

**SOCIALISM AND REVISIONISM: THE POWER OF WORDS IN
THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE ITALIAN
COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY
(LATE 1950S-EARLY 1960S)**

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I. Introduction

In the 1950s and early 1960s the Italian Communist Party (ICP) played a key role in Sino-Italian unofficial exchanges. Being the strongest communist party in Western Europe and, more generally, in the capitalist world it developed direct and intense exchanges with the Chinese communists. Yet, contacts between Italian and Chinese communists passed through Moscow and were inevitably shaped by the developments taking place at the international level within the world communist movement. The first exchange of delegations among Italian and Chinese communists took place in 1956 when both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the ICP convened their respective National Congresses. This first bilateral exchange of delegations laid the ground for further contacts in the following years. In 1959 a high-level official ICP delegation was sent to China to meet the leaders of the CCP. This visit took place at a time when China's domestic and external policies were radicalizing and distrust and tension between Beijing and Moscow were further deepening. Minor delegations of the ICP would follow later the same year and, again, in August 1961, while the last direct contact occurred in December 1962, with Zhao Yimin's visit in Italy to attend the 10th National Congress of the ICP. By then, party-to-party relations had cooled down significantly as a consequence of the Sino-Soviet split and the hardening of the CCP's ideological positions.¹

¹ Guido Samarani and Sofia Graziani, "Yidali Gongchandang yu Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo:

Political relations between the Italian and the Chinese communist parties had developed positively up until 1957, being largely based on solidarity. In particular, Italian communists appreciated the peculiarities of the Chinese revolution and the way the CCP leaders defended their autonomy and sought distinctive features in their revolutionary action.² The Italian communists' attention to and appreciation for the distinctive features of the Chinese revolution at that time was a positive judgement on the merits as well as the method, considering Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964)'s commitment³ to set the so-called *via italiana al socialismo* (Italian road to socialism), which was at the core of the ICP renewal in the mid 1950s, within the framework of a broader search for 'national roads to socialism'.

Yet, the year 1957 marked a turning point in the relations between Italian and Chinese communists. Since then, as Pajetta states, both parties began to develop differentiated positions, and their relationship, which had been based upon solidarity and identity of judgement eventually fell apart, resulting in the interruption of bilateral relations.⁴ At the 1957 Moscow conference Mao expressed his reservations about the policy of "peaceful coexistence" being promoted by the new Soviet leadership, pointing instead to the possibility of war and stating that in case of a nuclear war the whole world would become socialist.⁵ His famous speech of 18 November 1957 in Moscow, especially his speculation about a nuclear war and its consequence, stirred confusion and caused strong reactions after the meeting,⁶ bringing to the fore crucial disagreements not just with the Soviet leadership, but also with important protagonists of the communist parties in Western capitalist Europe, including Togliatti, for whom peaceful coexistence

zhengzhi lianxi yu jiaoliu (1949-1965)" [The Communist Party of Italy and People's China. Political Ties and Exchanges (1949-1965)], *Lengzhan guoji shi yanjiu (Cold War International History Studies)*, 19/20 (2015): 5-29. On the general context of China-Italy relations in this period, see, among the others, *Roads to Reconciliation: People's Republic of China, Western Europe and Italy during the Cold War Period (1949-1971)*, ed. by Guido Samarani, Carla Meneguzzi Rostagni, and Sofia Graziani (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2018).

² See, for instance, Gian Carlo Pajetta, "Come il PCI ha guardato alla rivoluzione cinese" (How the ICP has looked at the Chinese revolution), *Rinascita*, 37 (1976), 7-9.

³ Togliatti had been the National Secretary of the ICP from 1927, holding this position until his death in 1964.

⁴ Pajetta, "Come il PCI ha guardato alla rivoluzione cinese", quotation at page 7.

⁵ Shen Zhihua and Xia Yafeng, "Hidden Currents during the Honeymoon: Mao, Khrushchev, and the 1957 Moscow Conference", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 11, 4 (2009): 74-117. For an annotated translation of the complete texts of Mao Zedong's speeches at the Moscow Conference see Michael Schoenhals, "Mao Zedong: Speeches at the 1957 'Moscow Conference'", *Journal of Communist Studies*, 2, 2 (1986): 109-126 in particular Mao's remarks on the theme of a nuclear war during his speech on November 18, 118-119.

⁶ Shen and Xia, "Hidden Currents during the Honeymoon", 111.

was extremely important. The question of peace would indeed become a key aspect of the ICP-CCP dispute in the early 1960s.

Thus, beginning in 1957, ideological divergences gradually emerged between Italian and Chinese communists. The situation worsened in 1960 when at various international meetings (including, for instance, a meeting of the World Peace Council in Stockholm and the Beijing meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions), Italians clearly understood the seriousness of the Sino-Soviet dispute and the hardening of the CCP positions on the theme of peace and peaceful coexistence.⁷

The years 1962-1963 mark the lowest point in ICP-CCP relations as divergences eventually resulted in an open ideological dispute: the 10th National Congress of the ICP held in December 1962 provided the platform for a direct attack to the ICP's position regarding international politics, and especially, of Togliatti's idea of a transition to socialism through democratic and peaceful means (the *via italiana* to socialism) as "revisionist".⁸ Despite Italian Communists willingness to resolve the crisis and maintain contacts, from then on until 1980, even though the Italian and Chinese communist parties never reached the point of formal breakdown, bilateral contacts were practically non-existent.

