The Imperative of an Empire: Italian China Policy 1867-1901

by

Uroš Urošević

a Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities

Approved Dissertation Committee

Prof. Dr. Brendan Dooley
Name and title of Chair
Prof. Dr. Dominic Sachsenmaier
Name and title of Committee Member
Dr. Miloš Ković
Name and title of Committee Member

Date of Defense: 23 July 2012

School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank very much my PhD advisor, Prof. Dr. Brendan Dooley for his endless patience, constructive criticism and support which helped me overcome the hurdles that I encountered along the way and rendered this project a truly gratifying experience. Furthermore, I would like to thank my internal reviewer, Prof. Dr. Dominic Sachsenmaier who encouraged me to look at the topic from new and exciting perspectives and supported me with friendly and valuable advice and assistance. I would also like to thank wholeheartedly Dr. Miloš Ković, whose work was an inspiration and who, to my great pleasure and joy, agreed to assume the task of acting as my external reviewer.

Deep gratitude I owe also to the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes, not only for supporting me with a doctoral scholarship but also for the possibility to participate in their doctoral seminars, which allowed me to present my work at different stages of progress and receive valuable feedback from my peers.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for bearing with me all these years.
1. Introduction

2. Italian Imperialism
   2.1. The Idea of Imperialism and the Risorgimento
   2.2. Different Faces of Imperialism
   2.3. Imperialism from Above

3. Structural Differences between Italy and Germany
   3.1. The Problem of Efficiency and Capability
   3.2. The Problem of Political Instability
   3.3. The Problem of Incentives

4. Italy and Germany in China
   4.1. Catholic Missions in China
   4.2. Spheres of Influence
      4.2.1. Italian Colonial Policy After Adua
      4.2.2. German Action in China
      4.2.3. The Sanmen Crisis
   4.3. Armed Conflict
      4.3.1. German Military Action in China
      4.3.2. Italian Military Action in China

5. Conclusion

6. Bibliography
Falta, sin embargo, perspectiva y domina un ingenuo optimismo y una romántica incapacidad de ver y comprender completamente. Allí están todos los desequilibrios y desajustes de un pueblo magnífico e inculto, impulsivo y apático, inmaduro políticamente y enamorado del gesto individual y desinteresado, sin sentimiento comunicativo, pero compasivo y cordial, cruel, morboso y, a veces pueril y sentimental; pero, la música de los siglos, el rico mundo pintoresco y legendario del pasado impiden la visión abierta y sincera que vendrá mucho más tarde...

Juan Alcina Franch
1. Introduction

Italian imperialistic action in China has all but completely vanished from both academic and lay collective memory. It has been virtually ignored by Italian historians and recent academic works on the topic are inexistent. A 2008 guide through Italian archival sources concerned with the “memory of China” was published on demand, testifying to infinitesimal readership it was expected to serve.¹ Writers of popular literature have shown only a marginally greater interest in the topic than their academic counterparts² and other media of popular culture have ignored it entirely, leaving the brief (and unhistorical) appearance of Massimo Serato as Menotti Garibaldi in “55 Days at Peking” to slowly fade away from collective memory of the Italians.

In conversations with historians of colonial history, the mention of Italian imperialistic efforts in China often elicits smirks that consign this episode of Italian history to the realm of the anecdotal, denying it the necessary amount of “seriousness” required of any historical event worthy of academic attention. Indeed, in the context of colonial history or even Sino-European history of the 19th century, Italian imperialistic action in China was of short reach and little consequence. What is then the interest in examining Italian China policy during the second half of the 19th century?

The comparative lack of prominence of Italian imperialistic action in China, both in colonial history in general, and in the history of Italian imperialism, has perhaps precluded the realisation that Italian China policy of the late 19th century is a perfect illustration of Italian liberal imperialism as a whole, its sterility and impotence, as well as an ominous foreboding of unchecked imperial ambition that fully expressed itself only during the fascist era. More succinctly than the history of a longer and more persistent Italian interest in Abyssinia, and more clearly than the muddled history of Italian presence in the Dodecanese, it tells the story of an impromptu imperialism, shoul­dered with difficulty by a state crippled by fiscal inefficiency and internal unrest, and motivated by nothing more than a puerile desire of an empire. The history of Italian imperialistic action in China at the end of the 19th century is, therefore, paradigmatic for the entire liberal phase of Italian imperialism, whose specific weaknesses and shortcomings led directly to the rise of fascist imperialism. “Weak imperialism translates, in fact, almost always into ridiculous imperialism”, as Ernesto Ragionieri pointed out, “but this is by no means to say that weak imperialism translates into

a less dangerous kind of imperialism”. This in mind, the adequate amount of “seriousness” cannot be denied anymore to what may appear at first sight as somewhat stereotypical and incompetent but generally innocuous colonial dabbling of moustached men in feathered hats and white uniforms.

Precisely because it constitutes such a paradigmatic example of Italian liberal imperialism, Italian China policy at the end of the 19th century needs to be put into a larger historical context. It is tempting to assume that this context is adequately defined by the interaction of foreign policies of the sum of various foreign countries directly or indirectly interested in developments in China, as well as China itself. It turns out, however, that this is not enough. Although the context provided by foreign political dynamics would certainly prove capable of answering some of the questions that arise in view of Italian imperialistic action in China, concentrating on it alone would artificially reduce the complexity of political decision making processes in the second half of the 19th century and ultimately lead to a failure in understanding the logic behind at times seemingly irrational and unorthodox Italian imperialistic actions in China. By the time Italy entered the colonial race for resources, territories and markets, foreign policy had long ceased to be a mere battlefield of statesmen and diplomats it used to be during the era of classical cabinet diplomacy. Democratisation of political systems and technological breakthroughs that facilitated information exchange had led to an increase in public interest for questions of foreign policy, which, in turn, inevitably gave rise to the need of tying foreign policy more tightly to home policy. In other words, whereas during the era of classical cabinet diplomacy, foreign policy could be seen as a separate sphere of politics, largely unaffected by other considerations, by the beginning of the 1880s, the growing popular interest had made it highly relevant for the overall political system and rendered it a part of home policy. Although these developments were taking place across the Western world, they were particularly pronounced in states and societies that were still in the process of defining their territories, identities, political systems and social structures. In them, foreign policy, and therefore also colonial policy, was inseparable from the strife and ferments that characterised the internal life of the state. The Kingdom of Italy, which was proclaimed in 1861, but did not acquire its promised capital until 1870, and assumed an ambivalent attitude towards irredentist tendencies for decades thereafter, was a perfect instance in point.

---

5 ibid., p. 213.
The first chapter examines, therefore, Italian liberal imperialism in the context of the Risorgimento and its heritage. By identifying its roots in the political programme of the Risorgimento it also uncovers its real motives and offers an explanation for its obstinacy in face of defeats and political difficulties. It shows that an imperialistic policy was in minds of many “fathers of the nation” so closely related to the national unification itself, that abandoning it translated into abandoning the idea of a strong and unified Italy. This idea, by the 1930s capable of going to its ultimate consequences, expressed itself in all its clarity and forcefulness only during the fascist era. During the liberal era, however, it tended to express itself through a series of rationalisations that mimicked the motives of established colonial powers for engaging in imperialistic enterprises but, unlike the latter, entirely lacked a foundation in Realpolitik. The lack of a sound economic basis of Italian liberal imperialism inevitably led to a divorce of the policy makers given to imperial delusions and the poverty-stricken population of largely unindustrialised Italy.

The singularity of Italian liberal imperialism and Italian imperialistic action in China as its paradigmatic example becomes apparent most quickly if compared to the contemporary China policy of another colonial power. In order to meaningfully compare the policies, however, one is well advised to examine also the national contexts in which they were formulated. The second chapter compares, therefore, Italy and Germany not only as two countries whose histories have long been known for offering some of “the most fruitful parallels”\(^6\) in modern history, but also as two countries typologically most similar in terms of their approach to imperialism\(^7\). A closer look at Italy and Germany unveils, however, a series of significant differences that greatly affected the way in which they were able to organise the life of the state and formulate policies. In Germany, the result of the unification was a state that could profit from a single market and compounded military and economic power while still being able to rely on local fiscal, educational and conscription mechanisms. In Italy, on the other hand, local mechanisms had been either destroyed or seriously shaken and new ones had to be built from scratch, thus slowing down both the nation-building process and the industrial development of the country. In addition to this, Germany was politically much more stable than Italy. Whereas Germany inherited from Prussia a monolithic Junker political elite that firmly held onto power and reduced political tension by effectively excluding the middle class from the political process, the Italian political elite was a heterogeneous mixture of nobles and bourgeoisie that lacked a common political purpose. Finally, Germany’s state concept was not undermined by a redoubtable internal foe, as Italy’s was by the Catholic Church. All these

---


circumstances decisively determined the reach of Italian and German foreign policies and left a deep mark on imperialistic actions of the two countries.

Having placed Italian imperialism into the historical context from which it arose, and now in the position to understand its idiosyncrasies and its singularity even in comparison to German imperialism, to which it was most closely akin, the third chapter finally analyses the Italian China policy between 1867 and 1901. It proceeds with the comparison begun in the previous chapter and closely examines Italian and German imperialistic action in China. Not only because the familiar pattern of “sameness and divergence”\textsuperscript{8} of Italian and German histories is remarkably visible even here, but also because an appraisal of Italian China policy would, strictly speaking, be impossible without a suitable comparison. Two significant events delimit the historical episode examined: the establishment of an Italian mission in the Far East in the summer of 1867\textsuperscript{9} and the retreat of Italian soldiers from China on 5 August 1901. Prior to the former, no significant interest in Chinese matters can be discerned in Italian foreign policy; after the latter, a renewed loss of interest set in, rendering the Italian concession in Tianjin a mere “sentinella avanzata della civiltà italiana”\textsuperscript{10}, as Mussolini phrased it much later, devoid of any commercial or strategic importance. This relatively short time period spanning a bit more than a third of a century is further subdivided into three historical episodes with respect to the policy questions that dominated them. The first, encompassing roughly the years between 1867 and 1896, was characterised by the battle for formal right of protection over Catholic missionaries, fought with varying intensity by Italy and Germany, on the one side, and France, on the other. German invasion of the Jiaozhou Bay in November 1897 signalled a change of political climate in China, and initiated a phase of feverish struggle for concessions that saw Italy and Germany not only in diplomatic opposition to China but also to the established colonial powers wary of losing their strategic and commercial supremacy. The final episode, characterised by open armed conflict between China and foreign powers, began early in 1900 with the outbreak of the Boxer Uprising and ended in 1901 with the retreat of foreign contingents.

Italian and German imperialistic actions in China led to very different results. While Germany not only proved capable of competing with the most redoubtable colonial empires of the


\textsuperscript{9} Initially, the mission was established in Eddo. In 1878, it was transferred to Beijing.

era but also asserted its claim to world leadership in course of the Boxer War, for Italy, China became a theatre of repeated humiliations. Having followed the “parallel lives”\(^{11}\) of Italy and Germany long enough, as two lines that go in the same direction but never meet, one finally understands why this was the case. It is even more fascinating, however, to understand how Italian imperialism retained its vitality despite the repeated and severe blows it suffered, and nevertheless managed to survive into the “age of extremes” where it achieved its apotheosis. Frustrations and defeats accumulated during the era of liberal imperialism expressed themselves in a proclivity towards violence, much like they would do in post-Versailles Germany, that became a characteristic trait of the entire society.\(^{12}\) That is where the “parallel lives” continue.


\(^{12}\) For a remarkable comparison of the cultures of violence in Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany see: Reichardt, Sven: *Faschistische Kampfbünde: Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadrismus und in der deutschen SA*. Cologne, Germany: Böhlau Verlag, 2002.
2. Italian Imperialism

What is Italian imperialism? There seems to be no simple answer to that question. The first difficulty that arises when approaching it is seemingly of semantic nature: is it Italian imperialism or Italian colonialism? Imperialism, following Osterhammel’s definition, is “the concept that comprises all forces and activities contributing to the construction and maintenance of transcolonial empires”; in particular, “imperialism presupposes the will and the ability of an imperial centre to define as imperial its own national interests and enforce them worldwide in the anarchy of the international system”\(^{13}\). Colonialism, on the other hand, is “a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders [where] the fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonised people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis”\(^{14}\). Did Italy in the last quarter of the 19\(^{th}\) century possess “the will and the ability” to enforce its national interests worldwide? Or was it merely interested in subduing indigenous populations and drawing profit from its colonies? The answer to both questions is negative. In the former case, because, although willing, Italy clearly did not possess the ability to enforce its national interests worldwide. In the latter, because it aspired much more than a simple domination of indigenous populations. An additional distinction between imperialism and colonialism in Osterhammel’s theory offers a first indication as to what the correct answer might be: “imperialism is planned and implemented by chancelleries, foreign ministries and ministries of war, colonialism by colonial offices and ‘men on the spot’”\(^{15}\). Ironically, in Italy, the Ministry of the Colonies was established only in 1912, and reached the peak of its activity during the fascist era when Italy came closest to becoming an actual empire in Osterhammel’s sense. During the liberal era, however, most of the planning was done at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of War and the Ministry of the Navy, indicating that the correct term might be “Italian imperialism”, after all. This view is further strengthened by Wolfgang J. Mommsen who saw another distinction between colonialism and imperialism in the fact that rather than being interested in overseas territories merely for the sake of economic exploitation and settlement, imperialist states saw in them a vehicle for achieving the status of a world power.\(^{16}\) As this was one of the most important aspects, if not the most important one, of

\(^{14}\) ibid., p. 21.
\(^{15}\) ibid., p. 27.
Italian overseas involvement, one might conclude that it would be correct to term this involvement imperialistic action, although Italy was not an imperial power in the strict sense of the definition.\(^{17}\)

In spite of this, both Italian and foreign historians continue to prefer the term “colonialism”.\(^{18}\)

Although the predilection for the term “colonialism” certainly also has to do with belonging to academic traditions less familiar with the definitions applied here, this is not the only reason. Rather, this choice reflects another difficulty connected to the research of Italian imperialistic past.

