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4/ The Journalistic Experience of Tiziano Terzani in China (1980-1984)

Lorenzo M. CAPISANI

ABSTRACT: *The journalistic experience of Tiziano Terzani in Deng Xiaoping's China represents valuable evidence to reach a better comprehension of the transition from Socialist planned economy to Socialist market economy. Terzani's story not only provides new information on Chinese history, but it also shows the nuances of the foreign judgement on Deng's reforms. The changes in economics and society had a primary importance, but the critical point for Terzani was the political sphere and the implications of Deng's reforms for the history of the People's Republic of China. Archival materials and published sources in Chinese contribute to analyze these aspects.*

ABSTRACT: *L'esperienza giornalistica di Tiziano Terzani nella Cina di Deng Xiaoping rappresenta una preziosa testimonianza per comprendere il clima della transizione dall'economia socialista pianificata all'economia socialista di mercato. Le vicende di Terzani forniscono non soltanto nuove informazioni sulla storia cinese, ma mostrano inoltre la varietà del giudizio straniero sulle riforme di Deng. I piani economico e sociale sono importanti, ma l'ambito politico rappresenta il punto centrale su cui si gioca l'esperienza di Terzani. Il materiale d'archivio italiano e le fonti pubblicate in cinese contribuiscono ad approfondire questi aspetti.*

Tiziano Terzani (1938-2004) was an Italian intellectual that is remembered today for his knowledge of Asian cultures and religions. Mass media, especially television, shaped the image of an Oriental-style sage with pacifist positions towards several sensitive topics like the Afghanistan War¹. This topicality led scholars to explore the journey of Terzani's life. However, a restricted number of works might be regarded as scientific examinations of his history². Furthermore, few of them have stressed the importance of China as a clear life choice or the arrival point of a long-time commitment. Terzani's experience in the People's Republic of China (PRC) started in 1980 and abruptly ended in 1984³. This period is at the center of the present essay which aims to

¹ See the dispute with the writer and journalist Fallaci after the fall of the Twin Towers: FALLACI, Oriana, «La rabbia e l'orgoglio», in *Corriere della Sera*, 29 September 2001, pp. 1 and pp. 23-26; TERZANI, Tiziano, «Il Sultano e Francesco», in *Corriere della Sera*, 08 October 2001, pp. 14-15.

² For biographical and factual accounts, see: LORETI, Àlen, *Tiziano Terzani: la vita come avventura*, Milano, Mondadori, 2014; LORETI, Àlen, FONDAZIONE GIORGIO CINI (a cura di), *Tiziano Terzani: guardare i fiori da un cavallo in corsa*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2014; CARDINI, Franco, *Introduzione*, in LORETI, Àlen (edited by), TERZANI, Tiziano, *Tutte le opere*, Milano, Mondadori, 2011, pp. IX-LXXVIII.

³ LORETI, Àlen, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-152; DE MAIO, Satriano, *Il mio fratellone Tiziano Terzani*, Milano, TEA, 2011, pp. 85-122.

emphasize the challenges faced by him as a journalist. His activity is contextualized in the times of Deng Xiaoping's leadership and reforms, which marked an epoch-making transition that raised expectations not only in China but also in the West.

This paper relies on scientific studies of Terzani's activity, but it positions itself among the works on Italian-Chinese relations during the Cold War and among the surveys on foreign reporters in the PRC. Hopefully, it adds a small chapter to the study of foreign journalism in China after the Cultural Revolution, as correspondents' histories give insights on the enhancements and uncertainties in the post-Mao relations between PRC and Western countries. This historical examination is based on archival evidence, especially Terzani's personal archives, and published materials in Italy and China⁴.

1. The circumnavigation of China

In Italy, possibilities to reach the PRC or be informed about it existed since the 1950s⁵. Associations of scholars and politicians with cross-party support organized conferences and travels, and produced publications. During the 1960s, the materials available in Italy to comprehend the Chinese world, mainly reportages and translations of official communiqués, grew in numbers. This activity was supported by Beijing government's propaganda, which recruited Italian native speakers. Radio Peking started to broadcast in Italian in 1960. Some members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) took the autonomous initiative to promote the knowledge of China as a way to express their dissent from the reformist positions of the Italian communists' party-secretary Palmiro Togliatti⁶. The years 1962-1963 marked a breakdown in the relations between PCI and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because of their diverging ideas for the future of the Communist international front.

The Sino-Soviet split seemingly had a repercussion on Terzani, who started to «play with [Chinese] characters in 1963» according to one of his memoirs⁷. The young Tuscan guy agreed on

⁴ This essay is the result of a “Fondazione di Venezia 2018” grant at Centro Vittore Branca, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venice). I would like to thank Eva Salviato, Emilio Quinté, Francesco Piraino and the whole staff. Special thanks to Àlen Loreti, Angela Staude Terzani and the young researchers that were at Cini in 2018. Chinese names are transcribed according to pinyin, while other transcriptions are used for best-known or untraceable names. The translations from Chinese and Italian are made by the author, while the ones from German are made by C. T. Quoted text in English is transcribed literally.

⁵ CAPISANI, Lorenzo M., «“Cina d’oggi” e Guerra fredda nella politica estera italiana: il Centro studi per lo sviluppo delle relazioni economiche e culturali», in *Italia Contemporanea*, 289, 2019, pp. 40-71; SAMARANI, Guido, DE GIORGI, Laura, *Lontane, vicine. Le relazioni fra Cina e Italia nel Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2011, pp. 99-132.

⁶ DASSÙ, Marta, RHI-SAUSI, José Luis, «A che serve la Cina», in *Limes*, 1/1995, pp. 185-198; BORDONE, Sandro, «Il contrasto cino-sovietico e la polemica tra PCI e PCC», in *Il politico*, 44, 2/1979, pp. 282-314.

⁷ Fondazione Giorgio Cini (FGC), *Tiziano Terzani (Terzani), Progetti editoriali (PE)*, 4, *Materiale preparatorio*, typewritten page «I had studied China...», [1984].

the need of a social transformation at the global level and showed a critical view on capitalism, but he refused to join communist or socialist movements. He seemed simply fascinated by China's recent history. He felt inspired by the efforts to build a prosperous and just society, as it was described by the reportages and some studies written in those years. Edgar Snow, Israel Epstein, Harrison Forman and Rewi Alley travelled China since the anti-Japanese war and praised the Communist-controlled areas for their progressist projects⁸. These authors and other ones wrote accounts that had resonance in the West. Terzani read them, being especially charmed by the figure and intellectual stature of Mao Zedong.