This essay focuses on the analysis of political language and terminology within the context of the ideological dispute erupted between the Italian Communist Party and the CCP, considering as main sources several official texts through which the debate was articulated at that time. The aim is to provide an analysis of the role of language and lexicon in a controversy, which involved two political parties (the ICP and the CCP) searching for their own autonomous road to socialism. The research has first identified relevant documents in the ideological controversy between the ICP and the CCP, looking at the main themes and terminologies used. The first document examined is the joint communiqué (*Comunicato sui colloqui tra il Partito Comunista Italiano e il Partito Comunista Cinese*) signed during the 1959's visit of the ICP in China. The second relevant document in the ideological controversy between the ICP and the CCP is provided by Zhao Yimin's speech at the 10th National Congress of the ICP (December 31, 1962). It was here that the Italian policy (the road to socialism through structural reforms) was attacked through a critique that would soon turn into a public condemnation of the ICP, and especially of its leader Togliatti. Lastly, we analysed the two long articles appeared between December 1962 and March 1963 in China's official party press (*Renmin*

⁷ Novella Archives, mf. 0153, Fondazione Gramsci, Rome; APCI, Verbali Direzione, 1969, mf.024, 24 giugno 1960, 725-751.

⁸ Alexander Höbel, "Il PCI nella crisi del movimento comunista internazionale tra PCUS e PCC (1960-1964)" [The ICP in the crisis of the international communist movement between the CPSU and the CCR, 1960-1964], *Studi Storici*, 46, 2 (2005): 542-555.

ribao and *Hongqi*), being entitled respectively “The divergences between the comrade Togliatti and us” and “Again on the divergences between the comrade Togliatti and us”, that condemned the Italian Communist Party for its alignment with Moscow and for the *via italiana* to socialism.

The chapter is divided into three parts. After introducing the nexus between language, politics and ideology in Mao’s China and highlighting the importance Communist leaders attached to prescribed words as having enormous power, reflecting categories and ideas that the people were expected to interiorize, the essay moves on to examine the 1959’s ‘joint communiqué’ between the ICP and the CCP putting in its historical context. It highlights the important role that language and words played in the process of negotiating the text of the joint communiqué showing how the Chinese emphasis on the correctness of language and on the choice of word reflected early divergences based on principles and idealistic purposes. Then, the article delves into the analysis of the dispute erupted in the early 1960s highlighting the divergent evaluation and interpretation about fundamental concepts and words related to the Marxist-Leninist tradition and their significance for and impact on contemporary international issues and the world communist movement.

II. Language, Politics and Ideology in Mao’s China

*A single word may rejuvenate a country, a single word may bring disaster to country. This is the mental changing the material.*⁹

Since its accession to power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party has made a lot of efforts in controlling the language of political discourse. In his seminal study, *Doing things with words in Chinese politics*, Michael Schoenhals points out the crucial importance Communist leaders, first of all Mao Zedong, assigned to the role of language in Chinese politics of the Communist era, especially *tifa*, or “correct” formulations or “ways of putting things”. As a special kind of formalized or ritualized political language, *tifa* were understood as very serious matters, having enormous power: “Where the formulation is off the mark by one millimeter, the theory will be wrong by a thousand kilometres”.¹⁰

⁹ Mao Zedong, “Speech at the Hangzhou Conference” (1963); cf. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_03.htm, last accessed on 2 May 2019. Quoted in Maurizio Marinelli, “La voce del potere: linguaggio e discorso politico in Cina”, *L’invenzione della Cina*, ed. by Giusi Tamburello (Galatina: Congedo, 2004), 406-407.

¹⁰ Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992), 7.

What concerned Chinese leaders was that people say certain things in certain ways under the assumption that, over time, thought and attitudes will also be affected. As Schoenhals put it,

There are few questions over which the CCP leadership has not at one time or other been divided. [...] there has on the whole been a remarkable consensus about the pivotal role played by what J. L. Austin called ‘perlocutionary acts’ in the attainment, consolidation, and preservation of state power. Perlocution, in its purest form, is the intentional use of language to produce consequential effects upon feelings, thoughts, and actions of people.¹¹

The attempt to control the language and turn it into a powerful tool to forge new ways of thinking among the population represented a crucial aspect of the CCP broader project of maintaining control of society and politicizing China’s everyday life, or what Ji Fengyuan has defined the biggest experiment of centrally controlled and rigidly enforced ‘linguistic engineering’ in world history.¹² The CCP’s policies of linguistic engineering originated during the early 1940s in Yan’an where new semantic categories and discursive formulations that embodied new ways of thinking (‘correct thought’) were propagated among cadres and learned through lectures, personal study and discussions based on key prescribed texts.¹³ The CCP’s acknowledgement of the power of words in Chinese politics was partially rooted in Chinese historical tradition, especially Confucian doctrine that considered “the correctness of language/names” (*zhengming*) as strictly related to the art of governing the state, and, more precisely, to the ideal of a political and social order based on the correlation between names (*ming*) and things (*shi*). Yet, Mao’s linguistic engineering had even stronger roots in modern authoritarianism, especially in the example of the Soviet Union where language had been considered as a key tool in thought-engineering.¹⁴ As Perry Link puts it, “this Soviet approach to language arrived in China primarily in the 1950s, when it merged with assumptions that were deep in Chinese tradition about speech as moral performance. The result, for China’s rulers, was an enduring confidence that government-prescribed words could indeed produce ‘correct’ behavior in citizens”.¹⁵

¹¹ Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, 5.