Unlike British, French, or even German imperialism, Italian imperialism is in the national collective memory closely associated to the history of a totalitarian regime. Although the beginnings of Italian imperialism reach far back into the liberal era, for a majority of Italians, Italian imperialism is closely associated to the fascist regime and the Italian Empire Mussolini officially proclaimed in 1936. Following World War II, in order to avoid references to fascism, the memory of Italian imperialism was suppressed and deliberately removed from history textbooks.\(^{19}\)

In an attempt to replace an ideologically charged term, post-war historians started using “colonialism” as a more benign-sounding equivalent to “imperialism”\(^{20}\), and this tendency has remained prevalent until the present day. This semantic shift was not the only mark that fascist imperialism left on the study of Italian imperialism as a whole. Firstly, it overlay the memory of liberal imperialism to the extent that even contemporary research on Italian imperialism largely concentrates on its phase following the March on Rome. Secondly, the culture of silence that followed the end of the fascist empire left a deep and possibly irreversible impact on the manner in which the history of liberal imperialism can be approached. Due to the lack of (preserved) personal

\(^{17}\) In Osterhammel’s theory this term is reserved only for Great Britain and the United States. Other states may act as imperialists without being imperial powers.


11
narratives of both Italian and subaltern protagonists, a historiography based on unofficial, personal histories remains out of reach and the field is dominated by questions of policy and diplomacy.\textsuperscript{21}

The picture remains fragmented. It is telling that the only volume bearing the title “Italian Imperialism” published since 1947 is a collection of essays, newspaper articles and speeches written between the beginning of the unification and the fall of fascism, rather than an attempt to provide a unifying theoretical framework.\textsuperscript{22} Another, titled “Italian colonialism”, deals with the history of fascist imperialism and, apart from brief explanatory remarks, completely ignores the history of Italian imperialism prior to 1922.\textsuperscript{23} Closest to giving a comprehensive picture of Italian imperialism is Nicola Labanca’s “Oltremare: Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana”\textsuperscript{24}. It also, however, mainly draws on fascist era material and, while giving a superb overview of Italian imperialistic action, entirely disregards the ideology behind it and its relation to Italian post-Risorgimento history.

At present, there is no work dedicated to examination of Italian imperialism, its ideological origins and its political roots, from the Risorgimento beginnings to the end in 1947. Certainly, one of the reasons for this state of things is the fact that it is difficult to form a theory capable of comprehending instantiations of Italian imperialism as disparate as the Dodecanese, Tripolitania, Italian East Africa and Tianjin. Another reason is that, apart from Italian East Africa, even these instantiations have not received a sufficient amount of academic attention and little is known about them. It is beyond the scope of this project to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding Italian imperialism in all its forms. Even so, some level of understanding of Italian imperialism in general is a necessary prerequisite for embarking on a narrower and a more specific project. The question from the beginning of the chapter, hence, needs to be answered, at least in part.

This chapter concentrates on Italian imperialism of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century in order to situate the Italian colonial action in China in an ideological and institutional context. It begins by identifying the origins of Italian imperialism in the ideas of great figures of Risorgimento, whose views regarding the role Italy was destined to play in contemporary politics, although sometimes open to different interpretations and often even contradictory, foreshadowed Crispi’s \textit{africanismo} and the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Taddia, \textit{Italian Memories}, pp. 210-212.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Mola, Aldo A.: \textit{L’imperialismo italiano: La politica estera dall’Unità al fascismo}. Rome, Italy: Editori Riuniti, 1980.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ben Ghiat, Ruth and Mia Fuller (eds.): \textit{Italian Colonialism}. New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Labanca, Nicola: \textit{Oltremare: Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana}. Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 2002.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
conquest of Libya. It then continues by examining Italian imperialism in terms of the purposes it served, those it failed to serve, rationalisations and the real motives behind it. Finally, it analyses how imperialism was put into practice by the liberal governments of the 19th century Italy and how the Italians responded to it.
2.1. The Idea of Imperialism and the Risorgimento

On the eve of the Italo-Turkish War for Libya in 1911, the Italian nationalist Enrico Corradini, a follower of D’Annunzio and later a fascist senator, published a book whose title grasped the historical moment in terms that would be vividly remembered by fascists and supporters of Italian imperialism. “The Hour of Tripoli” was a plea for a swift occupation of Libya, bemoaning the inactivity of the Italian government and proposing how Tripolitania could be turned into a prosperous colony useful to the motherland. To support his own ideas about Italy’s claims to Libyan territories, Corradini invoked the spiritual father of the Risorgimento:

Someone, oh gentlemen, much before the question of Tripolitania first arose: before Italy itself was liberated and became a nation; someone who in his magnanimous heart cherished Italy’s past and its future; someone who knew what Italy had to do in order to fulfil its new mission in the world, as it once fulfilled its ancient mission; someone, oh ladies and gentlemen, much before us and with a different voice, said: Northern Africa must belong to Italy!

Now, of all the Northern Africa, only Tripolitania remains.

And this someone was Giuseppe Mazzini.²⁶

It is debatable whether Mazzini would have shared Corradini’s views on Libya and it is certain that the latter was portraying thoughts of the Risorgimento philosopher in the light that best served his current political agenda. Nonetheless, to discard Corradini’s interpretation of the Mazzinian thought as imperialist propaganda would mean to forcefully and artificially simplify the ideological complexity of the Italian unification movement.

In the context of the Risorgimento, Mazzinian republicanism represented the far left option that Cavour and his successors were determined to keep under control even at the cost of imprisoning the spiritual father of the Unification. It would be wrong to deduce from this, however, that Mazzini’s ideas were radically leftist in a context wider than the Italian unification movement. In fact, Marx discarded them as being of limited reach and implied that the Italian philosopher “had gone over bodily to the reaction”, representing “nothing better than the old idea of a middle-class republic”.²⁷ Mazzini’s outlook on humanity was fervently democratic while being fervently nationalistic at the same time. The attractive forces of these two ideas held sway over his mind and

²⁵ Tripolitania was the term commonly used in Italy at the time to denominate the whole territory of modern Libya. The territories conquered in 1911 were subdivided, however, into the provinces of Tripolitania (sometimes called ‘Tripolitania proper’) and Cyrenaica.

²⁶ Corradini, Enrico: L’ora di Tripoli. Milan, Italy: Fratelli Treves, 1911, p. 34.

determined his views on virtually all other political issues. His stance on imperialism was, hence, rather a by-product of his views on democracy and nation than a theory in itself. As such, it was, if not outright contradictory, then certainly open to a wide range of interpretations.

Mazzinian political theory was based on the idea that humans, having received the divine gift of life, were indebted to their Creator, and their only means of repaying that debt lay in fulfilling his design and adhering to his law.\textsuperscript{28} God’s design, according to Mazzini, was to educate and improve the humanity through progress, which, however, needed to be achieved by humans themselves. In order to fulfill this goal, the mankind needed to make use of the gifts bestowed upon it by its Creator:

\begin{quote}
You are humans: that means reasonable, sociable creatures capable, solely through the means of association, of achieving a progress that no one can put limit to; this is what we know today of the law of life given to the humanity. These characteristics constitute the human nature that distinguishes you from other beings that surround you and is entrusted to each of you as a seed that needs to be brought to fruition.

Your entire life needs to be directed towards the exercise and development ordained by these fundamental abilities of your nature. Each time you suppress or let one of these abilities be suppressed in you, entirely or in part, you fall from the level of men to that of inferior animals and violate the law of your life, the law of God.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Free exercise of human abilities required freedom and social equality, according to Mazzini’s theory, which were impossible to attain without previously achieving nationhood:

\begin{quote}
Without a fatherland, you do not have a name, nor character; you have no rights, nor have you received the baptism of brotherhood among peoples. You are the bastards of the humanity. Soldiers without a flag, the Israelites of nations, you will be neither trusted nor protected: you will not have a guarantor. Do not delude yourselves that you might emancipate yourselves from a unjust social condition if you have not previously conquered a fatherland for yourselves; where there is no fatherland, there is no social contract which you could invoke: there is only egoism of interests and whoever has the power keeps it...\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Nationhood was hence not the ultimate goal for Mazzini, but it was nonetheless an indispensable vehicle for participation of every individual in progress of the humanity as a whole. The

\textsuperscript{28} Mazzini, Giuseppe: \textit{Scritti politici}. Turin, Italy: UTET Libreria, 2011, pp. 865, 875.
\textsuperscript{29} ibid., pp. 884-885.
\textsuperscript{30} ibid., p. 895.
intermediate goal of achieving nationhood was, however, the most practically relevant aspect of Mazzinian theory in the socio-political context of the 19th century.

In his political writings, Mazzini postulated his tenets on nationhood as universally valid, not only in temporal but also in geographic terms. He emphasised the right of all nations to liberty and held that the same standards had to be applied to all “children of God”, explicitly stating that “colour” did not imply moral inferiority in any way. Showing himself wary of injuring the rights of other nations he warned the Italians:

You will descend to the level of brutes and violate the law of God each time you suppress or let be suppressed, in you or in others, one of the faculties that constitute the human nature. What God desires is not that his will be done in you only – if He had wanted only this, He would have created you alone – but that it be done in all the world, among all the creatures He created after His image.

Whereas in theory his views were perspicuous, they did not stand the test of political reality, more nuanced and complex than the idealistic picture of humanity he portrayed in his political writings. To what extent he believed in that picture himself remains open to debate as the views expressed in his private correspondence depart significantly from those expressed in writings foreseen for a broader readership.

Mazzini himself found it difficult to reconcile his humanistic views with his equally fervent nationalism. Although he generally believed in equality of all nations in front of God, he nevertheless emphasised the exceptional character of the Italian people reflected in a divine predilection for his motherland. In 1859, he wrote:

To you, men born in Italy, God assigned a fatherland most clearly defined in the whole of Europe, preferring you to all others. In other countries, defined by more uncertain and interrupted borderlines, questions can arise, which a peaceful agreement will resolve one day, but which have cost and will perhaps cost even more tears and blood. In your country, such questions cannot arise. God extended around you sublime, unquestionable borders: on the one side, the highest mountains in Europe, the Alps; on the other side, the sea, the immense sea. Take a pair of compasses: put one leg on the North of Italy, on Parma; put the other leg on the mouth of the Var and draw a semicircle going in the direction of the Alps until you reach the mouth of the Isonzo; having completed the semicircle, you will have

31 ibid., p. 886.
32 ibid., pp. 986-987.
33 ibid., p. 885.
delineated the border that God gave you. Up to this line your language is spoken and understood, beyond it you have no rights.\textsuperscript{34}

Although the borders drawn by Mazzini in 1859 spoke against the cession of Nice and Savoy to France\textsuperscript{35} and claimed for Italy the ethnically mixed regions of Trentino and Alto Adige, they were still characterised by relative modesty. He modified them a few years later, adding Istria to the list of Italian lands.\textsuperscript{36} More controversial, however, were his statements concerning northern Africa. Although no claims on African territories were present in his political writings and his lists of Italian lands included no overseas possessions\textsuperscript{37}, Mazzini did see northern Africa as a region historically belonging to the Italian sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{38} Addressing the assembly of the short-lived Roman Republic in 1849, he expressed his admiration for the past conquests of imperial Rome and outlined, albeit somewhat ambiguously, his view of the role the new Roman Republic had to assume in the world as its descendant:

…only one city was endowed, by grace of God, with the power to die and rise again, greater than before and accomplish a mission in the world greater than the one previously accomplished. I first saw the Rome of emperors rising and expanding through conquests to the borders of Africa, to the borders of Asia; I saw Rome oppressed by barbarians, the same ones the world calls barbarians even today; I saw her rise once again after having ousted those same barbarians, bringing to life, from its sepulchre, the seed of civilisation: and I saw her rise again, even greater to renew the conquests, not anymore with arms but with the word; rise again in the name of popes to repeat its great missions. I kept saying deep in my heart: it is impossible that a city that had two great lives should not have a third one. After the Rome that conquered with arms, after the Rome that conquered with words, a Rome will come that will conquer with the example it sets: after the Rome of emperors, after the Rome of popes, the Rome of people will come.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{34} ibid., p. 894.
\textsuperscript{35} In 1858, Cavour and Napoleon III had secretly reached the Agreement of Plombières, which was still not publicly known at the time Mazzini published the quoted article. The agreement stipulated, among other things, that Piedmont would cede its transalpine regions of Nice and Savoy to France in exchange for support in a war against Austria and the territories in the North of Italy then held by Austria. Mazzini later fervently attacked Cavour on this account and never reconciled himself with the loss of these regions.
\textsuperscript{36} Mazzini, G.: \textit{Scritti politici}, p. 993.
\textsuperscript{37} ibid., pp. 894-895.
Although the references to conquests do not have to be taken literally in this context, a private letter from 1845, written by the philosopher to his mother, proves that “conquest by example” was not meant only in ideal terms:

*I believe that Europe is called by the Providence to conquer the rest of the world in order to bring civilisation and progress to it: so, although they are politically unjust, I see with satisfaction the steps taken by the Europeans in the regions dominated by backward and foreign beliefs: the French in Algeria, the English in China, the Russians in Asia, if they ever go there, these appear to me as missions necessary to the humanity; [...] It is admissible that, taking advantage of the right moment, a European power should occupy, even by an act of violence, a part of an African, Chinese, Asian territory and then show from there, as one would do with a machine model, how superior the European civilisation is to theirs. I approve of an invasion under these conditions.*

It becomes clear, hence, that while Mazzini expressed in his political writings humanistic ideals that seemed absolute and unquestionable, nationalistic fervour could at times obscure his view of these ideals and he was not too pusillanimous to consider morally questionable expedients, either.