The importance of China for the young Terzani seems underestimated in the studies. It is often assimilated to a general interest in Asian cultures. Nonetheless, Terzani had a specific focus on the PRC and this recurrently emerged during the 1960s. While working in the Italian company Olivetti, he continued pursuing the study of Chinese history and language⁹. After leaving the good career prospects in the manufacturer, Terzani moved to New York in 1967 and attended courses of Modern Chinese History, Chinese Language and International Affairs at the Columbia University with a scholarship. At the same time, he tried to establish contacts with PRC diplomacy. His project was to obtain a visa and reside in China for a long period, but all the attempts were unsuccessful. When Terzani dedicated himself to the journalistic career, he immediately asked to be sent to China, but the director of the newspaper «Il Giorno», Italo Pietra, replied that he needed men in Brescia, Italy. His desire to reach the Asian country was so strong that he preferred to hand in his resignations.

The later occupation at «Der Spiegel», the German magazine based in Hamburg, was more in line with Terzani's hopes. He was assigned to cover entire Asia. This was intended as an intermediate step more than a compromise.

I dedicated part of my life to the study of China [...]. To reside in Asia at the gates of China for the moment (and I hope soon inside) seems to me the most natural consequence¹⁰.

Hence, the job of correspondent in Asia can be seen as a long journey to reach the People's Republic of China. Terzani gained a reputation for his news coverage of several countries, especially Vietnam and Cambodia. For example, he was one of the few international reporters that witnessed the liberation of Saigon in 1975¹¹. When he finally obtained to work and live in

⁸ For example, see: SNOW, Edgar, *People on Our Side*, New York, Random House, 1944; FORMAN, Harrison, *Reports from Red China*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1945; EPSTEIN, Israel, *The Unfinished Revolution in China*, Boston, Little-Brown, 1947.

⁹ MALCANGI, Alberto, *Tiziano Terzani*, Roma, Coniglio, 2007, pp. 11-13.

¹⁰ Resignation letter fully quoted in: LORETI, Àlen, *op. cit.*, p. 59. Original text in Italian.

¹¹ See: TERZANI, Tiziano, *Giai Phong! The Fall and Liberation of Saigon*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1976.

China, he expressed enthusiasm «in his witty way (he's Italian)» wiring «habemus officium» (*we have the office*) to Hamburg¹². Tiziano was followed by his family: the wife Angela Staude, the son Folco and the daughter Saskia.

For these reasons, Tiziano Terzani seems to represent a new type of foreign reporter in China. Studies have emphasized that, during the 1960s and Mao's era in general, Western correspondents were often career journalists who attempted to expand their knowledge of real China as much as they could¹³. Some of them were immersed in Chinese culture, while others maintained distance. These studies have stressed the idea of an unsolvable struggle with China's Foreign Ministry, which aimed to regulate the diffusion of news and information. In general, many foreigners had the perception to 'live on a different planet' and studies have pointed out that coping with foreigners [外事] posed cultural issues¹⁴. It implied an element of duplicity. The cadres that managed the relations with the foreign press, apparently, aimed to isolate Chinese people from external influence, but their control activity was a proactive strategy as much as a defensive duty. It had the additional purpose of manipulating strangers and giving a good image of "New China" at the international level.

Terzani hardly fits in these descriptions. When he thought over his experience in his old age, he stated that «the profession that I practised was not exactly journalism, I have just created it»¹⁵. The reason might be found in the deep interest for China that concurred to his interpretation of events. This fascination was based on the initial conviction that the PRC was a social experiment designed to achieve a balanced development of state and individual interests. Terzani was not communist and rejected the idea of 'real socialism', but he simultaneously believed that Western capitalism elicited serious damages to society and was an inadequate solution to people's welfare. Consequently, Terzani discussed Mao's China and Deng's reforms from what may be called an *internal* perspective. In other words, he was far from thinking himself as an antagonist of the CCP, but he hardly believed to be a neutral bystander too. This perspective is unprecedented in Italy to some extent. Other correspondents like Franco Calamandrei, who was a member of the PCI and

¹² «Hausmittelung», in *Der Spiegel*, 5/1980, 28 January 1980, p. 3. These words were meant to be humorous and referred to the traditional Latin phrase for the election of the Pope, «habemus papam» (*we have the Pope*).

¹³ HOOPER, Beverley, *Foreigners under Mao. Western Lives in China, 1949-1976*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2016, pp. 1-7, 125-159; FRENCH, Paul, *Through the Looking Glass: China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2009, pp. 1-14. Also see: LANTHAM, Kevin, «Media, the Olympics and the Search for the "Real China"», in *China Quarterly*, 197, 2009, pp. 25-43; MOKRY, Sabine, «Whose Voices Shape China's Global Image? Links Between Reporting Conditions and Quoted Sources in News about China», in *Journal of Contemporary China*, XXVI, 107, 2017, pp. 1-13.

¹⁴ BRADY, Anne-Marie, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 1-6, 35-78; HOLLANDER, Paul, *Pellegrini politici. Intellettuali occidentali in Unione Sovietica, Cina e Cuba*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1981, pp. 405-498. Also see: SUN, Wanning, «Configuring the Foreign Correspondent: New Questions about China's Public Diplomacy», in *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 11, 2/2015, pp. 125-138.

¹⁵ TERZANI, Tiziano, *La fine è il mio inizio*, Milano, Longanesi, 2014, p. 440.

operated inside the framework of the communist world¹⁶, always maintained the separation between Chinese Communism and Italian Communism – between China and the Western world – as two distinct entities. By contrast, Terzani perceived the similarities and the parallels between the PRC and the rest of the world. These aspects made his journalism impervious to the techniques of the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

2. Journalism in Deng Xiaoping's Era

The journalist experience of Tiziano Terzani in China took place right after the launch of the reform era. This element should be considered as having a prominent relevance. China was on the verge of a drastic and momentous transformation. On one hand, the Open Door Policy foresaw greater freedom for correspondents, if compared with the past. On the other hand, the wind of change was feared to obliterate rural China, which Terzani longed to see from real. These aspects made his journalistic experience different from the ones of other correspondents in Mao's era.

Scholar have explained the situation of Chinese journalism in the 1970s referring to the aftermath of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution¹⁷. The movement launched in 1966 also attacked establishment journalists, especially for their role in condemning past efforts, like the Great Leap Forward. The confusion and the struggle over ideological issues paralyzed the official press organs. Often, older journalists were ousted from editorial offices. The aim to «revolutionize» journalism consisted of putting a tighter grip on the media and force them to express unanimous positions, reflecting the view imposed by radical revolutionary committees. While journalism before 1966 could eventually express the nuances of party factions¹⁸, the Cultural Revolution was characterized by the predominance of the «leftists»¹⁹.

¹⁶ CALAMANDREI, Silvia, «Un inviato dell'Unità nella Cina dei primi anni Cinquanta», in *MemoriaWeb. Trimestrale dell'Archivio storico del Senato della Repubblica*, 5 (Nuova Serie), 2014, URL: <https://www.senato.it/4156?newsletter_archivio_storico=6> [consultato il 15 ottobre 2020].