¹² Ji Fengyuan, *Linguistic Engineering: Language and Politics in Mao’s China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 2-3.

¹³ David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Ji, *Linguistic Engineering*, 42-51.

¹⁵ Perry Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rhythm, Metaphor, Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 300.

A key aspect of linguistic engineering in Mao-era China was the reform of the lexicon and semantics, which involved, among other things, the introduction of new terms required for the 'correct' expression of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and the revival of traditional terms to be applied to a new revolutionary context.¹⁶ A rich vocabulary was thus developed by Chinese communists, reflecting categories and ideas which never existed before such as, for instance, the lexicon of class analysis. The introduction and preservation of the language of Marxism-Leninism was also an important aspect in the broader international Communist movement, whereby ideological disputes were carried on largely in terms of 'principles' and idealistic purposes.¹⁷ For Chinese leaders, 'inappropriate' formulations could reflect attempts by revisionists to distort and tamper with Marxism¹⁸.

III. The 1959's 'Joint Communiqué' between the ICP and the CCP

As explained above, up until 1957 positive relations developed between the Italian and the Chinese communist parties, being largely based on solidarity and similarity of judgements. However, beginning in 1957, ideological differences gradually emerged between Italian and Chinese communists. Both parties began to develop differentiated positions and by 1960, in the wake of the Sino-Soviet dispute, ideological divergences beset relations among communist parties. The Sino-Soviet split and the hardening of the CCP's ideological positions put a great strain on party-to-party relations, which cooled down significantly after 1963 as a result of the CCP's condemnation of the ICP's position regarding international politics, and more broadly, of its political line (*via italiana* to socialism) as 'revisionist'.

If the 1956 saw the first direct exchanges of delegations between the ICP and the CCP, in 1959 a major initiative marked the highest point in political relations among parties. In April the first high-level official ICP delegation travelled to China invited by the CCP Central Committee (CC) to consolidate relationship and formally sign the first joint document. It was guided by Gian Carlo Pajetta, and composed of key party figures such as Antonio Roasio (1902-1986), Celso Ghini (1907-1981), Luciano Barca (1920-2012), Maria Michetti (1922-2007), the regional leader Gerardo Chiaromonte (1924-1993) and Giuseppe Boffa (1923-1998) who was in

¹⁶ Fengyuan, *Linguistic Engineering*, 4.

¹⁷ Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965) 61-62.

¹⁸ Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, 8.

charge of *l'Unità* foreign news services and had been a correspondent of the newspaper in Moscow (1953-1958). The visit took place at a time when China's domestic policies were radicalizing, with the launch the year before of the Great Leap Forward, and fell in the context of growing tensions between Beijing and Moscow resulting from the policies adopted by the new Soviet leadership at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The journey consolidated the political relationship among parties, leading to the solemn signing of a joint communiqué (*Comunicato sui colloqui tra il Partito Comunista Italiano e il Partito Comunista Cinese*), covered by Chinese national media, which formalized the establishment of direct bilateral relations. In an article written for the ICP's monthly *Rinascita* in 1976, Gian Carlo Pajetta, the head of the delegation, revealed his impression that the Chinese political line was diverging itself from the policy of the other communist parties on the themes of détente and peace, as well as on the possibility of a democratic road to socialism. According to him, during the visit the Italians clearly perceived that there was an ongoing concealed polemic and that the Chinese might want to sound out the Italians' real positions.¹⁹ Not by chance, long negotiations between the Italians and Chinese delegates took place mainly on the contents of the joint communiqué before a consensus could be reached.²⁰

As mentioned above, this visit to China by the delegation of the Italian Communist Party envisaged the solemn signing of a protocol as previously agreed. Pajetta accepted, but only on the condition that nothing contradicted the ICP positions, and that an explicit mention was made of the *via italiana delle riforme di struttura* (the Italian road of structural reforms). The Chinese demanded that a mention be made of the people's communes. Barca was in charge of negotiating the text, a long process that forced Italians to work day and night and that disclosed the Chinese dissent towards the Italian positions (peaceful coexistence and *via italiana* to socialism). According to Barca, the Chinese considered the Italian recognition of the original experience of the people's communes to be a point that could not be given up (for the Italians it was a delicate point, as it had led to a change in China's relations with the URSS) and binded this point to their own acceptance of mentioning Togliatti's structural reforms, considered by the Chinese "an unusual term in the Marxist and Communist literature".²¹ Misunderstandings and divergences were finally resolved with a compromise and on April 19th, Pajetta and Deng Xiaoping signed the joint communiqué in

¹⁹ Pajetta, "Come il PCI ha guardato alla rivoluzione cinese", 7-9.

²⁰ APCI, Estero, mf. 0464: CINA, *delegazione del PCI in visita in Cina. Aprile 1959*, pages 2910-2943.