The heterogeneous ideological heritage left by the spiritual father of the Unification led to a considerable confusion in the Italian society regarding his positions on imperialism and a number of other issues. Republicans, liberals, Catholics, as well as later socialists and africanists, all professed to be followers of Mazzini. During the struggle for independence and in the years immediately following the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, the emphasis was put on equality of nations, their universal right to freedom and the morally uplifting and non-violent character of Italian mission in the world. Virtually echoing earlier writings of Mazzini, the Neapolitan philosopher Bertrando Spaventa maintained in 1860 that the “concept of a moral and free universe, governed by a rational law, applied to the national life of all peoples, in which all people are united and share a common destiny, is the essence of the civilisation of our times”. Also inspired by Mazzini’s writings on humanity as a family of nations, the Neapolitan jurist Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, who fled Naples after the coup d’état in 1848 and became a law professor at the university of Turin, asserted:

---


41 An illustration of this confusion, although not central to the argument presented here, is that Mazzini was in the 20th century highly revered both by fascists and antifascists.

...as there is a multitude of nations on the Earth, the principle of nation can signify nothing but equal inviolability and protection of all of them; therefore, as this principle would be violated if our nation suffered offence from others and obstacles were put in the way of its free development, it would be not less so if, on the contrary, our nation invaded the domain of others and caused offence against their legitimate freedom. In both cases, equality would be subverted, national independence would suffer a setback and the rule of rights would be upset.\(^{43}\)

Although Mazzini’s followers did not grow tired of repeating that the “Third Italy” did not aspire political domination of any kind and even that any idea of political dominance had to be renounced if Italy was to rise to its ancient greatness\(^ {44}\), they never truly believed that Italy was merely another one in a multitude of nations. Vincenzo Gioberti, who in his magnum opus “On the Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italian Race” described Italy as a benevolent “ancient and loving mother” of peoples, affirmed that Italy was the “organ of the supreme reason and the royal and ideal word, the source, the rule, the guardian of every other reason and language; because it is the seat of the head that rules, the arm that moves, the language that teaches and the heart that brings life to the universal Christendom”.\(^ {45}\) For Gioberti, who was a Catholic priest, it was only natural to see Rome as the metropolis of the world and the shepherd of the humanity. The idea that Italy’s mission in the world was to teach and uplift was, however, enjoying the same popularity among those who strove to oust the pope from Rome.

Already Mazzini had thought that he could recognise a sign of divine predilection in Italy’s geographic position and history, and his conviction was shared by many of his followers. Facts and myths, philosophy and religion were conveniently woven into a pseudo-scientific, historicising tapestry that was supposed to portray Italy as the “creatress and redemptress of peoples”\(^ {46}\). The fact that the Apostolic See was located in Rome was interpreted as a proof of a divine design to entrust Italy with a supranational, ecumenical mission in the world. But even more important for the new Italian mythology than Christian references, and more frequently cited as the relations with the Vatican deteriorated, was the precedent of the Roman Empire. For the poet Giovanni Pascoli, the ancient Rome and Italy were one and the same thing:


\(^{44}\) Gioberti, Vincenzo: *Del primato morale e civile degli Italiani*. Brussels, Belgium: Meline, Cans e Compagnia, 1845, p. 244.

\(^{45}\) ibid., p. 27.

\(^{46}\) ibid., p. 28.
Whoever was the first to dream, predict, announce, and prepare the Unification was inspired by Rome. Rome and the unity of Italy are the same thing. Rome was not conquered, it was her who united, attracted, inseparably bound Italy with all its peoples of various origins, traditions, talents, customs: she was the conqueress. At Rome, all these peoples became one great and mighty people of Italy...⁴⁷

This imagery was readily accepted by journalists, philosophers and politicians who hoped that Italy might assume the role that Rome once had, when “Romulus called all peoples to become members of the family that gave Roman law, Dante’s verses and Raffaello’s Madonnas to humanity”⁴⁸. Imperial Rome became thus the same as Dante’s Italy and Dante’s Italy became the same as the newly born Italian state. Nonetheless, not everyone agreed with this point of view. The journalist Mario Morasso, a fervent pre-futurist and no less patriotic than Pascoli, asserted that Roman past did not belong in any way to the Italian nation and that Italy “as an entity has no tradition whatsoever, no common historical root”⁴⁹. His opposition to the view that Roman past was national ironically strengthened through a dialectical process the same claim to universalism and supranationalism that lay behind the references to the ancient Rome. By denying the Italian nation clearly delineated geographical and cultural ancestral lands and by claiming that although all Italian “tradition, its past go back to Rome, this past is not Italian past, but belongs to the world”⁵⁰, he rendered the Italians a nation unlike all others, a nation of the world. It became, hence, possible to imagine “an Italy outside of Italy”⁵¹ and Mazzini’s borders “beyond which the Italians had no rights” became blurred. The idea of imperial Rome, whether through a direct link between the Roman Empire and the “Third Italy”, or indirectly as the cause and origin of cosmopolitan nature of the Italian nation, thus became pivotal for the birth of Italian imperialism.

The notion that Italy belonged to the world, stealthily and inevitably, introduced the inverse notion: that the world belonged to Italy. For many, this was meant in ideal and not territorial terms and, given the power relations in the second half of the 19th century, even then the “world” was taken in its antique rather than the modern meaning. As late as 1898, king Umberto I repeated, echoing Mazzini, that the new greatness of Italy had to be different from the ancient greatness of the Roman Empire and be based on rights instead of force⁵². By this time, however, such protestations of pacifism had been superseded by political reality and it had become clear that

⁵⁰ ibid.
⁵² “La commemorazione del cinquantenario dello Statuto”. Corriere della Sera (5-6 March 1898).
Mazzini’s ideas could be interpreted in a different manner, too. Francesco Crispi, the creator of the Italian African policy that met its disastrous end at Adua in 1896, frequently invoked the spiritual father of the Risorgimento and buttressed his expansionistic policy with claims that what his enemies called “megalomania” was only the desire to see a powerful Italy, a “sin of hosts, led by Mazzini, who worked together to include our entire beautiful country into the State”\textsuperscript{53}. Like many others who were not satisfied with an Italy rich in virtues but poor in possessions, Crispi maintained that ever since the fall of the Roman Empire, Italy had been “weak and impotent, and therefore an easy prey for conquerors” but that it had ceased to be an “artist’s studio, a museum of antiquity and not a nation” and that “rival states had to tolerate it, even if they are not disposed to love it”\textsuperscript{54}. The fact that Crispi had worked closely with Mazzini during the Risorgimento strengthened his authority as an exegete of Mazzinian thought and gave more weight to his bellicose statements. Nor was he the only prominent political figure of the Risorgimento who believed that Italy had to expand beyond the borders of 1870. Marco Minghetti, Cavour’s secretary-general, the first Italian Minister of Interior and twice the Prime Minister of Italy, sneered at the idea that Italy might play a role comparable to that of Switzerland or Belgium in European politics. Drawing upon the historical precedent of the Roman society, which entered an era of decadence once it stopped expanding territorially, he maintained that ”a great country cannot concentrate its activities on itself like that. Youth needs to grow and expand. If it is not offered some great prospects, it will become embittered, then corrupt and dissatisfied”\textsuperscript{55}. Such statements initially opened the way to Italian imperialism and were frequently used during the Crispi era to buttress ideologically the state-sponsored imperialistic dabbling in Abyssinia. This implied by no means, however, that Italian political class had a clear idea of how Italy could profit from an overseas empire.

\textsuperscript{53} Crispi, Francesco: \textit{Ultimi scritti e discorsi extra-parlamentari (1891-1901)}. Rome, Italy: L’Universelle, 1913, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid., p. 63-64.
2.2. Different Faces of Imperialism

Although it was nationalism that Edoardo Giretti characterised in 1913 as a “banner hiding the most varied types of goods”\textsuperscript{56}, his definition could equally well be applied to imperialism. In this sense, the Italian case was in no way untypical. Collusion of public and private interests, participation of different political currents in the shaping of colonial policy and the resulting heterogeneity in views and intents were in no way uncommon for the established colonial powers, either. For industrial and mercantile circles colonies represented sources of additional income, to armies and navies colonial campaigns offered a possibility of enhancing their status and increasing their influence, and for politicians they were tokens of power and prestige, which could readily be used for dazzling masses and diverting attention from internal problems. One important difference existed in the Italian case, however. Whereas countries like England or France had centuries to incorporate these different aspects of imperialism into a political practice that was capable of harmonising the influences of various interest groups and was overall advantageous not only for political and economic elites but to a certain, naturally much lesser extent, also for the general populations of these countries, in Italy the whole colonial effort was limited to a period spanning less than eight decades\textsuperscript{57} and Italy consequently never reached the level of developed imperialism at which it could as a country draw significant benefits from its colonies. At the end of the 19th century, the established colonial powers had in place political structures characteristic of high imperialism that allowed them to govern effectively and impose their will on the subjugated populations. The Italians were only beginning to conceive and build their own.

The will for closing this gap started showing early, even before the project of national unification was completed. Already in 1863, the political economist Leone Carpi wrote in a circumspect but nonetheless warning manner that:

\textit{“Without a judicious and pacific policy of colonial expansion, Italy will always be troubled by, more or less violent, popular unrests within the kingdom and be comparatively weak and abject compared to other civilised peoples of the globe. [...] Without colonies and without a constellation of plantations and factories abroad one cannot expect having a thriving navy, a thriving industry, thriving}

\textsuperscript{56} Giretti, Edoardo in Salucci, Arturo (ed.): \textit{Il nazionalismo giudicato da letterati, artisti, scienziati, uomini politici e giornalisti italiani}. Genua, Italy: Libreria editrice moderna, 1913, p. 106.

\textsuperscript{57} Labanca limits it even to six decades, setting the beginning of Italian colonialism in 1882, when the Bay of Assab was officially taken over by Italian government from the private Rubattino company. “Mediterranean colonialism” of the four Italian maritime republics is generally not considered in the context of modern colonialism. See Osterhammel, J.: \textit{Kolonialismus}, p. 7.
commerce, peace and order among the numerous members of the working class, legitimately thirsting for well-being.\textsuperscript{58}

Carpi was not alone in his convictions. In 1867, less than a year after Venice joined the Kingdom of Italy and while Pius IX rather than Vittorio Emanuele was still ruling in Rome, the Società Geografica Italiana was founded in Florence, then the capital of Italy. Two years later, it organised the first exploratory mission in Eritrea. The same year, the Lazarist Giuseppe Sapeto obtained for the private shipping company Rubattino the Bay of Assab in concession.\textsuperscript{59} A long phase of inactivity followed before the Italian government decided to use Assab as the point of access to the East African hinterland in 1882, and acquired it for itself. From this point on, the arduous path of Italian imperialism would lead via Dogali and Amba Alagi to Adua but even the annihilating defeat at the hands of the Abyssinian negus Menelik and the collapse of Crispi’s \textit{africanismo} could not destroy the Italian imperialistic dream. The reasons for its tenacity in spite of repeated frustrations need to be sought in its origin and the motivation of Italian politicians to indulge their desire of a colonial empire in the first place.

