Chinese people and society. On the cover, the character *wang* 望 'look far, hope'. Dissemination of the magazine and other materials produced by the Edizioni took place through subscriptions and direct sales in bookshops. Cities all over Italy were involved in the sale, from Milan in the North to Bari in the South.

The Edizioni were also a conduit for requests for editions of Chinese materials such as a book on China at the UN. *Richiedetelo presso le librerie o alle Edizioni Oriente* (Ask for it at bookshops or from Edizioni Oriente), read the editorial advertisements in the magazine. It claims to be the most real window of knowledge on China, to pass on knowledge and to be in a common movement in complete agreement with the Chinese for the choice of materials and contacts to follow. As described by Fabio Lanza (2017, 14) in his work *The end of Concern*, the so called Long Sixties was a period in which the creation, translation and transmission of knowledge about China and Maoism globally took on the tones of an attempt to look at China as a centre of propulsion for intellectual and political change to be adapted and modelled on different local experiences.

7 Target Audience

Undoubtedly distorted and enamoured of China, the knowledge passed on by the contributors to Edizioni Oriente was nevertheless a way to bring people closer to China, to make relations more feasible, even at the government level, because it was the result of passion and interest.²⁰

As Vittorio Regis recalls,²¹ the magazine's users were members of the political landscape and especially activists. *Vento dell'Est* was not a mass-circulation magazine, but as there were no other sufficiently well-informed media, and above all no other media interested in the Chinese world, it certainly was an important means of knowledge and dissemination of the experience of Chinese socialism in Italy, capable of offering a space of circulation for the formation of a China knowledge that would be useful to the subsequent development of China-Italy relations.

The target audience of the magazine was undoubtedly wide, not one of specialists. In the presentation of the first issue, it is clearly stated that the magazine aims to fill a knowledge gap about China for a wide audience and to educate and help the public opinion that needs to be informed to know and understand. The readers to whom the magazine addresses its essays are those who have not had the opportunity to acquire knowledge about China, since the ICP, which had

the task of fostering acquaintance and friendship with the Communist Party, the Chinese state and the Chinese people, has essentially run out of possibilities to continue this work due to its alignment with the positions of the CPSU. (Regis 1965, 4)

The Italian public and scholars who are not specialists in sinological disciplines, and therefore cannot read Chinese, are unable to find study material.

Presenting material in Italian to fill this serious gap in the documentation is no easy matter. More often than not, texts bristling with lexical difficulties have to be translated from the original language for those who are not specialists in the various techniques. (4)

The undertaking is difficult, but Edizioni Oriente feels it is urgent to carry it out, choosing Chinese material and presenting it in Italian to the public that is unable to have sufficient knowledge of such a relevant political experience from such a large slice of the world.

²⁰ Interview with Silvia Calamandrei, Montepulciano (SI), 20-21 June 2023.

²¹ Interview with Vittorio Regis, Rome, 8 July 2023.

Here, then, the audience of *Vento dell'Est* reads about

the middle peasants, the poor peasants, the rich peasants, the commercial bourgeoisie and the industrial bourgeoisie, (text by Mao Zedong translated in *Vento dell'Est*, 1965, 11)

in a rigorous and precise lexical choice. Reading translations from the Chinese press, however, one often gets the impression that the desire to be attentive to the source message also leads to very little detachment from idioms and idiomatic language, so dear to Chinese leaders. Idioms like *feng xiyu fangfa* 风细雨方法 (*procedere col metodo della brezza e della rugiada*, the 'wind and rain' method), *zou ma guang hua* 走马观花 (*ammirare i fiori stando a cavallo*, a fleeting glance in passing), *shede yisheng gua, gan ba Huangdi laxia ma* 舍得一身剐, 敢把皇帝拉下马 (*a rischio della vita, avere l'ardire di far cadere l'imperatore da cavallo*, one who does not fear the death of thousand cuts will dare unhorse the emperor) risk not being effective and having an alienating effect on the reader. These are certainly evocative expressions but with little impact on Italian society. Since the group of translators is made up of several people, we have, however, in some cases a punctual explanation with notes to the text of some otherwise obscure and unintelligible political formulae, as is the case, for example, for *si ge di yi* 四个第一 (*i quattro primati*, the four firsts), *san ba zuofeng* 三八作风 (*lo stile di lavoro detto del 'tre-otto'*, March-8-style behaviour), *san da minzhu* 三大民主 (*tre democrazie*, three great democracies) and *si hao liandui yundong* 四好连队运动 (*le compagnie delle quattro perfezioni*, four good companies campaign) (*Vento dell'Est* 1968, 27).