²¹ Luciano Barca, *Memorie dall'interno del vertice del PCI* (Memories from within the ICP leading group), 3 vol. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), vol. I, 218.

a solemn atmosphere with the presence of Mao Zedong. Yet, the final text acknowledged the role of the ICP in advancing Italy toward socialism according to its national characteristics, but did not eventually include the expression “structural reforms” (*jiegou gaige*), that referred to the idea of a democratic transition toward socialism that could not be accepted by the Chinese. Thus, by insisting on the correctness of language, the Chinese delegates also cut off alternative ways of thinking, leaving the document with a largely shared vision of the problems related to the international situation and the world communist movement.²²

It first introduces the Italians’ vision and appreciation of the Chinese people’s struggle in the construction of socialism and of the people’s communes’ movement; then it states that the CCP has sympathy and admiration for the Italian workers movement and for the role the ICP plays in the struggle for peace, democracy and social progress within Italy. Here the Chinese side recognized the crucial role ICP in the struggle for “advancing Italy towards socialism, according to its own national characteristics”.

As mentioned above the term “national characteristics” (*minzu tedian*) used in relation to the ICP mission in advancing Italy toward socialism was an important term in the debate and discussion unfolded since 1956 within the world communist movement, reminding to the broader idea of “national roads to socialism” (or the principles of the multiplicity of the roads to socialism) sanctioned at the 20th Congress of the CPSU when the thesis of the plurality and diversity of the roads to socialism opened up new opportunities for communist parties’ autonomy. Not by chance, it was in this context that the ICP’s leadership began to search for a more autonomous role internationally, elaborating a new original conception based on ‘polycentrism’ that also implied a re-assessment of the traditional leadership role of the Soviet Union and also led to the ICP’s interest and action towards the extra-European world.²³ The need, strongly upheld by Togliatti, for every country to find its own road to socialism would become a point of disagreements between the Chinese and Italian positions in the years to come; by avoiding explicit reference to the ICP’s “structural reforms” and to the term “national roads to socialism”, the 1959’s document suggests that this theme had already emerged as a problematic one. Indeed, the concept of the “national roads to socialism” encapsulated the idea of a peaceful and democratic transition from capitalism to socialism; a possibility that was indeed downplayed in the document presented by the Chinese delegation at the Moscow conference, two years

²² APCI, Esteri, mf. 0464, pages 2910-2913 (Italian version) and pages 2914-2918 (Chinese version).

²³ Marco Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati, 1955-1975* [The ICP and the movement of the non aligned countries, 1955-1975] (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2011).

earlier.²⁴ In 1957 divergences also started to emerge regarding the leadership of the USSR within the international communist movement, which Togliatti was reluctant to accept as proved by the fact that he opposed the proposal to reorganize a centralized communist movement for the struggle against imperialism guided by the USSR put forward by the Chinese at the Moscow conference.²⁵ Indeed, despite being critical of the new Soviet leadership's initiatives (including de-stalinization), Mao endorsed the Soviet Union's leading role in the international communist movement at that time.²⁶ As Pajetta would later recall, in 1957 the Chinese unlike the Italian communist leaders were not willing to "renounce a liturgical formula behind which there was a political meaning: 'the socialist countries, the communist parties guided by the Soviet Union'".²⁷ This might also explain the fact that no reference to national characteristics in the Chinese road to socialism was included in the joint document, despite this issue was a central one in the Italian communists' analysis and view of the CCP. As a matter of fact, in autumn 1956, after returning to Italy, Scoccimarro reported the results of CCP's 8th Congress during a meeting of the CC of the ICP, and afterwards the ICP CC approved a resolution entitled "How the new China builds socialism" in which the construction of socialism in China was mainly seen through the prism of its originality on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. Indeed, the resolution stated that,

the edification of socialism in China [...] makes an invaluable, and in a way decisive contribution to the historic victory of socialism. Socialism triumphs in China, under the leadership of the Communist party and the flag of Marxism-Leninism, and following its original path, adequate to the country's situation [...].²⁸

Two months later, in December 1956, a CCP delegation was invited in Italy to participate in the 8th Congress of the ICP held in Rome. During the congress, Togliatti took up the theme of the "*via italiana* [Italian road] to socialism", making it clear that socialism should be realized according to specific national conditions. The Chinese

²⁴ Höbel, *Il PCI nella crisi del movimento comunista internazionale*, 521.

²⁵ Bruno Bernini's Archival Fund, Istituto Storico della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea, Livorno (ISTORECO; Livorno Historical Institute of Resistance and Contemporary Society), autobiographical manuscript, 116.

²⁶ Chen Jian and Yang Kuisong, "Chinese Politics and the Collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance", *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*, ed. by Odd Arne Westad (Washington; Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 1998), 266.

²⁷ Pajetta, "Come il PCI ha guardato alla rivoluzione cinese", 7.

²⁸ "Come la nuova Cina costruisce il socialismo", *Istruzioni e direttive di lavoro della Direzione del PCI a tutte le Federazioni* [Instructions and directives of the ICP Direzione to lower level committees], 10 (1956), 157-158.

delegation was guided by Peng Zhen, then member of the CCP Politburo and Mayor of Beijing.