The traditional reasons of mercantile profit and production surplus that had motivated the first European colonial powers to go in search of new markets hardly played any role in Italian colonial endeavours. Italian entrepreneurs who decided to go abroad could rarely count on any kind of support from their government and if their businesses did not go bankrupt and continued to operate overseas it was more often in spite of the local representatives of the Italian state than due to their support.\textsuperscript{60} The more numerous group of those who remained at home was hardly interested in imperialism at all. The Italian middle-class, as opposed to the urban bourgeoisie of other European countries, remained very much attached to land and the industrial take-off took place in Italy only with a significant delay in comparison to the regions on the other side of the Alps.\textsuperscript{61} This anachronistic trait of Italian middle-class inevitably affected also the deployment of capital and, ultimately, the structure of Italian economy. While industrialised European countries were already exporting industrial goods or cheaply produced textiles into the colonies, Italian exports in the last quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century included, with the noteworthy exception of the highly esteemed silk

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Leone Carpi in Mola, A.: \textit{L’imperialismo italiano}, p. XIV.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Sapeto, Giuseppe: \textit{Assab e i suoi critici}. Genua, Italy: Stabilimento Pietro Pellas fu L., 1879.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Einaudi, Luigi: \textit{Un principe mercante: Studio sulla espansione coloniale italiana}. Turin, Italy: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1900, p. 13.
\end{itemize}
fabric, mainly agricultural produce.\textsuperscript{62} Italian economy was hence complementary to those of the industrial states but not necessarily to those of the colonies and most of the Italian exports were leaving for other European markets.

Isolated voices were drawing attention to this fact, warning that under current conditions, colonies would prove to be of disadvantage rather than advantage to their mother country and insisting that a colonial empire meant nothing as long as Italy did not have a strong industry to rely on. Upon the passing of Assab under state administration, the journalist and Risorgimento veteran Antonio Gallenga protested in vain:

\textit{“Of what benefit for a nation is the possession of colonies and other territories if the luxury of governing them brings with itself the obligation to defend them in the moment of danger and even feed them in the hour of famine? To be sure, it seems that Italy does not need to do more than to read the records of its mediaeval republics in order to understand that as far as the establishment of new colonies is concerned, commerce can achieve more than conquest, and influence is heard farther than power.”}\textsuperscript{63}

Policy makers consistently ignored the opposition to imperialism of this kind. In general, economic considerations hardly seemed to play a role and the debate on imperialism was characterised by a decisive lack of pragmatism. Whereas the established colonial powers were at this time already carefully weighing economic advantages and disadvantages of acquiring new colonies\textsuperscript{64}, in Italy, imperialistic projects were often taken for a goal in themselves.

For many Italian politicians and intellectuals, imperialism was more of an emotional need than a political strategy designed to fulfil an economic purpose. The fact alone that “in this colonial race, in which all the nations including little Belgium, have found its place, only Italy has not been able to find its own”\textsuperscript{65} weighed heavy on the self-esteem of the leaders of the nation. Looking back in 1914, Roberto Michels wrote:

\textit{“Italian imperialism was born, first of all, out of the full awareness that the Italians were naturally proud, and that they were politically, morally, militarily and civilly better than the world thought, and out of the legitimate desire to stop playing, once}


\textsuperscript{63} Gallenga, Antonio: \textit{“L’Italia, il suo commercio e le colonie”}. \textit{Nuova Antologia} LXIII (15 June 1883), p. 706.


\textsuperscript{65} Nobili-Vitelleschi, Francesco: \textit{“Espansione coloniale ed emigrazione”}. \textit{Nuova Antologia} XCIX (May and June 1902), p. 108.
and for all, the odious part of the perennial Cinderella that other nations had assigned to it. Little by little, in the years leading up to this, a certain psychological need was being born, to go and conquer, at all costs, the place among the European nations that the civilisation and the genius of the Italian people deserved. Having become a slave, Italy knew how to break its chains. Having become an adult, the Italians felt the need to fight in front of the foreign countries and in front of their own selves for respect and their name in politics.⁶⁶

When imperialism was acclaimed as a way of improving the prestige of Italy in the eyes of other European powers, the question of raising the prestige in the eyes of others could never be completely separated from that of raising the prestige of Italy in the eyes of the Italians themselves. The “acute inferiority complex with regard to more advanced countries like France and England”⁶⁷, which had already given an important impetus to the process of Italian unification, was now pushing the Italians into another trial of strength with its European competitors. Only, this time, it was to take place beyond the lines that Mazzini had drawn with his pair of compasses.

Naturally, although the intrinsic motivation for imperialism was emotional, it had to find ways of expressing itself through rational or at least seemingly rational ideas acceptable in the context of a political discourse. The vehicle was provided by the same concept of historical fatalism that had been present already in Mazzini’s writings on nationhood. The supposed ideal continuity between ancient Rome and Italy acted as the coagulator of the diffuse political consensus on the topic of imperialism, and the romanticising view of Italy as the natural heir of the ancient glory of the Roman Empire contributed more than any other argument to the conviction of Italian thinkers and politicians that Italy was destined to have an imperial future.⁶⁸ Memories of the ancient rivalry between Rome and Carthage were evoked⁶⁹ among clamorous proclamations of “inevitability of the Italian imperial destiny”⁷⁰ that still echoed years later in the verses of Gabriele D’Annunzio, the forerunner and master choreographer of fascism⁷¹:

Con me, con me verso il Deserto ardente,
con me verso il Deserto senza sfingi,
che aspetta l’orma, il solco e la semente;

⁶⁹ Decleva, E.: *Da Adua a Sarajevo*, p. 39.
⁷⁰ Mola, A.: *L’imperialismo italiano*, p. XVIII.
con me stirpe ferace che t’accingi
nova a riprofondare la traccia antica
in cui te stessa ed il tuo fato attingi.\textsuperscript{72}

The inevitability of imperial destiny was in turn linked to other inevitabilities: of economic progress, of Italian civilising mission, of the survival of the fittest and other rationalisations characteristic of the era of high imperialism. While even the more cautious observers, such as the philosopher Antonio Labriola, were denying the possibility that Italy could escape the “development of states that brings with itself the development of peoples” and that “competition [could] make place for a defenceless justice without means of coercion”\textsuperscript{73}, more bellicose military men were demanding resolve in following the dictate of the ineluctable struggle for survival:

“In sum, these poor Danakil\textsuperscript{74} lead an unhappy existence, living on an ungrateful land from which they nonetheless expect everything without wanting to work [...] Possibly it is a people destined to disappear from the face of the Earth [...] and if we really want to establish ourselves in Assab, we need to fatally contribute to their destruction. [...] If this should be too much for the humanitarian consciences, and if these should constitute a majority of Italians, we should have avoided involvement in Africa, that is, we should retreat now, since one should rest assured: in no other part of the world is the inexorable struggle for survival fought to its ultimate consequences like in this infernal and scorching land of the sun.”\textsuperscript{75}

From there it was but a step to the conviction that the coloured peoples had to disappear and make space for Italians, “a superior race”.\textsuperscript{76} The whole logical system that implied a preordained imperial future for Italy seemed to consist of a chain of ineluctable developments. The question was not anymore whether Italy should acquire an overseas empire and whether imperialism was good for Italy, but rather, the course of Italian future as an empire being set, what kind of purpose Italian imperialistic endeavours should have.

Advocates of imperialism were quick to find a meaning in what they perceived as historical inevitabilities. They emphasised the importance of colonies especially in the case of states

\textsuperscript{73} Mola, A.: L’imperialismo italiano, p. XVIII.
\textsuperscript{74} The Danakil (it. Danàkili) was the name commonly used at the time for the Afar populating the Horn of Africa.
\textsuperscript{76} Ghisleri, Arcangelo: Le razze umane e il diritto nella questione coloniale. Milan, Italy: Marzorati, 1972, pp. 97-100.
“resurrected or waxing in power” and described them as not only necessary for economic growth but even as the “guarantee of life”. Apart from this aspect, the Italian supporters of imperialism hardly differed from their transalpine and British counterparts, seeing imperialism as

“...the omnipresent contest of nations in the great and glorious mission of bringing civilisation to the extremes of our little world, of rendering productive the regions that are still uncultivated, of substituting barbaric customs with civilised ones, and above all, doing what is the most important scope of this movement of expansion, opening, that is, a vast field of activity and well-being for European nations instead of forcing them to devour one another in the battle for life.”

Even those who, more candidly, discarded “bringing civilisation to barbarous and wild countries” as a “rhetorical figure” due to the fact that “no people called savage has ever been civilised [...] but replaced, absorbed and most of the time destroyed” insisted on the function of colonialism as a “security valve”. It was generally believed that colonialism not only reduced internal tension within the colonising states, but could also be employed for reducing tension between various colonising states by banning the inexorable struggle for survival among nations from the European continent to other, more spacious ones, where it could freely take its course without directly endangering the power structures in Europe. Indeed, whereas European politics after 1871, seen strictly as regarding the continent of Europe, was characterised by a self-imposed moderation of territorial ambitions, dictated by the determination to avoid war in Europe, the colonial policies of European powers were free of any such restraints. Implicit in this theory was the notion that the indigenous populations of Africa and Asia could be easily subdued and that their soldiers were no match for the armies of European states.

In their imperialistic fantasies, Italian politicians and journalists tacitly implied that battalions of the new Italian army were made of the same fibre as Roman legions and that they simply had to continue the work of the latter, emulating, at least in Africa, the example that Roman emperors had set. The reality was different. The unity had been achieved primarily with the power of French and Prussian weapons and the wars of unification provided few examples of Italian military prowess, even those being overshadowed by the grave and traumatic defeats at Custoza and

---

Lissa. From these facts was born the “ignoble legend that the Italians do not fight” that left both the army and the navy in dire need of glorious victories that could be stylised into myths of invincibility at land and sea. It comes as no surprise then that in the aftermath of the Battle of Agordat in December 1893, one of the few military encounters of any significance that Italian troops won in East Africa, the poet and journalist Edoardo Scarfoglio seized the long awaited opportunity to link the successes of Italian soldiers to those of Roman legionnaires and claim that “the only thing we are suited to and the only one in which we can expect some happy outcome is war”. Scarfoglio’s joy was premature and his judgement off the mark, but they perfectly illustrated the hopes and expectations that were put into the imperialistic endeavours in Africa. The dreams of ancient power being restored and the “banners of Lepanto hoisted again” depended on military and naval successes that Italy could seek only in colonial context. Victories, even if only in skirmishes, became a reason for persisting in colonial campaigns despite the absence of economic and all other incentives. In a letter to the editor of “La Riforma Sociale” and the later prime minister of Italy Francesco Saverio Nitti, the famous explorer of Africa Henry Morton Stanley accurately described the Italian approach to colonialism in East Africa:

\[ \text{It appears that your ideas on colonisation changed after you conquered Kassala.} \]
\[ \text{You became bold and disinclined to waste time in negotiations. Each act of yours} \]
\[ \text{became a part of a military master plan. As soon as you conquered one place you} \]
\[ \text{would start desiring another, more advanced one, and were directing your efforts} \]
\[ \text{towards its conquest. You were not acting as colonisers any more, but as} \]
\[ \text{conquerors plain and simple.} \]

Although the Italian streak of conquests in East Africa came to a definitive halt at Adua in 1896, the approach to imperialism devoid of any pacific long-term strategy of colonial development did not die with the failure of the Abyssinian campaign. Rather, the political class, partly incapable of freeing itself from “great power airs disproportionate to the available means”, partly practically minded and determined to divert the public attention from the internal problems of an increasingly oppressive political system, continued to seek “supposedly easy successes in military campaigns as

82 Edoardo Scarfoglio in Mola, A.: L’imperialismo italiano, p. XIX.
83 Mola, A.: L’imperialismo italiano, p. XXV.
short as possible, risk-free, and inexpensive”\textsuperscript{86}. This obstinacy in spite of defeats, fiscal problems and internal unrest became one of the characteristic traits of a political elite that believed, or appeared to believe, that only “ostentation of power was a guarantee of respect for Italy abroad”\textsuperscript{87}.

\textsuperscript{86} Mola, A.: \textit{L'imperialismo italiano}, p. XXV.
\textsuperscript{87} ibid., pp. XXI-XXII.
2.3. Imperialism from Above

Monuments commemorating Italian imperial endeavours of the liberal era are few and inconspicuous. There are several reasons for this. One is that for a number of years following the official end of the Italian Empire in 1947, the Italians rather kept quiet about their imperial past than talked about it. Although the fragile Italian democracy that emerged after the fall of the Mussolini government initially attempted to regain by diplomatic means the overseas possessions lost by the fascists, after their final loss in 1947, it assumed the approach that imperialist past was a “historical experience to be erased”. This attitude affected primarily the memory of fascist imperialism but the memory of liberal imperialism, as the precursor of the former, suffered significantly on its account, as well. This explanation, adequate as it may be for the lack of post-war monuments, does not account for the lack of contemporary monuments built before 1922. Despite the fact that more Italians lost their lives in the battle of Adua than in all the Italian wars of independence put together, neither in the immediate aftermath of the battle nor in the years that followed, did a single Italian municipality decide to dedicate a monument to their memory. What may appear as a puzzlingly irreverent attitude of the Italians towards their dead had to do, for one thing, with the practical difficulties of creating a monument supposed to inspire patriotism while commemorating a shameful and unnecessary defeat. Secondly, it attested to the general awkwardness that accompanied the attempts of all pre-fascist governments to create a myth of Italy as a successful colonial power, that ultimately resulted in the practice of downplaying, visually neutralising and ignoring all potentially embarrassing references to lost battles, failed colonies and an empire that proved to be an abortive dream. Finally, but not less importantly, the silence and the lack of attention that the dead of Adua, but also the vanquished of Dogali and the victors of Agordat received from their compatriots reflected the importance of imperial endeavours for the majority of the Italian population.