¹⁷ FANG, Hanqi (edited by), *A History of Journalism in China*, vol. 9, Hong Kong, Enrich Professional Publishing, 2014, pp. 1-140; DE BURGH, Hugo, *The Chinese Journalist. Mediating Information in the World's Most Populous Country*, London-New York, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp. 56-68. Also see: DE GIORGI, Laura, *La rivoluzione d'inchostro: lineamenti di storia del giornalismo cinese, 1815-1937*, Venezia, Cafoscarina, 2001.

¹⁸ The theatrical work *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* was published in 1961 by the historian and journalist Wu Han. The story of the Ming minister who criticized the emperor Jiajing for the sake of the state and faced imprisonment resembled the contrast between Mao Zedong and Peng Dehuai in 1959. The most important newspapers in 1965 resumed this work and transformed it in a political case that contributed to start the Cultural Revolution. See: MACFARQUHAR, Roderick, SCHOENHALS, Michael, *Mao's Last Revolution*, Cambridge-London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 15-19.

¹⁹ The situation was difficult for foreign journalists too. David Bonavia, the first resident correspondent of «The Times», lived in China between 1972 and 1976. Even though the Cultural Revolution was already ending, he left the country voluntarily, as he hardly borne the complications of writing articles in China. He remembered that every detail was deeply analyzed and his residency status was always uncertain. See: HOOPER, Beverley, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

After the death of Mao, the general desire seemed to be the return to where the Chinese media had been before the Cultural Revolution²⁰. Therefore, the activity of newspapers and other means of communication in 1966-1976 was exposed as an attempt of the radicals to take over the country. The manipulation of the public opinion and the references to misleading role models were denounced. The end of the Cultural Revolution was symbolized by the arrest of the so-called Gang of Four, a group of leading «leftists». The media publicized their crimes and their imprisonment, contributing to their condemnation even before their actual trial. The assertion of Deng Xiaoping's faction in 1977-1978 had further repercussions on the journalistic world. The article *Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth*, written by Hu Fuming and published in the *Guangming Daily*, was inspired by a quote of Mao Zedong that derived from the Chinese tradition: «seek the truth from facts» [实事求是]²¹. The new leadership wanted Chinese newspapers to gain a more balanced perspective, strengthening the image of the party and restoring the idea of professional journalism as a way to investigate society, not (only) as a tool to regiment it.

The return to a less-heightened conception of the public sphere inspired a different approach to foreign journalism in China. In 1981, the PRC State Council published specific regulations for non-Chinese journalists²². The control activity seemed less discretionary than in the past. Correspondents needed to be registered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they were allowed to work only for the news agency they were listed with. Every year, the permit to stay in the country as a reporter had to be reconsidered and renewed. To protect the alleged «legitimate rights» of the reporters, the Council compelled them to go through the police or similar corps to perform activities like hiring local staff.

In general, the «opening up» policy was scarcely intended as a radical change of course for foreign correspondents²³. They had slightly more freedom, but the CCP never waived its claim to control their actions and to monitor their criticism. The contrast between restrictive and less restrictive tendencies reflected on the misadventures of several reporters. The friction between Chinese authorities and non-Chinese journalists might escalate in warnings and expulsions. Foreign journalists denounced exasperation for the way they were treated, even when the conflict

²⁰ DE BURGH, Hugo, *op. cit.*, p. 56; ZHAO, Yunze, SUN, Ping, *A History of Journalism and Communication in China*, London-New York, Routledge, 2018, pp. 100-104; TONG, Jingrong, *Investigative Journalism in China: Journalism, Power, and Society*, London-New York, The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, pp. 31-35.

²¹ HU, Fuming, «Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth [实践是检验真理的唯一标准]», in *Guangming Ribao*, 5 May 1978, p. 1.

²² «The PRC State Council provisional guidelines for managing resident correspondents of foreign news organizations [中华人民共和国国务院关于管理外国新闻机构常驻记者的暂行规定]», in *PRC State Council Gazette* [中华人民共和国国务院公报], 9 March 1981, pp. 111-112.

²³ While there are studies on journalists and travelers in China during the 1950s and the 1960s, a fully-developed literature on the 1980s is missing. Probably, the reason is that many protagonists are still alive and primary sources are not yet available. Terzani in China was part of a broad community of correspondents, but it is not possible to retrace here all his interlocutors without specific studies.

with the authorities ended with repatriation. This represented a last resort if compared with prison time. Eventually, accounts of their experience and vicissitudes were written once back home.

For instance, John Burns was the chief of the Peking bureau at the «New York Times». While in China, he happened to intercept a secret mission of a Saudi diplomat, Bandar bin Sultan²⁴. Police accused Burns of espionage and expelled him in 1986 without discussing the matter, although he had been reporting from Beijing for a very long time²⁵. Lawrence MacDonald was a US reporter working for «Agence France Presse». He learnt Chinese since childhood because of his grandparents, who had been missionaries in the country for 30 years²⁶. According to his version, the crime consisted of receiving «intelligence information» and he was sent away from the country in less than two weeks. In addition to journalists, also academic researchers could experience hard times. Steven Mosher visited the country in 1979 and was expelled the following year because of his reportages on the One-Child Policy²⁷. Shortly after, Stanford University decided to dismiss him from the doctoral program for related reasons. Mosher sued the university and the affair became a media case discussed for years.

3. Discussing the Gang of Four

Tiziano Terzani settled in Beijing on 23 January 1980 with a disenchanting mind²⁸. Unlike ten years before, he had assumed a more critical view on China since the late 1970s. Yet, the revolutionary spirit of the country, as well as Deng Xiaoping's reforms, still intrigued him. He even chose a Chinese name, *Deng Tiannuo* [邓天诺], to echo the surname of the reformist leader²⁹. The first affair covered by Terzani for «Der Spiegel» was indeed decisive in Deng's assertion as a paramount leader: the trial of Wang Hongwen, Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao and Jiang Qing, Mao's widow³⁰. The Gang of Four was accused with a 20,000-word indictment for their actions

²⁴ OTTAWAY, David B., *The King's Messenger: Prince Bandar bin Sultan and America's Tangled Relationship with Saudi Arabia*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2008, pp. 70-71.

²⁵ «China expels Times reporter for entering restricted area», in *New York Times*, 23 July 1986, p. 1.

²⁶ MACDONALD, Lawrence, «My expulsion from China», in *Washington Post*, 8 February 1987, p. 3.

²⁷ «China cautions Stanford about expelling student», in *New York Times*, 17.09.1984, p. 10; «Mosher drops last of charges», in *The Stanford Daily*, 8 January 1990, p. 1.

²⁸ Interestingly, he chose to confirm and make public this fact only in 1984 with the book *Behind the Forbidden Door*.