Upon arrival in Beijing, the 1959 delegation was welcomed by Liu Ningyi and then met with Peng Zhen to whom Pajetta said that Italians and Chinese communists could understand each other well because “we, as much as you, have always wanted to be a national party, closely linked to the national situation and at the same time to socialist internationalism”.²⁹

The same conversation with Peng Zhen also turned to the current nature of imperialism, with Peng Zhen outlining its strategic weakness and stating that, “in the case of a war today, there is no doubt on which side the victory would be”. Pajetta emphasized instead that the policy and struggle for international détente and peace was the most suitable means to weaken American imperialism.³⁰ This theme was covered by the formal joint communiqué which presented a moderate and shared view, where the need to guarantee peace appears to be a recurring theme throughout the communiqué. It states:

the forces of the socialist camp, the forces of the national liberation movement, the forces sided with peace and progress have proved their superiority on the forces of imperialism: their victory appears historically inevitable [...] one of the most fundamental tasks of the communist parties and the proletariat is to unite all peaceful, democratic and progressive forces in the struggle for the defence of peace in the world and for weakening international tension. In the present time it is urgent to demand the prohibition of atomic and thermonuclear weapons [...] and to struggle for a peaceful solution of international disputes and for peaceful coexistence among countries with different social systems.³¹

This attention to peaceful coexistence was probably pushed on by the ICP, considering that Togliatti was a strong supporter of the need for peace. For him this theme was extremely important as he was persuaded of the need to appeal to Catholic masses, and to find a common ground that could unite the Communist and Catholic groups within Italy. Not by chance, Togliatti had adopted the thesis that a thermonuclear war would lead to global destruction and mark the end of civilization as early as April 1954, one month after it had first been discussed by Malenkov.³²

²⁹ APCI, Esteri, mf. 0464, page 2792.

³⁰ APCI, Esteri, mf. 0464, pages 2791-2799 (Peng Zhen's quotation at page 2797).

³¹ APCI, Esteri, mf. 0464, pages 2910-2913.

³² Aldo Agosti, *Togliatti. Un uomo di frontiera* [*Togliatti. A man of the frontier*] (Torino: UTET, 2003), 416-417; Silvio Pons, *La rivoluzione globale. Storia del comunismo internazionale (1917-1991)* [*The global revolution. The history of international communism (1917-1991)*] (Torino: Einaudi, 2012), 285-286.

Moreover, the joint document also recognized the key function played by the USSR in terms of world peace and international détente. Both parties agreed on the crucial importance of unity of the socialist camp for guaranteeing world peace (*shijie heping shiye*) and international détente (*nuanhe guoji jinzhang*). As such, both parties ended up to formally recognize the leadership of the USSR despite concrete attempts were carried out by both parties to pursue a more autonomous path at that time.

IV. The Dispute between the CCP and the ICP (1962-1963): Ideology and Lexicon

The 1962-1963 years were very important for the development of the political and ideological dispute between Chinese and Italian communists, a dispute which basically focused on divergent evaluation and interpretation about fundamental concepts and words related to the Marxist-Leninist tradition and their significance for and impact on contemporary international issues and overall relations within the world communist movement. Such a dispute, however, must be considered within the broader context of the period, in particular in relation to two main questions which historiography has focused on.³³ The first question: Mao Zedong's return to the 'first line' which he had to leave by retreating himself to the 'second line'³⁴ in 1960-1961 after the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, which clearly weakened his position as the great leader of the CCP and at the same time his political ambitions within the international communist movement; the second question: the development and worsening of the polemics between the Chinese and Soviet communists as seen in particular through some important events: the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (October 1961); Mao's talk at the CCP's 8th Central Committee's 10th Plenum (September 1962) in which he "called upon the whole party and the whole country 'never to forget class struggle'. Along with continuing championing of anti-US imperialism, he placed 'struggles against revisionism' at home and abroad as the party's top priority mission";³⁵ the

³³ See for instance, Yang Kuisong and Stephen A. Smith, "Communism in China, 1900-2010", and Timothy Cheek, "Mao and Maoism", *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. by Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 220-235 and 90-106 respectively.

³⁴ The reference is here to the division of responsibility within the CCP leadership which had been basically agreed since 1959, when Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were put in charge of the daily political work (first line) and Mao took up a senior role of supervision (second line).

³⁵ Original text in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (Mao Zedong's Manuscripts Since the founding of the State); for the English translation and comments see Chen Jian, "The Chinese Communist Revolution and the World", *The Cambridge History of Communism. Volume II: The Socialist Camp and World*

June 14th 1963 letter by the Central Committee of the CCP about proposals regarding the general line of the international communist movement; and finally the July 1963 meeting between delegations of the two parties during which Deng Xiaoping, head of the CCP delegation, indicated that:

It can be said with all candor that a whole series of disagreements of a fundamental character which exist today in the international communist movement, started at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. In the past we never spoke about this openly, because we were taking into account the situation you were in. We only mentioned that the disagreements which have arisen in the past few years in the international Communist movement were provoked by the violation of the Declaration of 1957 by comrades from several fraternal parties [...]. We have always considered and still consider that the 20th Congress of the CPSU put forward positions on the issues of war and peace, peaceful coexistence and peaceful transition which went against Marxism-Leninism. Especially serious are two issues: the issue of the so called “peaceful transition” and the issue of the full, groundless denunciation of Stalin under the pretext of the so called “struggle with the cult of personality” [...]. Here I want just briefly to say the following: a criticism of some errors by Stalin is necessary; taking off the lid, so to speak, and ending superstition is a good thing. However this criticism must be correct both from the point of view of principles and from the point of view of methods. Since the 20th Congress of the CPSU, the facts demonstrate that the full, groundless denunciation of Stalin is a serious step undertaken by the leading comrades from the CPSU with the aim of laying out the path to the revision of Marxism-Leninism on a whole series of issues [...]. After the 20th Congress of the CPSU, as a consequence of the so-called struggle against the cult of personality and the full, groundless denunciation of Stalin, the wave of an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist campaign was provoked around the whole world [...]. The most prominent events which took place in this period were the events in Poland and Hungary. We have always considered and still consider that in resolving the issues connected with the events in Poland, the CPSU took a position of great-power chauvinism, trying to exert pressure on Polish comrades and to subordinate them to itself by means of coercion and even tried to resort to military force. We consider that such a method is not only evidence of great-power chauvinism in relation to fraternal countries and to fraternal parties, but also evidence of adventurism.³⁶

Power 1941-1960s, ed. by Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, and Sophie Quin Judge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 87-112, quotation at page 103.