Italian liberal imperialism was a project of a political class dissociated from its popular base and deprived of allies. While the British government sparked in its subjects imperialistic

92 von Henneberg, K.: Monuments, Public Space, and the Memory of Empire, p. 56.
93 ibid., pp. 56-58.
enthusiasm by means of an elaborate mix of pseudo-scientific theories and an even more elaborate system of social distinction⁹⁴, the French government worked closely with the Catholic Church in order to spread the French culture overseas, and even the German government, a novice in imperialistic enterprises, managed to secure the support of economically preponderant merchant elites, the Italian imperialists stood alone in their battle for “an Italy outside of Italy”. The isolation of Italian liberal governments in colonial affairs was an outcome of the failure to align the colonial policy with the interests of the state and direct the productive efforts of the society accordingly.

Already in 1874, Leone Carpi had written:

*No means is more suited to stimulating the industriousness of a nation in commerce and industrial enterprises involving foreign countries than a coordinated and persistent action of the employees of the state abroad, in order to direct the attention of their countrymen toward those exchanges and those speculations that correspond to the nature of the relations already established and those that can be established between the respective countries. The impulse should be given by the central government, so that it may spread everywhere in the same manner and the same relation to the supreme reason that determines it.*⁹⁵

Such coordination of efforts did not exist in the Italian case. While the thriving Italian communities of South America were ignored and the potentially lucrative commerce between the motherland and the colonists largely foregone⁹⁶, the Italian government concentrated its efforts on the infertile and hostile terrain of East Africa. Moreover, liberal political elites seemed completely disinterested in mobilising the support of the Italians for their imperial designs. Not only did the political leadership disregard the stream of Italians leaving the country, but it also sought to reduce the influence of the parliament on colonial policy to a necessary minimum. Political representatives of those Italians who remained in the country were kept in the dark with regard to the real intentions and the long-term strategy, as far as one existed, of the Italian colonial policy shaped at the Consulta, and were merely asked to approve, often post hoc, the actions taken overseas, both in war and in peace. The result was a colonial policy that responded to private ambitions of the key political figures but not to the needs of the Italian population or the interests of the Italian state.

These tendencies of the political leadership were not only anti-democratic but they also constituted flagrant violations of the Italian constitution. The Article V of the Statuto Albertino

---


from 1848 clearly stipulated that, although the king alone had executive power, “treaties which involve financial burden, or alter the territory of the State shall not have any effect until approved by the two houses.”

This principle was repeatedly violated and although it could not be subverted juridically, efforts were made to make it politically irrelevant. In 1890, Crispi claimed in front of the parliament that “when the Article V speaks of the ‘territory of the State’, it speaks of the national State, it speaks of the State that rules (Stato che impera), it speaks of Italy, not of foreign territories that could be acquired subsequently, beyond the confines of the nation.” Unable to convince the deputies of the correctness of his exegesis, and facing increasingly strong parliamentary opposition to his African policy, he even invited the king to dissolve the parliament and get rid of all the weak and indecisive ministers thus effectively proposing what Mussolini would put into practice three decades later.

Yet, to trace the undemocratic character of the Italian colonial policy back only to the proclivity of liberal governments towards totalitarianism would mean to oversimplify the political life of the Third Italy. Two decades after the proclamation of the Italian state, the overall literacy rate in the kingdom was still under 40%. A huge majority of the Italians, especially in the agricultural South that also accounted for a major part of trans-oceanic Italian emigration, was oppressed by poverty and ignorant not only of the colonial policy of the state, in which they perceived no direct relevance for their daily struggle for survival, but also of domestic political affairs. Francesco Saverio Nitti, himself a Southerner and an ardent defender of peasants and labourers, wrote in 1888:

*The peasants of the Mezzogiorno, it pains me to say so, do not trust their administrators in the least, and everything that does not regard their most immediate and urgent needs they view with complete indifference.*

The disinterest in the political life of the state was not characteristic only for the peasants Nitti spoke of, however. In 1895, at a time when only 6.7% of the most educated and richest Italians

---

100 Mola, A: *L’imperialismo italiano*, p. 4.
were entitled to vote, the electoral turnout barely exceeded 50%. Large parts of the Italian bourgeoisie and many intellectuals, disillusioned in their hopes of social reform after 1860, deliberately refused to participate in the liberal political system. Their interest in colonial affairs was even more negligible than the interest in politics in general. Shortly after Italian army clashed with the Abyssinian one at Adua, the journal “Critica Sociale” gave an accurate depiction of the popular sentiment prior to the battle:

If there is anything astounding and even deplorable about this, it is the absolute disregard of the public for the African affairs. In the beginning, there was a bit of interest for the choreographic aspect of the matter; the puerile desire to see who would win the battle: Baratieri or the Abyssinian ras. But of that seriousness and attention that renders the observer an active participant and demonstrates the awareness that in the spectacle taking place his interests are at stake, of that there was not even the slightest hint in any class, in any rank of the Italian society. [...] We should not confuse the public opinion with the conversations taking place at the caffè Aragno, at the ministries, and in the corridors of Montecitorio.

If the Italian society rose in an eruption of discontent unprecedented in the context of colonial policy when the defeat at Adua became known, it had hardly anything to do with frustrated hopes of an Italian empire. It was rather the straw that broke the back of the long-suffering Italian camel tired of being led into adventures in which it saw no benefit. Almost surreally and unimaginably for a European country at the height of the age of imperialism, the protests were accompanied by the shouts of “Viva Menelik!”.

The desire of liberal politicians for colonial dominions in Africa was not shared by the majority of the Italian population. The poorest classes that traditionally accounted for the bulk of European emigration indeed left Italy in great numbers. How little they were inclined to follow the steps of their government, however, is best demonstrated by numbers: out of approximately 14 million who left Italy between 1876 and 1915, over 7.5 million left for the Americas, over 6 million

---

105 Oreste Baratieri (1841-1901) was an Italian general who commanded the Italian troops at Adua.
106 Caffè Aragno was an Italian café, famous for being a meeting place of philosophers, writers and poets.
109 Labanca, N.: *Oltremare*, p. 82.
went to other European countries, and less than 300 thousand went to Africa, Asia and Australia combined. The land-owning middle class of central and northern Italy remained attached to its possessions and the urban bourgeoisie of the North tended to see in the African policy of Francesco Crispi a conspiracy of southern land-owning interests. Outside of the government buildings in Rome, imperialistic enthusiasm was low.

Seen in this light, it comes as no surprise that the Italians were little prone to commemorate in public space the defeats and the victories of liberal imperialism. Many of them were simply not aware of them, and those who were tended to associate them to a policy that was formed in disregard, if not in open defiance, of their interests.

---

3. Structural Differences between Italy and Germany

Situating Italian imperialism within the cultural context from which it arose is of great importance for understanding its purpose and its remarkable vitality. For this task, it sufficed to examine its relations to other social and political developments, the anterior ones that inspired it, the contemporary ones with which it interacted, and the posterior ones, on which it exercised influence in return. This revealed little, however, about Italian imperialism as such. It did not lead to identification of its unique traits nor did it permit positioning of Italian imperialism within the broader picture of the 19th century history. It was impossible, in other words, to come to a qualitative judgement without a comparison.\textsuperscript{111} In order to more comprehensively analyse Italian imperialistic action in China, or even Italian imperialism in general, one needs, hence, to have a suitable comparison.

Comparing Italian imperialism, closely connected to the awakening of national awareness and the nation building process, with imperialisms of old nation states and established colonial empires like Great Britain or France is hardly adequate. In order to be meaningful, historical comparison needs to rely on similarities and analogies.\textsuperscript{112} It is essential, therefore, to search for a case more similar to the Italian one.

Fortunately, one does not need to look far. As even the most discerning and circumspect critics of comparative history admit\textsuperscript{113}, Italy and Germany are the two European countries whose histories show the most similarities, rendering them an extremely promising object of historical comparison. In both cases, the process of national unification began only in the 19th century and was carried by one, politically and militarily predominant, independent state that sacrificed its separate identity for the sake of extending its influence over large territories and masses of consanguine peoples. The Piedmontese and Prussian ruling dynasties also became the ruling dynasties of the new unified states. In neither case was the unity gained peacefully. In a series of wars, at times even with mutual help\textsuperscript{114}, Piedmont and Prussia wrestled away territories from

\textsuperscript{111} Dipper, C.: \textit{Italien und Deutschland seit 1800}, p. 486.
\textsuperscript{114} Italy is generally considered to have gained unity in the three Wars of Independence of 1848, 1859-60 and 1866 and the conquest of Rome in 1870. Germany gained its unity in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. In the Austro-Prussian War, known as the Third Independence War in Italy, Prussia and Italy were allied against Austria.
neighbours and asserted their influence over them. Even on the level of individual protagonists, similarities cannot be overseen: in both cases, the roles of crowned heads were eclipsed by those of able and astute ministers, Cavour and Bismarck. Finally, the two national unification movements inspired and fostered each other. Whereas the Italian unification brought patriotic enthusiasm to Germany \(^{115}\) and furnished the example that German states emulated, the Italian conquest of territories under Austrian rule would not have been possible without the military help of Prussia.

Caution is nonetheless necessary. Seemingly identical events such as the proclamations of the Kingdom of Italy and the German Empire, or establishment of diplomatic missions in China, do not always have the same meaning and the same consequences in the respective national contexts. \(^{116}\) Huge but often superficial similarity of great historical events tends to eclipse differences that only a closer look will reveal to be of crucial importance. \(^{117}\) Precisely this is frequently the case with the “parallel histories” \(^{118}\) of Italy and Germany. Prior to their achieving of nationhood, one could have believed that the efforts of Piedmont and Prussia towards unification would lead to the same institutional results, all the more as a general pre-unification consensus on federal order existed in both countries. \(^{119}\) In Germany, a federal state was created indeed. In Italy, however, unplanned, unwanted even, unitary order was established instead. The same holds true for their imperialistic efforts. Having in mind the common foreign political context and the numerous similarities that characterised the young Italian and German states at the beginning of the last quarter of the 19th century, one could have surmised that their paths in China would be at least similar, if not the same. Nevertheless, their paths differed enormously. While Germany was gradually fulfilling its political goals in the Far East, Italy was constrained to abandon its, one by one. In order to explain this pattern of “sameness and divergence”, it is necessary, therefore, to examine actual, factual situations that led to different outcomes.

This chapter goes beyond superficial historical parallels and puts under scrutiny the structural characteristics of the two states in order to discover the causes of their disparate achievements. Three of these factors, overlapping but distinct from one another, decisively


\(^{116}\) Dipper, C.: Italien und Deutschland seit 1800, p. 497.


\(^{118}\) Dipper, C.: Ferne Nachbarn, p. 2.

determined the reach of Italian and German colonial policy in the Far East. Firstly, the efficiency and capability of the state as a whole differed greatly in Italy in Germany for reasons that were both inherited from the pre-unification states and caused by the unification itself. Secondly, the stability of the political system was much greater in Germany, primarily due to the manner in which the unification had been accomplished. Finally, real economic interests of the German industry and merchants, and the lack thereof in Italy, played an important role in shaping the China policies of the two states.
3.1. The Problem of Efficiency and Capability

The myth of “Italians, the good colonisers” is one of those myths of the colonial age that tenaciously persist to the present day despite compelling arguments for their revision.\textsuperscript{120} Indeed, even subaltern histories buttress it to a certain extent, especially when it regards the colonial rule of the liberal era.\textsuperscript{121} The supposedly milder character of Italian imperialists is not reflected only in the kind of rule they imposed in colonies, however, but also in the general character of Italian colonial policy. German colonial rule in Africa, on the other hand, is remembered by the merciless extermination of the Hehe\textsuperscript{122} and the Herero\textsuperscript{123}. The same pattern of recollection can be recognised in the literature about the Boxer War: members of virtually all contingents accused the Germans of excessive brutality while no aspersions were cast on the Italians.\textsuperscript{124} Were Italians indeed “uniquely humane imperialists”?\textsuperscript{125} The stories of atrocities committed by Italians in Libya\textsuperscript{126} and Ethiopia\textsuperscript{127} during the fascist era, but also of those perpetrated in Somalia\textsuperscript{128} during the liberal era suggest a negative answer. Why, then, does the myth of “italiani, gente brava” survive?