²⁹ According to the German and Italian version of *The Forbidden Door*, «Deng Tiannuo» was chosen in 1968. However, the use of the surname 'Deng' seems a clear reference to Deng Xiaoping. In fact, a friend's memory postpones the choice of the name in the period 1979-1980. This latter reconstruction is consistent with the fact that Deng Xiaoping acquired a paramount relevance after the Cultural Revolution. See: DE MAIO, Alberto, SATTRIANO, Dino, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-34.

³⁰ On the trial, see: COOK, Alexander, *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 1-34; LENG, Shao-chuan, «Criminal Justice in Post-Mao China: Some

during the Cultural Revolution and their long trial (20 November-29 December 1980) attracted worldwide attention. The charges were based on very detailed accounts that accused the Gang of Distorting Truth and Extorting Confessions³¹. The judicial proceedings were broadcasted on television, although in a censored version. Photos of a TV screen with a close-up shot of Jiang Qing on the witness stand became popular in the East and the West.

In the published articles on «Der Spiegel» and the Italian newspaper «La Repubblica», Terzani described the course of the trial and the contextual dynamics at the political level³². He highlighted the efforts of the Chinese leadership to present the trial under the light of the rule of law. The accusations to Jiang Qing and her followers were considered actual crimes, not political mistakes. An old leader like Peng Zhen clarified this. As Secretary of the Central Political and Law Commission [中央政法委员会], he insisted on Jiang's offences³³.

Regarding the “Great Cultural Revolution”, this catastrophe needs to be summed up from two sides: *one* is trying a legal case against the counter-revolutionary groups of Lin Biao and Jiang Qing, and solve the problem of the [different] essence of ourselves and the enemy; *one* is summing up the experienced lessons in a comprehensive way, and solve the problem of the right/wrong and achievements/errors in the party leadership³⁴.

Peng separated the judicial question from the political judgement on her climb to party leadership. However, Terzani expressed a different view on the civil significance of that event.

This is a Chinese Nuremberg Trial. [...]. A senior official refers to China's new rule of law as a justification of the trial that threatens the past of party and state, and exposes a decade of the PRC, at least, as a reign of terror: «[...] Without judgment, we cannot leave people in prison, it would be illegal, unjust». [... Jiang Qing] regrets nothing. Yet, she acted perhaps under pressure - who already dared to resist Mao?³⁵.

Preliminary Observations», in *China Quarterly*, 87, 1981, pp. 440-469. On the trial in its historical context, see: DIKÖTTER, Frank, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 312-322; TEIWES, Frederick C., SUN, Warren, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976*, Armonk-London, Sharpe, 2007, pp. 582-594.

³¹ See: «Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation», in *The China Quarterly*, 84, 1980, p. 814. The forty-eight charges were summarized in four major groups: conspiring, usurping other officials' powers, persecuting numerous cadres, and plotting to murder Chairman Mao. Also see the propaganda work: *A Great Trial in Chinese History: The Trial of the Lin Biao and Jiang Qing Counter-revolutionary Cliques*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1981.

³² TERZANI, Tiziano, «Bereut nichts», in *Der Spiegel*, 44, 1980, pp. 143-145; «Die Bühne als Tribunal», in *Der Spiegel*, 51, 1980, pp. 126-127. ID., in «Un processo per rimuovere Mao», in *la Repubblica*, 29 October 1980, p. 12.

³³ *Speech to the observers of the Special Court* [对特别法庭旁听人员的讲话], 17 January 1980, in *Selected writings of Peng Zhen* [彭真文选], Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 1991, pp. 392-399.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 392.

³⁵ TERZANI, Tiziano, «Bereut nichts», in *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144. Original text in German.

The division between the political perspective and the judicial one seemed artificial to Terzani. The comparison with the Nuremberg Trials, as an unidentified diplomat defined the 1980 trial, helped him to argue that, in reality, the legal case served the sole purpose of changing the interpretation of the recent past. According to the Italian reporter, Deng's entourage had the difficult task to prevent the repetition of chaos and simultaneously impose more pragmatic perspectives on social problems. Preserving the legacy of the CCP was fundamental, as well. Consequently, Terzani claimed that the real defendant on the stand was Mao Zedong and that the trial was going to determine the place of the 'Great Helmsman' in history.

It might be surprising to discover that the elaboration of these articles relied on a complex view of that historical juncture. The scepticism of the articles derived from the consideration that those who sat in judgement had been strong supporters of Mao. They shared his understanding of 'progress' and his voluntaristic approach to development, at first³⁶. Therefore, the legal proceedings against Jiang Qing and their popularization as a national event appeared peculiar to Terzani. He believed that their real purpose was to separate the criticism towards a certain leadership and the one towards the communist establishment as a whole.

Whatever the Chinese leadership now says and [dares] to prove that this is purely a non-political but strictly legal trial, [...] In many ways the verdict has already been passed. [...] The Gang of Four's crimes have already been described as "very grave and serious" by Hua Guo feng, as "towering" by Deng Xiao ping. In nobody's mind there is the slightest doubt about their guilt and therefore about their condemnation³⁷.

And again:

The problem is that the great majority of the party executive have spent years and years in prison, they are demoralized [...] the problem is that, at this point, it is no longer possible to blame the Gang of Four or others for all those troubles³⁸.

The Italian reporter suggested that the rage for the abuses made during the Cultural Revolutions pushed CCP leaders to stage a sort of 'show trial'. For example, Peng Zhen himself had a solid career in the party before 1966. He was active during the civil war and became the first

³⁶ FGC, Terzani, *Der Spiegel*. Gennaio 1979 - dicembre 1981, draft article *Fuer Lohfeldt or deputy*, 22 October 1980.

³⁷ *Ibidem*. Original text in English.

³⁸ FGC, Terzani, PE, 27, *Il galeotto*. Note segrete fatte in Cina 1980-1984 (1), typewritten note, 4 January 1980. Many notes were transcribed from the notebooks and they particularly seem significant in Terzani's mind. Original text in Italian.

mayor of Beijing after 1949, but he fell in disgrace during the Cultural Revolution³⁹. Later on, he was rehabilitated by Deng Xiaoping. Terzani believed that Peng had all the motives to attack the Gang of Four. By contrast, the mistakes made during the Mao era seemed long-term ones to Terzani and, in his opinion, Peng Zhen was as 'guilty' as Jiang Qing. The entire party should have been put on the stand for the PRC «catastrophes» because the burden of underdevelopment was imputable to all the CCP members, according to the «Der Spiegel» correspondent.