³⁶ “Meeting of the Delegations of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party”, Moscow, July 8, *Wilson Center Digital Archive*, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/1112>, last accessed on 2 May 2019.

Few days later, on July 14th 1963, the Central Committee of the CPSU released an “Open Letter to the Various Level Party Organizations and all Communist Party Members in the Soviet Union” in which all the accumulated grievances between the two parties were publicized. From September 6th 1963 to July 14th 1964 China replied with the publication of 9 commentaries (in Chinese *Jiuping*) by the *Renmin ribao/People's Daily* in which the origins of the rift between Beijing and Moscow were explained together with very critical assessment of the Soviet position about war and peace, peaceful coexistence, and in regard to Khrushchev's revisionism and phoney communism.³⁷

As Sergey Radchenko stresses in his studies about the China-USSR alliance,

Moscow and Beijing soon developed a range of ostensibly ideological disagreements, including different views on whether it was possible to avoid war (Khrushchev) or that was inevitable (Mao); whether communism could be achieved by parliamentary means (Khrushchev) or only by violent struggle (Mao); and whether class struggle was no longer necessary under socialism (Khrushchev) or still essential, even in communist states (Mao).

And again, about the issue of war and peace:

Mao and Khrushchev had very different assessments on the risks of war. Both leaders were quite keen to avoid war but Mao was certain that in the final analysis the ‘imperialists’ were more afraid of war than the socialist camp. Therefore, it was not only permissible but even necessary to take a tough line in foreign policy.³⁸

Thus, it was within such a general historical and political context that the ideological dispute between the CCP and ICP took place, within a broader attack – carried on with the publication of 7 articles on “contemporary revisionism” between the end of 1962 and Spring 1963 – against Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of French Communist Party Maurice Thorez, and the American Communist Party.³⁹

The two articles attacking Togliatti and the ICP were published by the *Renmin ribao* in December 31st 1962, with the title “The Differences between Comrade Togliatti

³⁷ See “Zhong Su da lunzhan/The Great Debate between China and the Soviet Union”, *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China*, compiled by Kwok-sing Li (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995), 579-582. See here also “Jiuping/Nine comments”, 208-209.

³⁸ Sergey Radchenko, “The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1949-1989”, *The Cambridge History of Communism. Volume II*, 243-268, quotations at page 253 and page 260.

³⁹ On this see Qiang Zhai, who quotes CCP leader Bo Yibo memoirs, in “The Cold War in Asia”, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Woodrow Wilson International Center, Washington DC, 6-7, (1995/1996): 228-231.

and Us” and in March 1963 by *Hongqi* (nos 3-4) with the title “More on the Differences between Comrade Togliatti and Us”.⁴⁰ We will here analyze some aspects and questions regarding the lexicon of these two articles, focusing on those ideological concepts and words which represented the bulk of the divergences between the two parties. Before this, we will provide an analysis of the speech by the CCP delegate Zhao Yimin at the ICP 10th National Congress in early December 1962,⁴¹ that is a few weeks before the *Renmin ribao*’s article.

Zhao Yimin (1904-?) was at that time one of the vice chairman of the CCP International Liaison Department, in charge of the relations with communist states and parties worldwide.⁴² In a collective volume published in China in 2004 on the occasion of his anniversary, few words are specifically dedicated to Zhao’s role in the International Liaison Department and no mention is made about his role during the ICP Congress.⁴³

In his speech, Zhao after remembering the historical contribution of the ICP to the anti-fascist and democratic struggle and to that of workers and peasants in Italy, focused first of all his critique on Tito and his clique as the representative of “modern revisionism” (in Chinese *xiandai xiuzhengzhuyi*), which – Zhao claimed – has led Yugoslavia to depart from socialism, restore capitalism and favour imperialism policies worldwide. In the second part, then, he stressed how this ICP Congress was characterized by a series of harsh attacks against the Party of Labour of Albania and especially against the CCP which continue to rely on Marxism-Leninism and fight against revisionism; in particular, Zhao clearly explicitated that there exist striking differences and contrasting visions between the CCP and the ICP on problems related to the evaluation of Togliatti’s so-called “theory of structural reforms” (*teoria delle riforme di struttura*), on Tito’s revisionism and some important problems related to the international situation. The ICP positions and

⁴⁰ See “Taoliyadi tongzhi tong women de fenqi”, *Renmin ribao* (31 December 1962), 1-3 and the article appeared in *Hongqi*, 3-4 (1963). The English official version of the two articles were published respectively in *Peking Review*, 7 January 1963 and by Foreign Languages Press (Peking), March 1963. For the Italian version, see “Le divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi”, *Dossier dei comunisti cinesi*, ed. by Roberto Gabriele, Nicola Gallerano, and Giulio Savelli (Roma: Edizioni Avanti, 1963), 321-364 and “Ancora sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi”, *Il revisionismo. Dossier dei comunisti cinesi: Sulle divergenze con Kruscev, Togliatti, Breznev*, ed. by Walter Peruzzi (Verona: Bertani, 1972), 123-364.