Italian imperialism was a milder version of other European imperialisms simply because Italian imperialists did not possess the means for following their ambition to its ultimate consequences. They committed atrocities on a smaller scale and less thoroughly than their British, French or German counterparts, and these were more easily overseen and more quickly forgotten. In other words, if the Italian colonial policy was not as aggressive, forceful, gruesome and,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Del Boca, Angelo: \textit{Italiani, brava gente?: un mito duro a morire}. Vicenza, Italy: Neri Pozza, 2005.
  \item Förster, Larissa: \textit{Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften: wie Deutsche und Herero in Namibia des Kriegs von 1904 gedenken}. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Campus-Verlag, 2010, pp. 151-152.
  \item Doumanis, \textit{Italians as ‘Good’ Colonizers}, p. 222.
  \item Labanca, Nicola: “Italian Colonial Internment”. In Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (eds.): \textit{Italian Colonialism}. New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, pp. 27-34.
\end{itemize}
ultimately, successful as the German one, this was mainly due the fact that the Italian political leadership, or at least some of its members, were aware that they commanded neither the means nor the people necessary for such a policy.

The former deficiency was more obvious and refers to the crippling weakness of both state institutions and industry in unified Italy. Whereas Germany inherited from its constituent states politically developed regions with functional local administrations, capable of collecting tax resources effectively, maintaining civil order, conscripting manpower and implementing policy goals, the situation to the south of the Alps differed dramatically. The Piedmontese state, the motor force of the Italian unification, was the only Italian state comparable to German states in terms of its political development. Most of the remaining Italian regions, and especially the southern ones, were characterised by low “infrastructural capacity”, which directly affected their governing ability. At the same time, Piedmont was not as preponderant in Italy as Prussia was in Germany in terms of the overall percentage of the territory it controlled prior to the unification. This rendered a swift implementation of advanced administrative practices impossible and rather than undergoing a radical and thorough process of modernisation, the new Italian state inherited the deficiencies that characterised most of its regions before the unification. Italy also lagged far behind Germany in industrial development. Whereas Germany’s industry had been gradually prepared for the new, larger national market by the Zollverein and grew and diversified accordingly, in the wake of the unification, Italian states were oriented towards foreign commercial partners rather than each other and thus completely unprepared for new opportunities and challenges that the unified national market implied. To make the matters worse, the predominant industries in various Italian regions were redundant rather than complementary and hardly profited from the unification. Instead of promoting growth, the unification only intensified competition. In post-unification Italy, hence, industry stagnated while institutions of the state continued to display pre-unification weaknesses. Although these deficiencies affected all spheres of public life, they were most immediately felt in the inability of the Italian state to extract sufficient tax money.

Industrialisation and economic development went hand in hand. Although Germany did face an economic crisis in the aftermath of the proclamation of the empire, the crisis failed to halt the industrialisation of the country, which in turn brought gradual improvement of the overall economic

129 Ziblatt, D.: Structuring the State, p. 80.
130 ibid., p. 84.
131 ibid., p. 3.
133 Ziblatt, D.: Structuring the State, pp. 86-87.
situation. Between 1875 and 1895, the real national income in Germany more than doubled\textsuperscript{134}. Italy, on the other hand, faced slow economic growth throughout the early and mid-1880s, only to enter a recession in 1887 that lasted until 1893.\textsuperscript{135} The gravity of the industrial setback that the country suffered during this time was such that the years between 1889 and 1894 have been called “the darkest of the economy of the new kingdom”\textsuperscript{136}. These developments were accompanied by cuts in government spending so drastic that even horses granted to infantry captains in 1886 as an “important symbol of privilege and prestige“ had to be returned in 1890.\textsuperscript{137} At the same time, investments made failed to yield fruit. The ratio between the public debt and the gross domestic product, which had been relatively moderate at 70% during the 1870s, steadily deteriorated to 87% in 1880 and 120% in 1897\textsuperscript{138}, exerting further pressure on the state finances. In this situation, Italian government could not afford anything but the strictly indispensable.

Ambitious and successful colonial policies, like those exercised by great colonial powers, required substantial amounts of tax money, much like any other complex political goal of a modern state did\textsuperscript{139}. Such a policy was clearly far beyond Italy’s means. Unable to imitate England or France but unwilling at the same time to accept the status of a minor power, Italy found it difficult to reconcile its self-perception as a colonial power with the hard reality of its financial impotence. In China, even comparatively unimportant details, such as the number of indigenous servants, palanquin carriers and guards employed by the various diplomatic representatives, revealed the size of the gap that separated Italy from the other European powers:

\begin{quote}
Among the mandarins, the luxury of these details stands in proportion to the person they belong to and they apply the same concept when judging the importance of the legations. What can they think of ours, dedicating less than four thousand francs to such services, when others spend fifteen or twenty thousand and some even more?!\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{134} Kolinsky, Martin: \textit{Continuity and Change in European Society: Germany, France and Italy since 1870}. New York, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{135} Pescosolido, G.: \textit{Unità nazionale e sviluppo economico}, pp. 122, 211.
\textsuperscript{136} Luzzatto, Gino: \textit{L’economia italiana dal 1861 al 1894}. Turin, Italy: Einaudi, 1968, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{140} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 370 (XX) from Beijing, 8 March 1898.
The need to economise was not reflected only in the inferior lustre of the Italian diplomatic legation. Far from affecting only its external appearance, it had far reaching consequences on its daily operative capability, as well. In the midst of the Jiaozhou Crisis, the Italian minister in Beijing marquis Salvago Raggi telegraphed to Rome:

[...] I would kindly ask your Excellency to give me the necessary instructions, indicating if I should keep you telegraphically informed regarding this question, as, due to the significant cost of telegraphic correspondence, I have desisted so far from using it, not having been explicitly authorised [...] \(^{141}\)

The inability to spend, as freely and extensively as the established colonial powers did, significantly limited the reach of Italian colonial policy.

Already during the 1880s, the issue of Catholic missions revealed the importance of financial strength for achievement of strategic goals. Determined to defend its protectorate over Catholic missions against Italian and German attacks, France launched an expensive but also highly effective campaign. French Catholic organisations readily supplemented the budgets of Catholic missions in China, even if the members were predominantly of Italian ethnicity. Furthermore, the French government established consulates wherever Catholic missions existed and allowed Catholic missionaries to travel free of charge on its commercial liners.\(^{142}\) Initially, neither Italy nor Germany were inclined to follow suit, even in case of missions where Italians and Germans were predominant. Although this decision was related to a certain extent also to the political tension, which existed at the time in the relations between the Vatican and the two countries due to the Roman Question and Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, in the Italian case it was also dictated by the sheer financial inability to emulate the French example. Whereas Germany was both genuinely interested in gaining protectorate over the German Catholic mission in Shandong and able to exercise it, Italy was torn between the theoretical desire to reclaim Catholic missionaries of Italian ethnicity from France and the practical inability to offer them the same amount of financial and physical security that France did. This state of affairs inevitably led to different outcomes of Italian and German efforts. While Italy was *de facto* constrained to renounce a protectorate in 1888, due to its own inability to exercise it effectively, Germany assumed financial and protective responsibility for the vicariate of Southern Shandong, which passed under its protection in 1890. Italy’s failure to extend its protection over the Italians spreading the word of the Lord had very terrestrial implications.

\(^{141}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 367 (XX) from Beijing, 7 February 1898.

\(^{142}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
Useful information regarding different regions of China, that missionaries who travelled extensively were capable of providing, remained difficult to obtain. This was of direct consequence for the outcome of the Sanmen Crisis.

Lack of funds translated into lack of information. In 1899, Italy possessed only a fraction of the intelligence on China that Germany possessed prior to the occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay sixteen months earlier. Although Germany’s success in obtaining a naval station and Italy’s failure to do the same were also conditioned by a multitude of other factors, they were to no small extent traceable back to the disparate levels of information on China that the two countries possessed. The German conquest of the Jiaozhou Bay had been preceded by years of meticulous gathering of information about different Chinese regions and by 1897, at Wilhelmstraße, Shandong was no *terra incognita* anymore. Although some of the information had been acquired without government expenditures, due to private expeditions such as those led by von Richthofen and financed by the Bank of California and the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce\(^\text{143}\), by the 1890s the German state was also bearing its part of the financial burden and supporting a network of consular offices in addition to the vessels stationed in Chinese waters. Italy lagged far behind. In March 1898, Salvago Raggi was analysing the Italian ability to successfully launch an action for acquiring a naval station in China:

> Germany had began planning to occupy a port in China at least a year before and was preparing itself, maintaining a certain number of vessels in the Empire, in order to make its naval power and its ability to acquire a naval station in China obvious to the Chinese eyes.

> In addition to the increasing number of German merchant houses and the introduction of German postal bonds, many consulates and vice-consulates were established, so that German representatives were installed in many parts of the Empire, commercial offices were opened, and travellers, to a greater or lesser extent dispatched directly by the German government, were crossing China; all of them, apart from making the German name known to the Chinese, furnished the government with useful information about the provinces; hence, while the vessels were examining the coast in order to select a location to be preferred, the consuls, the vice-consuls, the military attaché, the travellers were furnishing the same information regarding the provinces in the interior, which could serve the government in deciding between the different locations proposed by the navy.

\(^{143}\) Mühlhahn, Klaus: *Herrschaft und Widerstand in der “Musterkolonie” Kiautschou*. Munich, Germany: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000, p. 61.
Of all these preparatory steps, we have made none.\textsuperscript{144}

The importance of pecuniary considerations for the Italian government is reflected in the fact that Salvago Raggi mentioned the preparation related expenses no less than eight times in the same dispatch. By the mid-1890s, the gap in financial strength that had separated Italy and Germany already in the 1870s had grown even larger. Germany’s impressive economic growth enabled the government, among other things, to develop a colonial policy as ambitious as those of the established colonial powers. Italy, on the other hand, even if all the other factors influencing the inadequate preparation that preceded the Sanmen Crisis are disregarded, found it beyond its means to spend as lavishly on spreading its influence and acquiring intelligence on China. As Salvago Raggi correctly predicted a year before the crisis, the main difficulties in acquiring a naval station in China lay for Italy in the insufficient knowledge about the country and the lack of qualified personnel.\textsuperscript{145}

An insufficient number of China experts and the relative weakness of its military and navy further weakened the Italian position. While the German government could count on a large number of engineers, bankers, administrators and military officers who had built their expertise over the years of service in the Far East, and most of whom had been dispatched to China either directly by the government or found their placements following governmental mediation, in 1898, the Italian government could not count on any China experts at all\textsuperscript{146} and the Italian legation in Beijing had one sole officer who spoke Chinese with some effort\textsuperscript{147}. At critical junctures, as in March 1899, but also during the Boxer War, this fact translated into a serious strategic disadvantage for Italy. In contrast to the issue of financial weakness, which was openly addressed in political debates\textsuperscript{148}, the lack of qualified personnel was kept quiet about rather than talked about. This tendency became even more pronounced during the Boxer War, when military personnel was concerned. Wary of being stamped as unpatriotic, politicians preferred to talk of Italian soldiers and officers uncritically and any mention of the army was likely to turn into a panegyric\textsuperscript{149}. Even in private correspondence,

\textsuperscript{144} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 370 (XX) from Beijing, 8 March 1898.
\textsuperscript{145} ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} BCD, Atti del Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei Deputati, Sessione 1900, 1$^a$ della XXI Legislatura, Discussioni, Volume I: dal 16 giugno all’8 dicembre 1900, Tornata del 6 dicembre 1900, pp. 1097-98.
queen Margherita wrote: “Quello che fà piacere è di vedere come si conducono bene i nostri soldati in Cina, Evviva l’esercito for ever.” Although queen’s exultation may have been genuine, it hardly reflected the sentiments of the political leadership of the country. Not only Visconti Venosta, whose misgivings regarding the military prowess of Italian soldiers could clearly be read in his actions of the summer of 1900, harboured doubts. Vittorio Emanuele III, unlike his mother, feared that the Italian officers dispatched to China were inadequately prepared for participation in an international expedition and might leave a bad impression:

_I hope Garioni and Salsa are not going to eat each other in the pallid China._

_Garioni hardly speaks any French and Salsa..._151

The king’s decision not to finish the sentence speaks volumes about the attitude of the political leadership towards the military and the navy in pre-fascist Italy. Whereas German leadership was genuinely proud of its army, which decisively contributed to the German unification, the Italian one had an ambivalent attitude towards its own. The German victories at Königgrätz and Sedan became important elements of the national lore, which left a deep impact on the military culture of the German Empire.152 Italy, on the other hand, had achieved its unification mainly due to the military help of France and Prussia. Although some victories, such as those at Bezzecca and Porta Pia, had been achieved, they were eclipsed by the disastrous defeats of Custoza (in 1848 and 1866), Bicocca and Lissa. Post-unification colonial conflicts brought further disgraces in the shape of Dogali, Amba Alagi and, most importantly, Adua. The deep national traumas originating from these experiences caused a profound lack of confidence in local military and naval strength. The Italian government, hence, at the same time lacked civilian experts and was doubtful of the strength and valour of the military and the navy it commanded. Once again, the reason for this lay in the low infrastructural capacity of the Italian state.