In summary, Terzani's articles addressed the main questions of Deng's China, but they were based on a more composite evaluation of the PRC history, which comprehended political and ethical matters. For this reason, Jiang Qing emerged in Terzani's writings not as a scapegoat but as a tragic character⁴⁰. Terzani stressed her determination and fierce attitude as she, who «regrets nothing», was facing the death penalty. The woman with horn-rimmed glasses and pale face seemed unwilling to play the part of the guilty. She frequently sneered at the judges to expose their biases. The Italian correspondent showed no admiration for Jiang and what she had represented during the Cultural Revolution, but he made clear that both the reformists and the «leftists» contended the legacy of Mao. For this reason, Terzani doubted that the year 1978 was destined to become a political divide in history. His interpretation of the trial proceedings suggested instead that the struggle inside the CCP was still ongoing.

Finally, Terzani seemed to propose that the condemnation of the Gang of Four worked on two levels: it may be likened to a sort of purge, but it also dealt with the painful memories of the Cultural Revolution. Only deceptively, these levels were mutually-exclusive. When Deng's reforms and leadership attempted to impose a political reorganization of the party, the goal was to contain the political tensions on the correct method to supervise society and economy⁴¹. On one hand, the reformists advocated a radical change of course and a liberalist plan to create a Chinese version of the market economy. On the other hand, the conservatives wanted the government to continue intervening in society and economy to ensure the wealth of all citizens from all the classes. Even if one considers Deng's reforms a watershed and refuses to agree with Terzani's interpretation, it must be acknowledged that many tensions continued unresolved and perhaps resulted in the events of 1989. Terzani tried to describe these persisting divisions since 1980.

The Italian reporter was in the middle of interesting times. The political space in China was changing after 1978, but it seemingly preserved the possibility to discuss at a certain degree. In

³⁹ *The Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party* [中国共产党历史大辞典], Beijing, Zhong-gong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 2001, pp. 467-468.

⁴⁰ FGC, Terzani, *Der Spiegel*. Gennaio 1982 - dicembre 1985, draft version of the article *Too many Buddhas*, 10.02.1982. TERZANI, Tiziano, «Deng seguirà di nascosto il processo a Jiang Qing», in *La Repubblica*, 03.11.1980, p. 12.

⁴¹ FEWSMITH, Joseph, *The Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate*, Armonk-London, Sharpe, 1994, pp. 3-18; VOGEL, Ezra F., *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Cambridge-London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 217-591.

Mao's era, the party enjoyed a stronger unity. Because the path to Chinese modernity was believed to be one, factions debated on the best way to implement policies. By contrast, the paths diverged in Deng's era and each faction inside the party claimed to represent the true 'Left'. For similar reasons, scholars have deemed the concept of 'conflict' as characteristic to the CCP internal mechanisms⁴². In summary, the punishment of Jiang Qing and her acolytes found a large consensus in the party, due to the legalistic and non-ideological approach of party members like Peng Zhen. Nonetheless, the deep motivations of the Cultural Revolution and the problem of the CCP role in Chinese society were destined to surface again.

4. The search for the real country

While following the main political events, Tiziano Terzani's interest in Chinese matters extended to daily life, details, culture, costumes and traditions. Angela Staude stated that «politics go, life stays, it becomes part of the framework of our civilization»⁴³. Their desire to see China from real brought the Terzani's all over the country. Just after Tiziano's arrival, he immediately begun to explore Beijing «wandering around» and soon obtained permissions to travel through the country⁴⁴.

[I am] taking a run through the old Fuzhou. They still live in the spoilt and run-down frame of old China, [which consist of] old houses [made with] inlaid wood, windows of rice canes [and] small private markets. In front of almost every house, there is someone brushing teeth with a bowl of water and spitting in the street⁴⁵.

The contrast between the prospects of progress and the everyday routine of the people captivated Tiziano Terzani. The country was full of examples that satisfied the reporter's curiosity. The markets with crickets in cages and their connoisseurs became a vivid representation of old China that captured the imagination of the Italian reporter's readers. In addition to the remains of the old world, Terzani found traces of the recent past, scarred by the Cultural Revolution, that had had a deep influence on material life and Chinese traditions.

⁴² NATHAN, Andrew J., SHI, Tianjian, «Left and Right With Chinese Characteristics: Issues and Alignments in Deng Xiaoping's China», in *World Politics*, 48, 1996, pp. 522-550.

⁴³ TERZANI STAUDE, Angela, *Giorni cinesi*, Milano, TEA, 1996, p. 10. Original text in Italian.

⁴⁴ Terzani used an idiomatic expression from the Tuscan dialect, «andare a giro» (wander around), to stress the idea of taking the less-traveled roads; his intention was to acquire a non-stereotyped image of a place. He certainly visited Xiamen, Chongqing, Chengdu, Canton and Tibet in 1980; Shanghai, Dongbei, Daqing in 1981; Tianjin, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Chengde, Xi'An in 1982; Hainan in 1983; Canton, Macao in 1984.

⁴⁵ FGC, *Terzani, Taccuini* (T), 2, 1980, handwritten diary entry in the light-blue pad, 6 May 1980. Original text in Italian.

The first trip of relevance was the visit to Tibet. In that period, the government tended to restore the practice of allowing non-Han cadres to play a role in their provinces⁴⁶. The First Tibet Work Meeting in March 1980 reasserted the idea of decentralization, center-periphery consultation and limitation of the Han in the region. Indeed, self-government had been a major issue since the Republican Era. The visit of Hu Yaobang in May 1984 meant that the CCP leadership had a favorable disposition towards decentralization. The changes were presented as part of the new course promoted by Deng Xiaoping. Tibet was opened to foreigners, as well.

Initially, Terzani missed the government's concession of permits for Lhasa because he had returned to Europe in the summer of 1980⁴⁷. He later managed to obtain a new authorization and reach the southwestern region in September together with Klaus Reinhardt, another «Der Spiegel» reporter. The time was momentous and Terzani reported rumors of unrest in Tibet that were connected with the implementation of the new policy⁴⁸. The first group of journalists seemingly witnessed pro-Dalai Lama demonstrations. The «Der Spiegel» expressed disagreement with Terzani's decision to leave for the region, which he justified as part of his journalistic duties. This negative comment seemed to be motivated by Beijing government's sensitivity on the Tibet question. Terzani's travel probably stirred complaints that directly reached Hamburg, but his reportage was published in the end⁴⁹.

The articles on Tibet described the situation of the region at the political and economic levels, highlighting the coexistence of Marxist-Leninist elements and the Lamaist legacy⁵⁰. The region was seriously underdeveloped and needed external support to reach subsistence constraints. The repercussions of Deng's leadership in Tibet emerged in the words of religious leaders that remained in the PRC:

SPIEGEL [Terzani]: Do you think religion should keep the Tibetans quiet, so they don't plan another uprising against the Chinese? REDING: No, the revival of the Tibetan tradition should finally convince people that the Chinese leadership respects the Tibetans. This was not so in the days of the Gang of Four⁵¹.