⁴¹ For the Italian version of the talk by Zhao Yimin, see “Testo integrale dell’intervento del rappresentante del PCC al X Congresso del PCI”, *Dossier dei comunisti cinesi*, 291-301.

⁴² See “Zhao Yimin”, in Wolfgang Bartke, *Biographical Dictionary and Analysis of China’s Party Leadership 1922-1988* (Munich; London; New York; Paris: K.G. Saur, 1990), 315.

⁴³ See *Zhao Yimin jinian wenji* (Collected writings in commemoration of Zhao Yimin) (Beijing: 2004).

views – concludes Zhao Yimin – are actually against the two Moscow Declarations,⁴⁴ the general interests of the international communist movement and are not helpful to the fight against imperialism and for the defence of the world peace.⁴⁵

According to the available text, Zhao did not mention during his speech in Rome the word ‘modern revisionism’ in relation to the ICP and its leader Togliatti. This concept was however in various passages included, in a direct and indirect way, in the two articles published in late 1962 and early 1963, insisting that the positions by Togliatti and the ICP leadership clearly represented an evident break from the Marxist-Leninist theses and thus tended to “revise” Marxism-Leninism. In Mao’s view, historically “revisionism” (*xiuzhengzhuyi*) was one of the two main danger, together with “dogmatism” (*jiaotiaozhuyi*), for Marxism: he stressed that while Marxism must advance along with the development of practice and cannot stand still, because in that case it will become lifeless, stagnant and stereotyped (“dogmatism”), a serious danger was also represented by “revisionism”, that is the negation of the basic principles of Marxism and at the same time a form of bourgeois ideology. It is possible to maintain that while in the past “dogmatism” was Mao’s main target, after 1956-1957 “revisionism” became his main concern.

The two Chinese articles, following Mao’s analysis, indicated that ‘modern revisionism’ was a new kind of manifestation of a serious problem experienced by the international communist movement in its historical development, that is “old revisionism” as expressed by Eduard Bernstein and later accepted by Karl Kautsky. One of the main features of revisionism in its old and new forms was the idea of *heping zhangru shehuizhuyi* (growing peacefully into socialism), a concept which in the 1960s was further elaborated by the Chinese communists in their polemics against Khrushchev, Tito and Togliatti as the *sanhe liangguan* (the three peaceful and the two entires). While the “two entires” were specifically related to the Soviet Union (the USSR had become a “state of the entire people” and the CPSU a “party of the entire people”, thus putting to an end the dictatorship of proletariat), the “three peaceful” expressed more generally the idea of *heping gongchu* (peaceful coexistence), *heping jingsai* (peaceful competition) and *heping guodu* (peaceful transition). According to the CCP, the “theory of peaceful coexistence” was wrong because it failed to point out that the socialist countries and other countries with different social systems could not coexist in peace until the revolutionary forces will be able to wage a resolute struggle against imperialism; moreover, peaceful coexistence

⁴⁴ The reference here is to the Declarations approved respectively at the 1957 and 1960 Moscow Meetings of Communist and Workers’ Parties.

⁴⁵ For ICP reaction during the congress to Zhao’s speech see Gian Carlo Pajetta, “Risposta ai compagni cinesi” [A reply to Chinese comrades], *l’Unità* (6 December 1962), 3.

does not mean – as revisionists and traitors of Marxism-Leninism believe – that socialist countries should give up their support for class struggle in capitalist countries and revolutionary struggles by oppressed nations against imperialist forces.

The critique of the concept of ‘peaceful competition’ points basically to Khrushchev’s slogan raised at the 20th CPSU National Congress in 1956, which assumed that peaceful competition between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp would favor the revolutionary forces in the world and that in the end socialism would defeat capitalism in the competition.

Finally, the CCP firmly rejected the idea of a ‘peaceful transition’ from capitalism to socialism, a point which was central in the polemics against Togliatti and the ICP. They maintained that ‘peaceful transition’ was a new term for Bernstein’s concept of “growing peacefully into socialism” and that such transition must be achieved through proletarian revolution and not the so-called “parliamentary road” (in Chinese *yihui daolu*) as Khrushchev and old and new revisionists claim.⁴⁶

A special concern which emerges from the two Chinese articles is related to the critique, expressed by Togliatti and other delegates at the ICP National Congress of 1962, towards Mao’s theory that “imperialism and all reactionaries are paper tigers” (in Chinese *diguozhuyi he yiqie fandongpai dou shi zhi laohu*). This was a concept which most probably Mao Zedong raised first in August 1946 in Yan’an in an interview with American correspondent Anna Louise Strong; Mao pointed out that in appearance all reactionaries are terrifying but in reality they are not so powerful, and that from a long-term point of view it is not reactionaries but the people who are really powerful.⁴⁷ Later, he discussed his thesis on various occasions: for instance, his talk in July 1956 with some Latin-American public figures and his famous and controversial speech in November 18th 1957 at the above mentioned Moscow meeting, in which he indicated that

I said all allegedly powerful reactionaries are merely paper tigers. The reason is that they are divorced from the people. Look! Wasn’t Hitler a paper tiger? Wasn’t he overthrown? I also said that the tsar of Russia was a paper tiger, as were the emperor of China and Japanese imperialism, and see, they were all overthrown. U.S.