The issue of education reveals another major difference between Italy and Germany. Prior to the unification, Italy was characterised by a high level of illiteracy. Of all Italian regions, only Piedmont and Lombardy-Veneto had enrolment rates of over 40% for primary school-aged children while in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies it was as low as 18%.153 The situation in the unified state hardly improved in the first decade after the unification. In 1870, 62% of school-aged children were...

---

151 ibid., p. 702.
153 Ziblatt, D.: _Structuring the State_, p. 86.
still attending school only very irregularly or not at all. The Italian literacy rate of 31.2% stood in stark contrast to the German one of 75% and rose only very slowly to 38.1% in 1881 and 51.5% in 1901. What the German government realised and the Italian did not, was that literacy could significantly facilitate nation building and that education was an excellent instrument of governance. Already before the unification, the high literacy rate enabled a higher percentage of Germans to participate, even if only passively, in the nationalistic discourse that accompanied nation building efforts and was widely publicised in journals and newspapers. Beyond this, education was ideally suited for producing the kind of workforce that the state and industry needed.

In the second half of the 19th century, Germany became the leading country in Europe in terms of technical education. A high level of scientific knowledge, both theoretical and applied, coupled with excellent apprenticeship trainings and a broad diffusion of primary education enabled Germany to excel in the crucial areas of industrialisation such as steel, chemical and electrical industry. Education also became an instrument of political indoctrination used for creating a society displaying “characteristically German” traits: militarism and political conservatism. In this way, even civilian education aided the creation of an ethos that was essentially militaristic and exalted military skill and discipline above all qualities.

In Italy, the realisation that education could be used for achievement of political goals came relatively late. Only in 1896, after the disaster of Adua, the former minister of education Ferdinando Martini uttered the famous words: “Now that Italy is created, Italians need to be created”. This thought was appreciated and later extensively used for indoctrination and militarisation of the Italian society by Mussolini, but for the Italian colonial involvement in China this development came too late. In the 1880s and the 1890s, nationalistic enthusiasm was low among illiterate peasant masses and wearing a uniform did not imply a social status even close to the one that the German military men enjoyed.

160 Martini himself ascribed these words, probably for giving them more weight, to Massimo d’Azeglio. There is no evidence, however, that d’Azeglio ever expressed this thought. See: Soldani, Simonetta and Gabriele Turi (eds.): Fare gli Italiani. Scuola e cultura nell’Italia contemporanea, Vol. 1: La nascita dello Stato nazionale. Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 1993, p. 17.
3.2. The Problem of Political Instability

The way in which unification was achieved in Italy and Germany left a deep impact on the political lives of the two countries. Whereas in Germany it assured relative stability that allowed creation of long-term policies, including a colonial one, in Italy it was the cause of years of instability and internal strife that rendered long-term planning virtually impossible. Although both Cavour and Bismarck were in favour of federal solutions prior to the decisive years of 1859 and 1866, they were not both able to realise their plans. Following the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Prussia annexed some of the north German and smaller states such as Hanover, Nassau, Hesse-Kassel and the city of Frankfurt, but adopted a more conciliatory and accommodating approach with the south German states of Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden. Initially left out of the North German Confederation, they became a part of the unified German state only with the proclamation of the Empire in 1871, as constituent federal units. Piedmont, on the other hand, ended up annexing all the Italian states, both in the North and in the South. The reasons for this were both political and structural. The regions with developed infrastructure such as Lombardy and Veneto, which could have become federal units, were not independent prior to the unification. Others, such as the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, were unwilling to cooperate, much like the kingdom of Hanover in the case of Germany. Most importantly, however, the openly hostile Kingdom of the Two Sicilies put Cavour in front of a difficult situation that only a swift annexation could solve. While the south German states of Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden also opposed Prussia militarily in 1866, they could be trusted to survive on their own after they were defeated. Moreover, their rulers were only Austrian allies and no Prussian military actions were directed directly against their rule. The situation in the south of Italy differed significantly. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had been on the verge of dissolution even prior to Garibaldi’s arrival. Its Bourbon rulers were perceived as foreign and tyrannical by the majority of the local population, which lived in misery and was ready to revolt. Indeed, upon their landing, Garibaldi’s *Mille* were enthusiastically welcomed by the populations on both sides of the Strait of Messina. Nonetheless, Garibaldi himself represented another annoyance for Cavour. Even though he made his conquests in the name of King Vittorio Emanuele, he acted largely autonomously and disobeyed Cavour’s orders. His dictatorship in

---

163 Cavour urged Garibaldi not to cross the Strait of Messina and thus directly endanger the rule of Francesco II who reigned from Naples. Garibaldi did this nonetheless, forcing Francesco II to entrench himself at Gaeta.
Sicily quickly provoked revolts that could be put down only at the cost of significant bloodshed.\textsuperscript{164} In other words, whereas the defeated Austrian south German allies could continue functioning as states after 1866, the picture of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies after Garibaldi’s conquest was that of civil war and martial law. The ruling class of landowners, as well as those of important and influential lawyers and merchants, desired a quick restoration of law and order that would allow them to return to their peacetime activities.\textsuperscript{165} That could be achieved only through immediate merging of the former Bourbon territories with the Kingdom of Sardinia. In this way, annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was virtually forced upon Cavour although he might have preferred a different solution.\textsuperscript{166} The outcome, as it was, shaped the future of the unified country.

The German unification steps of 1866 and 1871 were only political formalisations of economic realities established long before. The Italian unification of 1860, on the other hand, was a deeply destabilising event. Whereas in large parts of Germany nothing changed as far as local governance was concerned, in Italy the institutions of governance had to be built from scratch. Prussia, which had governed 57\% of the population and 54\% of the territory of the German Empire prior to the unification, left much of the remaining population and territory to be governed locally even after the unification. Piedmont, on the other hand, whose political institutions had been built for governing only 22\% of the territory and mere 6\% of the population of the unified Italy\textsuperscript{167}, found itself governing centrally the entire new country. Inevitably a power vacuum was created that facilitated spreading of anarchy in vast tracts of the Italian Mezzogiorno, which the new Piedmontese rulers sought to combat by repressive measures. The popular sentiment quickly turned against the new government. Luigi Farini, the first civilian governor of Naples after the revolution, wrote already in December 1860, that “in seven million inhabitants of Naples there are not a hundred who want a united Italy”\textsuperscript{168}. The paradox of the Italian unification became visible early: although the wars of unification were fought under the banners of liberation and political liberalism the new government was applying the same repressive measures as the ancien régime and was reluctant to introduce democratic reforms. In August 1861, Massimo d’Azeglio, a Piedmontese politician and a former prime minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, wrote:

\textsuperscript{164} One of the most notorious episodes of Garibaldi’s dictatorship in Sicily was the so-called “Massacre of Bronte” commanded by Nino Bixio, one of the legendary Risorgimento heroes.
\textsuperscript{166} Cavour initially thought that the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies should not form a part of the unified Italian state. See: Santore, J: \textit{Modern Naples}, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{167} Ziblatt, D.: \textit{Structuring the State}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{168} Santore, J: \textit{Modern Naples}, p. 188.
We started by saying that governments not having the consent of the people were illegitimate [...] Moreover, in Naples we ousted the King in order to establish a government based on universal consent. But it takes sixty battalions, and it seems that even that is not enough, for keeping the kingdom together; brigands or non-brigands, it is notorious that nobody wants it there. Some might say: and what about the universal suffrage? I don’t know anything about suffrage; but I know that on this side of the Tronto battalions are not necessary and on that side they are. Hence, some mistake has been made and the actions and principles need to be modified.\textsuperscript{169}

D’Azeglio’s accurate observations indicate that the origins of two major future factors of instability, the division between the North and the South and the estrangement between the government and the people, were born out of the inadequate way in which the southern regions were merged into the kingdom and the unfulfilled promises of a more egalitarian society. The government attempted to alleviate the problems that arose from the former by shedding its regional identity. In order to emphasise its Italian character, but also to mitigate the resentment that grew in the light of what amounted to a military occupation and political domination of the South, the seat of the government was transferred from Turin first to Florence and then, in 1871, to Rome. Although this move may very well have been inevitable for reasons of political expediency, history and symbolism, it further destabilised the country.

Political institutions function best on the soil out of which they originally sprung as a reflection of needs and desires of the people that created them. The political institutions of the German Empire functioned exactly under these conditions. The new federal government left a large degree of fiscal and administrative freedom to the state governments of the constituent federal units.\textsuperscript{170} At the same time, Berlin became the capital and the seat of the new government, thus formalising its dominance over the German states. The Prussian royal family and Prussian politicians kept their power base and could continue to expand their influence over the newly acquired territories.\textsuperscript{171} In Italy, the opposite was the case. Twice uprooted and planted again, the royal family and the government found themselves in Rome. Leaving aside the psychological effects of an acquired inferiority complex that moving into papal palaces might cause in anyone, the move to Rome deprived both the Piedmontese politicians, who were still predominant in the government at this time, and the royal family of a culturally familiar surrounding and disrupted

\textsuperscript{169} d’Azeglio, Massimo: \textit{Scritti e discorsi politici}. Florence, Italy: La Nuova Italia, 1938, p. 399.
\textsuperscript{170} Ziblatt, D.: \textit{Structuring the State}, p. 7.
their networks of power. Whereas, in Germany, old Prussian political and military elites continued to dominate the political life of the new country well into the 20th century, their Piedmontese counterparts, completely lost their influence as soon as the generation of the “Fathers of the Fatherland” disappeared from the political scene. The words of Farini, who already in 1860 with alarm realised that “by God, they will outnumber us in the Parliament unless we in the North stay closely united”, had become true. With the arrival of Francesco Crispi in palazzo Chigi, at the very latest, Roman institutions came to be perceived by the northern regions as having become thoroughly southernised, which led to the rise of Milan as the “moral capital of Italy” and a further deepening of the political North-South divide. Within twenty years of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, the northern liberal elites, who had initiated the unification, had lost all their political preponderance and in the industrially and economically developed northern regions the feeling was growing that they were governed from Rome by the same class of “attorneys, tangle-weavers, law-twisters, casuists, and professional liars with the conscience of pimps” who they had unsuccessfully tried to remove from power in the South twenty years earlier. This was not the only division that destabilised Italy, however. Masses of Italians were still excluded from the political life of the country despite the promises of republican equality that were inherent in the ideology of unification and they were growing impatient.

At the end of the 19th century, Germany was far less democratic than Italy and more backward in terms of its constitution. Nonetheless, it was far more stable politically. This was largely due to the fact that power and privileges remained in the same hands in which they had been prior to the unification. The central role that the Prussian military played in the unification of Germany led to forging of close ties between the army and politics that enabled the Junker class to retain its old privileges. At the same time, German unification was not accompanied by an ambitious programme of political change, as the Italian was. In contrast to the ethos of Risorgimento, which was a spiritual child of the revolutionary republican Mazzini, that of the German Empire reflected the dedication of the ruling class to the old model of Prussian patriarchal paternalism. In the process of German unification any democratic reforms were very consciously

173 Santore, J: Modern Naples, p. 188.
175 Santore, J: Modern Naples, p. 188.
left out of the political programme. The outcome was an extremely hierarchical political system in which power was concentrated in the hands of few who had virtually limitless freedom in shaping national policies. The Imperial Chancellor, appointed directly by the emperor, was not in any way responsible to the elected legislative assembly. The parliament was weak and had only limited legislative capacity, being empowered to approve or reject laws proposed by the chancellor but not to initiate any on its own.\textsuperscript{178} Such an evolution of the German political system was directly traceable to the efforts of the first imperial chancellor, Bismarck, to suppress any democratic movements and exclude bourgeoisie from the political life of the state as much as it was possible.\textsuperscript{179} In this he was significantly aided by the Prussian three-class franchise system that assured that even the weak German parliament was mostly filled with representatives chosen by the richest members of the society. This effectively limited the participation of not only a vast percentage of the bourgeoisie but also of Germany’s fast growing urban working class in the political decision making process. At the turn of the century, the social democratic party had only a negligible influence on policy making despite being the largest mass party in the world.\textsuperscript{180} This state of things led to considerable dissatisfaction among the lower classes of the German society but it allowed a high level of political stability and enabled the ruling class to define and realise long-term policy goals.