⁴⁶ HARBAR, «Attempts to Transform CCP's Ethnic Minority Policy in the Early 1980s», in *Chinese Historical Review*, 15, 2, pp. 296-314; HUANG, Yasheng, «China's Cadre Transfer Policy toward Tibet in the 1980s», in *Modern China*, 21, 2, 1995, pp. 189-192.

⁴⁷ FGC, Terzani, *Der Spiegel. Gennaio 1979 - dicembre 1981*, draft letter from TT to Dieter [Wild], [1980].

⁴⁸ At present, no traces of these events were found in the general literature.

⁴⁹ TERZANI, Tiziano, «Wie Hunde mit gebrochenen Gliedern», in *Der Spiegel*, 44, 1980, pp. 185-206.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ «Für die Mönche eine Rente vom Staat», in *Der Spiegel*, 47, 1980, pp. 210-216. Original text in German.

The draft version of the article consisted of a much longer text, in which Terzani showed astonishment for the beauty of the landscape and for the Tibetan people⁵². He looked out for traces of old-fashioned traditions like 'sky funerals'. He described the revival of old customs like the visit to the Potala Palace on Sundays. In the longer version, the description of Tibet in 1980 is centered around the contrast between religious fervor and central government, symbolized by the «incredulous» gaze of some Han soldiers during a popular demonstration of faith. Tibet looked like a peculiar combination of modernization and old beliefs. Portraits of the Dalai Lama hung in the buildings used by town administrations. One medical doctor in Lhasa openly stated that he was a believer, while others stopped believing when they «discovered the laws of nature».

If Dalai Lama comes back, we serve him as a king, but he must refrain from returning and just oppressing the masses⁵³.

Kingship could be allowed then as a Tibetan tradition, but the title would remain purely nominal and the political decision would stay in the hands of the local party. Riding a bicycle, Terzani ventured out to the countryside and interviewed ordinary people, officials and party representatives. He received a variety of perspectives on the political issues of the recent history.

This search for the real country was far from representing the return to a remote and fictitious past. Terzani was seemingly attracted by the unusual mixture of the old and the new. This approach surfaced again during his visit to Daqing, a prefecture-level city in the northern Heilongjiang province that had become famous for oil fields in Mao's era⁵⁴. The existence of exploitable resources in China was debated for a long time during the twentieth century, but the deposits of the Songliao Basin were discovered only after 1956. They acquired a special importance during the Sino-Soviet split once Moscow called back Russian engineers. Beijing feared a consistent reduction in the furniture of oil from the Soviet Union and problems in the extraction sector. Great efforts were made to ensure a sustained level of crude oil production, not only mobilizing workforce but also through propaganda. Self-reliance was emphasized as a proof that the country could rely on its own forces. Actually, the oil production increased at a low rate and was far from meeting the demand of Chinese factories.

⁵² FGC, Terzani, T, 2, 1980, entry in notebook «Tibet 2», 22 September 1980; ibidem, entry in notebook «Tibet 2», 23 September 1980; TERZANI, Tiziano, *La porta proibita*, Milano, Longanesi, 1984, p. 15.

⁵³ FGC, Terzani, T, 2, 1980, entry in notebook «Tibet 1», 19.09.1980. Original text in Italian.

⁵⁴ KAMBARA, Tatsu, HOWE, Christopher, *China and the Global Energy Crisis: Development and Prospects for China's Oil and Natural Gas*, Cheltenham-Northampton, Edward Elgar, 2007, pp. 12-26. Also see: HOU, Li, *Building for Oil: Daqing and the Formation of the Chinese Socialist State*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2018.

Twenty years later, the city bore resemblance to a depopulated territory: empty hotels, underused oil tanks and a feeling of «dreariness»⁵⁵. This situation was considered by Terzani a proof that the promised wealth never materialized. He noticed that Mao Zedong's calligraphic pieces and Hua Guofeng's inscription, made in 1977 to raise consensus, had been erased from walls⁵⁶. Terzani interviewed the local population of Changchun, a city of the nearby province of Jilin. The elders remembered the several foreign powers that had controlled the city throughout the twentieth century. The Japanese domination, in particular, was characterized by poverty and hunger.

Chinese were starving to death. The city has not changed much since, but the Chinese can eat every sort of food [now] and have houses made of bricks now⁵⁷.

This spirit was common to local cadres, who expressed their disappointment for the interrupted development of the region. They felt «abandoned» by the central government which seemed unaware of the northeast difficulties. The plan and the investments for renewing the plants and updating the machinery had been dropped. It was a simple policy readjustment for Beijing, but it was instead perceived as a 'disaster' in Daqing.

This transition marked the other face of Deng's reforms. The slogan «learn from Daqing» [向大庆学习] during the Cultural Revolution expressed the emphasis laid on autarchic production and subsistence. This motto was maintained after 1978, but it was interpreted differently: it stated the necessity to abide by rules and regulations⁵⁸. Terzani in the case of Daqing was able to convey most of his ideas in the published writings and his notebooks can be considered an extended version of them. Yet, the published articles left out the feeling of alienation from the constructed image of Mao's era and Deng's era, in which the reporter had trusted for a long time.

In a sense, the Gang of Four trial failed to give him the real perception of what Communism had meant for China. Under this light, touring local communities, like Daqing, was a sort of 'socio-archaeological excavation'. The Italian reporter tried to distinguish the old 'sediment' of Mao's era from the new 'sediment' of Deng's times. His goal seemingly was understanding the point that China as a 'social experiment' had reached and the hopes brought by the reforms. The attention

⁵⁵ FGC, Terzani, T, 3, 1981, handwritten entries in the red notebook «Da qing», 1981; STAUDE TERZANI, Angela, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-107; TERZANI, Tiziano, *Behind the Forbidden Door*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1984, pp. 80-85.

⁵⁶ KRAUS, Richard Curt, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, University of California Press, 1991, p. 125.

⁵⁷ FGC, Terzani, T, 3, 1981, handwritten entry in red notebook «Da qing», 08.02.1981. Original text in Italian.

⁵⁸ *Daily History of the People's Republic of China* [中华人民共和国日史], vol. 28, Chengdu, Sichuan Renmin chubanshe, 2003, pp. 37-38.

to local customs reflected Terzani's intention to investigate politics not only through major events but also through their social repercussions.

For this reason, the future of China puzzled Terzani. The trip to Shenzhen introduced him to the most advanced realization of Deng's projects. In the past, the town had been a fishermen village and a «bastion of Mao» according to the Italian reporter, but it later «surrendered to capitalism»⁵⁹. The status of Shenzhen had been enhanced to the municipal level in April 1979. Its development was smoothed with a special administrative regulation that formed an area in which foreign contractors made investments together with PRC entrepreneurs⁶⁰. The city became a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). It was also chosen for its closeness to Hong Kong, which was still a British colony and was experiencing a transition from industry towards a service-oriented economy.