Important, however, is the role of the editorials, the introductions that open each issue of *Vento dell'Est*, because it is here that it is explained how the proposed translations and texts can and should have an impact on Italian society. Knowing China has, for the magazine's authors, the purpose of changing Italy. The Chinese experience must have an impact on how the Communist Party acts on and with the masses and how the masses operate in society (*Vento dell'Est* 1967a, 4-7).

In the spring of 1968, the magazine began to concern itself with ascertaining what kind of following the Cultural Revolution had in Italy. The magazine then became more and more the place to try to correct opinions, explain facts, and provide an inside point of view close to the Chinese sources (Niccolai 1998b, 87). The point that the issue of 6 April 1967 of the journal highlights the most in the editorial is the strength of the Cultural Revolution to take power to defeat the bourgeoisie and capitalists in a struggle "against old and new bourgeois tendencies". This is reflected in the choice of translated texts which concern the struggle between the reactionary bourgeois line

and that of the masses (*Hong qi* editorial of 1 January 1967), the relationship between revolution and production understood in a broad sense, also as cultural production, development, transport (*Renmin ribao* editorials of 7 September 1966 and 6 December 1966), or the need to extend the struggle to all sectors of activity (*Hong Qi* and *Renmin ribao* editorials of 1 January 1967). The desire, expressed in the connecting passages between the various translations, to offer examples to follow and programme documents is clear and strong. The need to make economic choices that run in the grooves traced by the revolution is stated several times and brings out China's leading role globally.

The importance of the target audience for the development of the magazine and the dissemination of Chinese ideas and documents presented emerges in the *Rettifiche e discussioni* (Corrections and Discussions) section, where we can see how the contents were reworked and understood through the lens of readers' experience. In this section of the journal we find opinions and reactions of those who want to express their point of view in response to the Chinese situation presented and, most importantly, want to draw a line to link the Chinese and the Italian experience:

Vento dell'Est has opened its columns to a debate on the positions taken by various groups on the Cultural Revolution taking place in China and on the contribution that the themes that emerged from it can make to deepen the ideological debate and to clarify the political line within the Italian workers' movement. (*Vento dell'Est*, 6, 1967b, 97)

In the issue of 6 April 1967, for example, we read Vittorio Rieser's opinion on how the Cultural Revolution's implications could be applied to the Italian situation, "while waiting for others to present their point of view in as much depth for publication in future issues". This is a clear example of the fact that *Vento dell'Est* fed a debate, brought content through translations, and received opinions in turn.

The process of knowledge circulation thus also finds in the textual production of *Vento dell'Est* and in a redefinition of the role of the party and of its protagonists agents capable of defining and redefining the role of the masses, the physiology of the party, the sense of building a socialist society and a shared destiny that must move away from terms such as 'bourgeoisie' or 'capitalism' and must approach 'socialism', the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the ways that China was operating in its revolutionary process.

The issues presented by the magazine resonate with the reading public, and the magazine publishes their opinions to open a dialectical debate on the Chinese situation and its possible applications to Italian society. In issue 9 of the magazine, after three years of

publication, the editorial states that the magazine's effort has yielded results and that the spirit of the Cultural Revolution

has begun to germinate and take root here too, and to present itself as an element of ferment in the class struggle taking place in Italian society. (*Vento dell'Est*, 1968, 3)

The reference is undoubtedly to the 1968 riots and the political turmoil of those years. Also in issue 9, readers are presented with a satisfaction questionnaire asking for feedback on the magazine's activities, the type of articles presented, the choice of topics, and even the graphic form.

8 Final Remark

The essay sought to show how much the experience of *Vento dell'Est* made the magazine's contents and its authors and translators true "go-betweens" (Schaffer et al. 2009) capable of creating, imitating and innovating China knowledge through a punctual analysis that starts from and goes back to texts, to make them protagonists in a shared space of circulation of knowledge. As Kapil Raj states:

spaces of circulation suggest a fabric with topographical unevenness, (power) asymmetries, and also the possibility of tapping into an already existing continuum, or cloud, of relations, rather than merely building individual linkages. [...] Also, circulation does not entail the smooth flow of knowledge between individuals, communities, civilities, and institutions, and does not imply any synonymy between circulation and fluidity. (2017, 52)