⁴⁶ On these aspects see *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People’s Republic of China*, ed. by Henry Yuhuai He (Armonk, NY; London: Sharpe, 2001) and in particular the Chinese words *xiuzhengzhuyi* (revisionism) and *xiuzhengzhuyi bi jiatiaozhuyi gen weixian* (revisionism is even more dangerous than dogmatism), 573-578.

⁴⁷ Original version in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (*Selected works of Mao Tse-tung*), vol. IV (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1968), 1087-1092; Italian translation in *Mao Tse-tung. Opere scelte*, vol. IV (Milano: Edizioni Oriente, 1970), 103-108.

imperialism has not yet been overthrown and it has the atom bomb, but I believe is too a paper tiger and will be overthrown.⁴⁸

Another critique on Togliatti and the ICP's thesis concerned the question of the 'theory of structural reforms', conceived as objectives of democratic transformation on the road to socialism. This was a topic specifically discussed in the second article, in which in Chapter 5 on "State and Revolution" the Chinese ironically asked: "What is the 'positive contribution' of Comrade Togliatti's 'theory of structural reforms?'"⁴⁹ The text stressed that Togliatti in different occasions and in his concluding speech at the ICP 10th National Congress spoke of his thesis as a fundamental line and as common to the whole international movement, considering this Italian road to be

the road of advance to socialism for the whole capitalist world today, and apparently the one and only such road [...] Togliatti and other comrades consider their ideas to be a positive contribution to the deepening and development of Marxism-Leninism, the revolutionary doctrine of the working class. Unfortunately there is nothing new in their ideas: they are very old and very stale; they are the bourgeois socialism which Marx and Engels so relentlessly refuted long ago [...] If Togliatti and the other comrades have made any 'positive contribution', it is to the development, not of Marxism, but of bourgeois socialism. They have developed pre-monopoly bourgeois socialism into monopoly bourgeois socialism. But this is the very development which the Tito clique proposed long ago, and Togliatti and the other comrades have taken it over after their 'study and profound understanding' of what the Tito clique has done and is doing.⁵⁰

In the following pages of the chapter, a special critical attention is devoted to the so-called "parliamentary cretinism" (*cretinismo parlamentare*), stressing that:

Comrade Togliatti and certain other CPI comrades admit that to realize socialism involves struggle, that socialism must be realized through struggle. But they confine the people's struggle to the scope permitted by the bourgeois constitution and assign the primary role to parliament [...]. We have always held that taking part in parliamentary struggle is one of the methods of legal struggle which the working class should utilize in certain conditions [...]. First, we hold that all bourgeois

⁴⁸ Original version in *Mao Zedong xuanji (Selected works of Mao Tse-tung)*, vol. V (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), 499-500; English translation in Schoenhals, "Mao Zedong: Speeches at the 1957 'Moscow Conference'", 120; Italian translation in *Mao Zedong. Rivoluzione e costruzione. Scritti e discorsi 1949-1957*, ed. by Maria Arena Regis and Filippo Coccia (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), 731-732.

⁴⁹ See the English official version published in Peking by Foreign Languages Press, 1963, page 89 and following.

⁵⁰ English official version published in Peking by Foreign Languages Press, page 89 and 93.

parliament, including the present Italian parliament, have a class nature and serve as ornaments for bourgeois dictatorship [...]. Secondly, we are for utilizing parliamentary struggles, but against spreading illusions, against 'parliamentary cretinism' [...]. Thirdly, we are for utilizing the platform of the bourgeois parliament to expose the festering sores in bourgeois society [...]. On the three points just mentioned, Togliatti and the other comrades have completely cast away the Leninist stand [...]. Togliatti and other comrades have become thoroughly obsessed with the Italian parliament [...]. The basic tactical principle of Marxism-Leninism is as follows: in all mass movements, and likewise in parliamentary struggle, it is necessary to maintain the political independence of the proletariat [...]. To forget or violate this principle is to fall into the quagmire of Bernsteinism [...]. We should like to ask: What difference is there between Comrade Togliatti's formula concerning the mass movement and Bernstein's formula?⁵¹

V. Conclusions

This paper has traced the development of the relations between the Chinese and Italian communist parties in the late 1950s and early 1960s, examining the dispute unfolded between the two parties within the broader context of the period, especially against the backdrop of the Sino-Soviet dispute and the radicalization of China's internal and external politics. The issues that began to be addressed and debated since 1956 (that is de-Stalinization, peaceful coexistence and the thesis of the plurality of the national roads to socialism) soon revealed the existence of differentiated positions between Italian and Chinese communist leaders. The relations between the ICP and the CCP eventually deteriorated in the early 1960s, ending up with the abrupt Chinese condemnation of the ICP's policy and, especially, Togliatti's idea of a transition to socialism through democratic and peaceful means as 'revisionist'. The 1962-1963 years were thus very important for the development of the political and ideological dispute between Chinese and Italian communists. The chapter has tried to show that the ideological dispute between Chinese and Italian communists was carried out largely in terms of 'principles' and idealistic purposes and was basically focused on divergent evaluation and interpretation about fundamental concepts and words related to the Marxist-Leninist tradition and their significance for and impact on contemporary international issues and overall relations within the world communist movement.

⁵¹ English official version published in Peking by Foreign Languages Press, pages 109-112 and 116-117.