At the time of Terzani, such an «experimentation» was still beginning. Therefore, the growth of Shenzhen was closely followed by the media. The PRC newspaper and television stressed the advantages for the local population, presenting Shenzhen as a confirmation of the reformist policy. Deng Xiaoping wrote an inscription, stating that «the experience and the development of Shenzhen prove that the policy of establishing SEZ is a correct one»⁶¹. Terzani certainly agreed that the economic zones had been beneficial for the population's wealth. Nonetheless, the Italian correspondent in his notes emphasized the 'contradictions' of the project⁶². The hypertrophic expansion of Shenzhen was based on the goal of attracting investments, especially from Chinese overseas, but this meant to associate with those capitalist actors that were previously despised. Socialism as a system of values, in Terzani's opinion, was neglected by this unprecedented alliance between communists and capitalists. The reporter argued that the whole situation was a surrender more than a defeat, as the debilitated socialist morality could barely oppose the spreading of capitalist habits. The opening of the SEZ fostered an integration between market areas: the one of Hong Kong and the newly-created one in the PRC. Terzani believed that one of the real goals of developing Shenzhen was the reconquest of Hong Kong, lost by the Qing dynasty to the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century.

⁵⁹ TERZANI, Tiziano, «Shenzhen, baluardo di Mao si è arresa al capitale. La città-laboratorio della Cina», in *La Repubblica*, 8 December 1982, p. 12.

⁶⁰ WANG, Da Wei David, *Urban Villages in the New China. Case of Shenzhen*, Shenzhen, Palgrave MacMillan, 2016, pp. 58-70; XIAO, Jin, TSANG, Mun C., «Human Capital Development in an Emerging Economy: The Experience of Shenzhen, China: Research Note», in *China Quarterly*, 157, 1999, pp. 72-114; ALESSANDRONI, Camillo, «Le zone economiche speciali nel Guangdong e nel Fujian: riflessi interni ed internazionali», in *Mondo Cinese*, 33, 1981, pp. 61-77.

⁶¹ *CCP Historical Resources* [中共党史资], vol. 52, Beijing, Zhong-gong dang chubanshe, 1994, p. 150. The celebration of Shenzhen continued uninterrupted until 1984, when the SEZs were discussed for the cases of corruption and illicit transactions; see BAUM, Richard, *The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s*, in MACFARQUAHAR, Roderick (edited by), *The Politics of China. The Eras of Mao and Deng*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 575-576.

⁶² FGC, Terzani, T, 3, 1982, handwritten entries in the yellow notebook «Shenzhen 10/1982», October 1982.

The debates on Shenzhen were often focused on the binomial opposition opening/closure. Terzani accepted the idea of Shenzhen as an ‘experimentation’ to find new ways and increase contacts with the rest of the world. However, he rejected the corollary that this policy meant an actual ‘opening up’. Deng Xiaoping’s strategy resembled a ‘controlled experiment’, in which the need to discover went together with the fear of a possible ‘adulteration’ of the PRC.

Deng has ordered to open after his visit to Shenzhen across the border from Hong Kong [...], [the SEZs have] to be isolated from the rest of the country with a fence as if they were contaminated places⁶³.

Places like Shenzhen were understood by Terzani as valves: they seemed to open China on one side, but they closed it on the other. What entered in Shenzhen was allowed to develop there, but it was also destined to be confined in that city as it was impeded to reach the rest of the PRC. This interpretation was quite common in journalistic circles, but Terzani stressed that the problem concerned the methods rather than the goals. In his view, Beijing was acquiring the ways of the West together with their implicit negative sides, disregarding the possible consequences of the newly-acquired policies on society. The «Der Spiegel» correspondent criticized the economic reforms for their lost aspiration to differ from Soviet authoritarianism and capitalist individualism.

5. The expulsion from China

On 8 February 1984, Terzani was coming back from Hong Kong. He was arrested on the charge of having offended the figure of Mao Zedong and having purchased national relics⁶⁴. The intervention of «Der Spiegel», the Italian diplomacy, the German diplomacy and «La Repubblica» exerted pressure for commuting the sentence into an expulsion, which was realized on March 2. Terzani immediately left Beijing for Hamburg, but the experience was so disgraceful that, shortly after, he wrote, «I’m wearing a tie again. I fill out all the forms in English, not in Chinese as before, and sign “Terzani”. Deng Tiannuo no longer exists»⁶⁵.

Like other expelled journalists, Terzani decided to write a memoir⁶⁶. In June 1984, it was published in Germany with the explanatory title *Fremder unter Chinesen* (*Foreigner among Chinese*).

⁶³ FGC, Terzani, PE, 28, *Miscellanea*, paper beginning with «Deng Xiaoping realizes...», [1984]. Original text in English.

⁶⁴ LORETI, Àlen, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁶⁵ TERZANI, Tiziano, «Und nun beginnen wir mit Ihrer Umerziehung», in *Der Spiegel*, 11, 1984, p. 158.

⁶⁶ See: TERZANI, Tiziano, *Fremder unter Chinesen. Reportages aus China*, Hamburg, Spiegel-Buch, 1984; ID., *The Forbidden Door*, Hong Kong, Asia 2000, 1985; ID., *Behind the Forbidden Door. Travels in Unknown China*, New York,

In October, the Italian version by Longanesi, a well-known company, was entitled *La porta proibita* (*The Forbidden Door*). Three editions in English were printed between 1985 and 1986. Initially, the paperback *The Forbidden Door* was translated from German by a Hong Kong publishing house. Terzani's agent, Robert Ducas, closed a more profitable deal with a US publisher and the title became *Behind the Forbidden Door*⁶⁷. A UK publisher produced the third edition with the same title and twenty-two black-and-white photographs. Angela Staude Terzani wrote her own account, the *Chinesische Jahre* (*Chinese years*), finally published in 1987⁶⁸.

The intricate editorial story confirmed the publishers' interest in this genre, but it also showed Terzani's intention to think over the events of the previous four years. The retracing of his vicissitudes consisted of an intensive elaboration process with several steps: transcribing notes, rethinking his notions on the PRC, writing loose impressions and condensing them into the framework of a classic book. This went on from March to October 1984 and it was occasionally restarted for the editions in English. Every step and every edition allowed him to alter the general perspective in a slight way.

The concept of these books was certainly focused on the narration of Terzani's life and work in China, but he left aside several aspects of the past experiences, especially the ethical and moral ones, which had been so important in the process of orienting him towards China. Terzani preferred to write a memoir along the lines of the detached journalistic reportage. On the one hand, the many political thoughts were only partially transposed into the book. On the other hand, the necessity to refute the accusations induced Terzani to question his beliefs on the cultural communication between China and the West. At first, the reporter intended to demonstrate that he avoided Western perspectives until 1984. He wanted to see the People's Republic from the Chinese point of view and he always stated his desire to be «Chinese among the Chinese». This approach was still present in the mentioned title of the German edition and the social inquiries during his trips served the same purpose.