We tried to highlight how politically engaged the translations of *Vento dell'Est* were, and how the translators involved in the publishing operation had a "clear set of shared goals", led by Giuseppe Regis' intention in founding Edizioni Oriente, as communicated in an interview with Niccolai:

at the time little was known about Mao and China. Academical sinologists continued to deal with old China; no correspondent from Italian newspapers had followed people like Snow, Smeedley, Belden during the Liberation War and in the first years of people's power. Only *L'Unità* had correspondents: Velio Spano, who covered the final period of the Liberation War and then Emilio Sarzi Amadé, who was in China when I also was there. Apart from that, like today, news came from reactionary Hong Kong, American, and British agencies. That is why together with other comrades and

friends we founded Edizioni Oriente with the intent to present in our country the most lively things that appeared in the Chinese press. (Gabbas 2022)

Regis' statement thus fulfils one of the basic assumptions underlying Tymoczko's theory of activist translation: translators worked with a clear set of shared goals, and this goal was undoubtedly political. It was in order to meet a political need that texts were chosen and selected for translation. The articles submitted by Edizioni Oriente concerned the crisis in the relationship between China and the USSR, Chinese positions on war and peace, philosophical content, social sciences, law, education, culture, industry and agriculture. Everything had to contribute to highlighting the rightness of the official Chinese position. Instead, *Vento dell'Est*, taking a further step towards the elaboration of content, presented essays, articles and research papers with theoretical elaborations (Gabbas 2022).

Another basic requirement of activist translations is the adherence to a broader network connected to cultural and artistic movements, as shown by the interest of the collaborators of Edizioni Oriente in Chinese matters in general, the willingness to settle in China, and the fact that many participants in the delegations frequently organised by the publishing house belong to the world of literature, art, cinema. Organising delegations was, in fact, one of Edizioni Oriente's activities, perhaps no less important than the publication of material translated from Chinese: delegations were an opportunity for inquiry, knowledge, and dialogue with a not infrequent request for clarification on concepts to be translated and disseminated in Italy.

The work that the translators of *Vento dell'Est* did through their commitment and front-line presence in Chinese affairs sought to shape the political line of the Italian left, giving the ICP clear signals of detachment and dissidence in favour of an unabashed orthodoxy. Nor was publishing alone the terrain in which admiration for China and research into its ideology unfolded:

The various forms through which interest in China manifested itself included the ever-increasing enrolments in Chinese courses in colleges, interest in theatre, music, dance, medicine, history and even Chinese fashion. (Hollander 1988, 408)

About the need to reach a broad audience to fall within the canons of activist translation, if we read in the presentation of the first issue that the journal wanted to make up for the lack of knowledge about China for a broad, non-specialist audience, we realise, from the requests made to readers for example with a questionnaire in issue 9 of the journal, that they wanted to 'improve the distribution work' which was, therefore, still not sufficient for a broad circulation and

the network of 'militant' bookshops all over Italy where the magazine could be bought was not sufficient for wide distribution.

Finally, we can state without hesitation that, between the 1960s and the 1970s, *Vento dell'Est* was a field of debate, discussion, and knowledge; we can state it because of the large number of contributors, the wide range of topics that were covered, from literature to politics, from mathematics to philosophy, we can state it because of the attempt to stimulate discussion and open dialogue with readers through questionnaires, invitations to collaborate and interlocutory editorials that were deeply focused on penetrating the readership with ideas and knowledge.

The political experiences that the essay focused on, trying to interpret the experience of Edizioni Oriente and its magazine *Vento dell'Est*, tell of actions with shared intentions and aims, which had their roots in the 1950s and 1960s and were fundamental to the left-wing movements that later led to 1968 (Gabbas 2022).

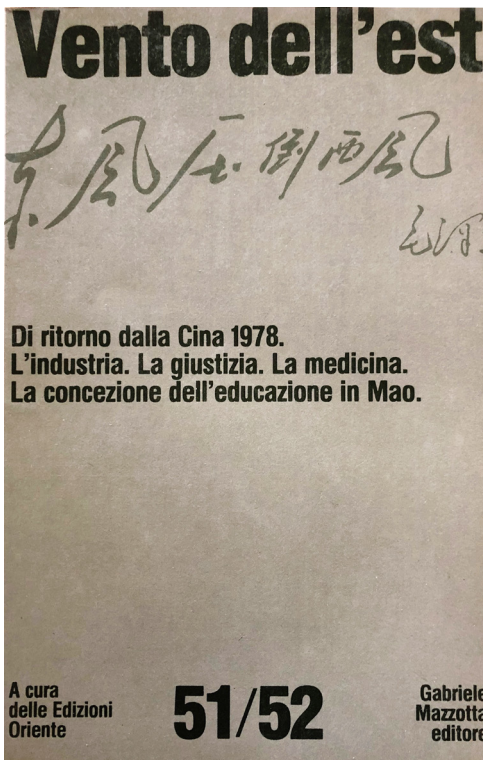


Figure 1
Vento dell'est, nr. 51/52, cover

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