While writing and rewriting the text, Terzani left his first impressions and came to a different assumption: his desire to socialize with Chinese people was his true liability⁶⁹. According to him, the CCP seemed to be erecting a curtain between China and the rest of the world, which was cultural rather than ideological.

Henry Holt and Company, 1986; ID., *Behind the Forbidden Door. Travels in China*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1986; ID., *Behind the Forbidden Door. China inside out*, Hong Kong, Asia 2000, 1987. Also see: LORETI, Àlen (edited by), TERZANI, Tiziano, *op. cit.*, p. 1519.

⁶⁷ FGC, Terzani, PE, 5, *Corrispondenza con editori e agenti letterari*, letter from Ducas to TT, 30 October 1985.

⁶⁸ See: TERZANI STAUDE, Angela, *Chinesische Jahre: 1980-1983*, München, Hoffmann und Campe, [1986].

⁶⁹ FGC, Terzani, PE, 5, *Corrispondenza con editori e agenti letterari*, printed message from TT to [Luigi] Bernabò with the title «Fremder unter Chinese», [1984].

When I finally crossed the Great Wall, I discovered that as a foreigner I was at the entrance of [a] huge labyrinth of prohibitions and privileges, [taboos] and habits that prevented me from getting there where I wanted: among Chinese. [...] China was [opening] like a sick man, [it] was [getting] out of the bed of suffering of the [Cultural] Revolution and ready to tell [stories] of horrors⁷⁰.

Cultural differences and social disparities played the part of an unbridgeable gap. Even though it is difficult to trace this topic in the draft papers, the re-elaboration process was still linked to Terzani's expectations towards the PRC as a 'political experimentation'. However, the reporter at this point of his life rejected the idea that the flaws of the Chinese political system were a human factor due to the natural fallacy of men. He assumed that, in the end, the People's Republic was more similar than he thought to the Soviet Union and other 'deviated' communist regimes.

It should be noted that these considerations were far from causing an about-turn of Terzani, who remained pacifist and maintained left-wing ideals. When he moved to Japan a few months later, his opinion on that country shared resemblances with the views on China, so that he was inclined to doubt of Asia entirely⁷¹. He went as far as to think that most Asian countries had been definitely 'different' from Europe in the past, but they were unable to transfer this uniqueness into a new model of society. They failed to mark their dissimilarity from the Western examples of socio-economic organization.

The mentioned books published in 1984-1986 shared the same argumentative system. In particular, all the introductions concluded that «my crime had been to search for an unrehearsed China; to look for a way out of the maze of prohibitions and taboos designed to keep me away from the people»⁷². The first chapter's description of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping stressed their differences as a positive turning point in Chinese history. The latter one dared to change society and economics for the best. Yet, the political direction of the country after 1978 had more uncertain prospects than before. It remained in the hands of the party and Terzani seemed to believe that this would never change.

Mao had a vision of a new China. Deng Xiaoping has none, and many of his reforms look like experiments tried out in order to solve this or that problem but without any commitment to accept their ultimate consequences⁷³.

⁷⁰ FGC, Terzani, PE, 4, *Materiale preparatorio*, paper beginning with «Walls within walls...», [1984]. Original text in English.

⁷¹ TERZANI, Tiziano, *In Asia*, Milano, TEA, 2014, pp. 7-11.

⁷² TERZANI, Tiziano, *Behind the Forbidden Door*, cit., p. 12. Original text in English.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

The idea of a mixed economy and the impersonal essence of capitalism seemed to aggravate China's situation at the political level. Half of the books' chapters regarded the trips across the country, while the remaining ones examined aspects of Chinese life. The author witnessed the survival of traditions as well as the legacies of the extreme emotions that exploded in the Cultural Revolution. The expulsion from China was discussed in the last chapter along the lines of the «Der Spiegel» article, whereas it had been the starting point of the book conceptualization.

After 1984, Terzani continued travelling Asia and working as a reporter. He completely left behind the focus on modern China, although this induced him to work in Asia in the first place and it had accompanied him for fifteen or twenty years of his life. The PRC was a closed chapter for Terzani. However, the criticism towards material progress and the necessity to preserve cultural variety persisted as part of Terzani's cultural background.

6. Conclusions

The one who reads Terzani's writings on China years after 1984 might have a distorted image of his approach to this far-away and challenging country. The Tuscan reporter may just look as another outraged correspondent who failed to understand China and experienced conflicts with its authorities. In general, preconceived critical thinking hardly seems to be consistent with an intimate understanding of another culture.

The main reason for this impression probably is that journalism is still at issue in China. The mentioned reader, then, could be simply projecting the present into the past, disregarding the warning of Michael Confino⁷⁴. The disdain for limitations to the free press, which is so common today, was just one among many different motivations that oriented positions towards the PRC in the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s. These aspects are often evoked in studies, but seldom contextualized. First, the PRC attracted foreign intellectuals because its socio-political project was alternative to the USSR or the US. Second, the appealing nature of Chinese revolutionary efforts was crucial in attracting foreigners. Consequently, the clash of foreign enthusiasts with the limitations inside China resulted often in disenchantments with the myth of communist China. Terzani's case proved that the neglected premise of social justice and equality was possibly an equally unbearable burden for those who had believed in it. The vicissitudes of the Italian reporter showed that the People's Republic not only represented a political challenge for the West, but it was also a matter of discussion. Whether one agrees or not with Terzani's historical

⁷⁴ CONFINO, Michael, «Present Events and the Representation of the Past: Some Current Problems in Russian Historical Writing», in *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 35, 4/1994, pp. 839-868.

interpretation, it must be considered that he strove to reason on the PRC from an *internal perspective*.

This is a key concept to understand Terzani's dissatisfaction with Mao's China and Deng's China. These two influential leaders can be seen as representing two antithetical views of «New China». At most, they might be put in a chronological and teleological sequence, as was proposed by the 6th Plenary Session of the CCP 11th Central Committee. Terzani was initially attracted by both leaders, while he later adopted more detached points of view. In the end, he seemed to embrace a medium-term historical perspective, in which Mao and Deng appeared rather similar. They both aimed to achieve a sustained development that cherished the dream of welfare in a general and depersonalized manner, which Terzani regarded as a Western concept. This was the nodal point for the Italian reporter. In the major political affairs as well as during the side trips across the country, he expressed the very persuasion that the People's Republic in 1949-1984 waived its claim to an original interpretation of two decisive terms for societies: «modernity» and «modernization». Consequently, Terzani found himself trapped in an intellectual cul-de-sac, being disenchanted towards the recent past and devoid of hopes for the future. It was the premise to his criticism of modern society in general and his search for different spiritual experiences.

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