The paradox of the political instability in Italy in the last quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century is that the Italian political system was too democratic and not democratic enough at the same time. It completely excluded Catholic rural masses from the political life of the state, on the one hand, while allowing the parliament and the bourgeoisie to play a much more significant role than was the case in Germany, on the other. An important distinction existed, however, between the exclusion of the peasantry from the political decision making process in Italy and the exclusion of both the bourgeoisie and the peasantry in Germany. In the latter case, although the result amounted to the same effect as in Italy, or even worse as a larger percentage of the overall population was concerned, through the introduction of universal male suffrage the population was given the illusion of being included in the political life of the empire. The census suffrage in the form of a three-class franchise combined with a weak parliament effectively deprived these classes of any influence on policy making but demanded of them political responsibility and gave them the feeling of participation. In Italy, however, the peasantry was initially promised social reform and then simply

\textsuperscript{178} Kolinsky, M.: \textit{Continuity and Change in European Society}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{180} Kolinsky, M.: \textit{Continuity and Change in European Society}, p. 31.
denied participation. In doing this, the Italian ruling class failed in two ways. For one, it forsook the opportunity of mobilising a large part of the Italian population for realisation of national political goals. In other words, it was impossible to realise national policies without making the whole nation political and the gap between the “legal state” and the “real state” grew. At the same time, it failed to achieve political stability. Between March 1861 and February 1901, 38 Italian governments came to power, almost one per year.

The origins of this paradoxical situation are, once again, to be sought in the political programme of the Risorgimento. In contrast to the German unification, in which only nationalism built the ideological basis of the movement and which was devoid of any revolutionary or religious character, the Italian one was ideologically heterogeneous and bore in itself the seed of the conflict between the secular state and the church, as well as of that between the Destra and the Sinistra. Later often portrayed as an idealised, ideologically homogenous quadruple made up by Vittorio Emanuele, Mazzini, Garibaldi and Cavour was in fact more similar to the Olympian pantheon, marked by deep conflicts, intrigues and distrust. Garibaldi’s militant anticlericalism clashed with the secularly oriented but politically more cautious and more accommodating attitude of the Piedmontese prime minister, while Cavour’s social conservatism made impossible Mazzini’s vision of a more egalitarian state. These conflicts, coupled with the unavoidable political confrontation with the Vatican, decisively shaped the political life of Italy after the unification and left each of the three major currents within the Italian society, the liberal-conservative, the republican, and the Catholic at war with the other two. In the end, the liberal conservatives had their way. Although contributions of the democratically oriented republicans were indispensable for the achievement of nationhood, both in the ideological Mazzinian and the military Garibaldian sense, and a majority of Italians remained faithful to their Catholic faith, the political system of the new Italian state was the work of a narrow liberal-conservative class, that, disregarding the promises of reform made during the unification and openly defying the papal authority, managed to impose its own political terms. This was a cause of bitter disappointment for the Left, which believed the principles of the Risorgimento betrayed and would not give up on social reform of the kingdom, and alienated the Catholics, whose allegiance remained with the Pope. Following the proclamation of the German Empire, republican and Catholic tendencies within the society were repressed and reduced to political

---

insignificance, as well. In contrast to their German counterparts, however, the Italian Catholics and republicans were in the position to seriously challenge the existing political order.

Unlike the Prussian ruling class, the Piedmontese liberals had to count with a powerful parliament. Already before the unification, the constitutionalism of the Statuto Albertino had evolved into parliamentary monarchy in political practice, if not on paper\textsuperscript{185}, and the parliament had a strong influence on fiscal policy and other key areas of governance. The only chance for the liberal conservatives of maintaining their political preponderance and the ability to shape national policies seemed to lie, therefore, in keeping the Catholic and republican rural masses away from the ballot boxes and completely out of the political life of the state. They succeeded in this, for a while, by consistent refusals of electoral reform. The political cost of this success was devastating, however.

The exclusion of Catholic rural masses from the political life of the state translated into surrendering them to the exclusive influence of 70,000 Catholic priests\textsuperscript{186}, who, following instructions of the Holy See, instigated civil disobedience and led them into fundamental opposition to all policies of the state\textsuperscript{187}. The Vatican, endangered in its very existence by the new political order, actively sought to destabilise the liberal rule and obstruct democratic processes necessary for the functioning of the state. Already in 1868, before the capture of Rome, the Apostolic Penitentiary issued a decree known as non expedit, that urged Italian Catholics to abstain from parliamentary elections, both as candidates and voters. The decree was issued several times by different organs of the Catholic Church and culminated in the binding non expedit prohibitionem importat of Pope Leo XIII in 1886. The conflict with the Vatican, Italian clergy and their fold not only destabilised the country but also represented a serious handicap in the context of colonial policy. While all other colonial powers strove to maintain friendly relations with missionaries of their nationality in order to use their networks for intelligence gathering, the Italian government could rarely count on assistance of Italian priests abroad. The enmity of the Catholic Church towards the Italian state was so strong that cooperation in the colonial context was out of the question and every Italian defeat was received with complacency. Even deaths of thousands of Catholics at the hands of Menelik’s schismatics were interpreted by “L’Osservatore Romano” as a defeat of the “Satan’s star by the Cross of Jesus Crist”\textsuperscript{188}.

\textsuperscript{185} ibid., p. 119.  
\textsuperscript{186} Kolinsky, M.: Continuity and Change in European Society, p. 10.  
\textsuperscript{188} Mola, L’imperialismo italiano, p. XVI.
The other, although much more heterogeneous, political force that endangered the liberal-conservative rule were the republicans, who saw the democratic principles of the Risorgimento betrayed in the political system established after 1860. While the Piedmontese liberal elite behind Cavour was determined to maintain a social status quo after the unification, much like the Prussian Junker elite would do, the republicans of Mazzinian persuasion had hoped to couple the unification with democratic reforms. Indeed, the political programme of the Risorgimento was, especially in the South liberated by the Mille, associated to a promise of social reform and universal suffrage that was never fulfilled. The electoral base of the unified state still included meagre 2% of the Italian population until the electoral reform of 1882, and 6.7% after that. While the Left demanded a more substantial participation of the general population in the political life of the state, the Right representing the interests of bourgeois elites believed that the reforms had already gone too far. Addressing the socialists at the chamber of deputies, the liberal Ruggiero Bonghi maintained in 1871:

*Your programme presupposes a human nature that does not exist...Inequality is necessary; we have managed to achieve a state of things where equal conditions give birth to equal rights and have removed everything that was artificial regarding the inequality of rights. Naturally, precisely the fact that we have done this has given rise to such conviction and force in your programme; if we hadn’t destroyed the legal inequalities you would not have even considered proposing the suppression of natural inequalities. But we have tried to achieve the possible and the just and you are trying to achieve the impossible and the unjust.*

By restricting participation, the conservatives managed to hold onto power until 1876. This by no means implied that political stability was assured during this period. Fourteen governments followed one another in quick succession until the historical dominance of the Right was ended by the first left government formed by Agostino Depretis in March 1876.

After much discussion and parliamentary obstruction, now caused by the Right, the long awaited electoral reform was promulgated in 1882. It came too late, however, and was too insignificant to close the gap between the political class and the society. Moreover, many underprivileged Italians felt also betrayed by the Left, as the practice of trasformismo introduced

---

189 Haddock, B.: *Italy: independence and unification without power*, p. 93.  
coalitions forged between individual members of the Right and the Left. Although *trasformismo* had originally been born out of the necessity to unite the moderates from both the Right and the Left and thus assure a certain level of political stability by marginalising extreme tendencies on both ends, it came to symbolise a further corruption of the political system, introduced by the ruling class in order to defend its position of power.

The excluded classes commenced to gather around various left-oriented, non-parliamentary movements of Mazzinian and anarchist persuasion that began to represent a growing threat to the established political system. By the last decade of the 19th century, these previously generally unsuccessful and poorly coordinated movements had acquired a significant number of followers both in rural areas and industrial centres and, even more importantly, become capable of organising themselves despite being divided by numerous ideological differences. The waxing in strength of the Italian labour movement, which was officially founded in 1892 and changed its name to Italian Socialist Party in 1895, was also reflected in a series of popular protests that shook Italy in the 1890s. The intimidated Crispi government responded by repressive measures, a proclamation of martial law and dispatching of 50,000 soldiers to crush peasant revolts that erupted in Sicily in 1893. Although the anti-socialist laws were repealed when Crispi fell from power in the aftermath of the battle of Adua, socialist agitation could not be brought under control by the succeeding di Rudinì government either, and they were reintroduced two years later. With the growing numbers of urban labourers, the socialist movement spread quickly, especially in the urban centres such as Rome and Milan. The poor harvest of 1897 and the rising price of bread further exacerbated the situation, leading to mass protests in a number of Italian towns that culminated in a proclamation of the state of siege and the massacre of demonstrators in Milan perpetrated by general Bava-Beccaris in May 1898. Civilians murdered by the army in the streets of Milan and other Italian towns were not the only victims of government oppression. The number of politically

---


196 ibid., pp. 75-83.

197 Kolinsky, M.: *Continuity and Change in European Society*, p. 18


199 Klinkhammer, Lutz: “Staatliche Repression als politisches Instrument: Deutschland und Italien zwischen Monarchie, Diktatur und Republik”. In: Christof Dipper (ed.): *Deutschland und Italien 1860-1960: Politische und kulturelle Aspekte im Vergleich*. Munich, Germany: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005, p. 140; The Bava-Beccaris massacre had far-reaching political consequences. After he assassinated Umberto I in July 1900, the Italian anarchist Gaetano Bresci claimed that he had done this to avenge the victims of Bava-Beccaris, as well as the offence given to the Italian people by the king’s decoration of the Piedmontese general in the aftermath of the massacre.
motivated executions, prison sentences and arrests in the period between 1894 and 1898 exceeded the number of the same measures of repression in the previous twenty-five years.\textsuperscript{200} The repression failed to accomplish its goal, however. Instead of securing law and order, it only brought about a strengthening of the socialist movement and deepening of the divide between the bourgeois society and the rural and urban underprivileged masses. The effects were crippling for the Italian society: in only one year between 1900 and 1901 the number of strikes exploded from 410 to 1671 and the number of strikers more than quadrupled from 94,000 to 420,000.\textsuperscript{201}

Liberal Italy was a state riven by numerous divisions that deeply destabilised it and endangered it in its very existence. Alienation of different groups made a positive policy nearly impossible, reducing governance to administration and leaving governments to perennially wait for new developments in order to be able to react to them. Addressing the parliament, Arturo Labriola accurately described the position Italian state was in:

\textit{We are in the presence of a collision of all the political elements...There is a Catholic Italy, a Socialist Italy, an Imperialist Italy [...] That Italy is a mediocre parliamentary combination, born in the corridors outside the Chamber, good only to prevent, incapable of creating. That Italy has to disappear.}\textsuperscript{202}

What was true of Italian politics in general was also true of the Italian colonial policy. The “uniformity of outlook, consistency of intentions and persistence in efforts”\textsuperscript{203}, that Sidney Sonnino demanded in 1890 as a guarantee of success in imperialistic endeavours, remained out of reach. A rapid succession of different governments made pursuit of long term goals difficult, all the more as the Italian system lacked a counterpart to the German Beamte, a politically independent servant of the state who remained dedicated to his operative tasks, regardless of who was in power.\textsuperscript{204} Ironically, both the “collision of all the political elements” and the swift succession of governments that so fatally hampered the political life of Italy were consequences of a comparatively advanced political system, much more progressive than that of the German Empire, which marched unperturbed towards becoming a colonial empire and a major power in Europe.

Although the effective exclusion of bourgeoisie from the political life of the German Empire can be seen as its specific weakness\textsuperscript{205}, precisely the opposite is true in the Italian case. The

\begin{footnotes}
\item[200] ibid.
\item[201] ibid., p. 143.
\item[204] Rugge, F.: \textit{Die Gemeinde zwischen Bürger und Staat}, p. 127.
\item[205] Bauer, F.: \textit{Wie ‘bürgerlich’ war der Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Italien?}, p. 120.
\end{footnotes}
comparatively democratic Italian constitution included the bourgeoisie into the political decision making process and thus enabled it to create a political fastness from which it governed the rest of the society without willing to share the power. What could have been a first step in a more thorough democratisation of the Italian society thus became an obstacle to its further democratisation. “The Italy of thoughts”, in the words of Giovanni Pascoli, “betrayed its poor sister: the Italy of labour”\textsuperscript{206}. This was the source of a long-lasting power struggle that devoured much political energy and prevented the Italian society from directing its efforts towards other goals. By the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the realisation that this situation was untenable was slowly dawning upon Italian politicians who managed to remove the causes of some grievances during the \textit{età giolittiana}. In the long run, however, the fundamental flaws of the Italian democracy could not be repaired and longing for “a uniformity of outlook” proved to be too strong.

\textsuperscript{206} Pascoli, Giovanni: \textit{Pensieri e discorsi}. Bologna, Italy: Nichola Zanichelli, 1914, p. 186.
3.3. The Problem of Incentives

Although different types of colonies were established for different purposes during the age of imperialism, what they all had in common is that they had a purpose. This seemingly trivial statement had rather non-trivial consequences for the Italian imperialistic endeavour. The colonial success of the German Empire and the failure of the Kingdom of Italy in East Asia were to a no small degree influenced by the fact that Germany was capable of coupling its colonial presence with purposeful economic activities whereas Italy was not.

According to Osterhammel’s typology of colonies, there were three types of colonies with distinct purposes: exploitation colonies, marine enclaves and settlement colonies. Establishment of exploitation colonies was possible if the colonised territory was rich in ores, spices or other natural resources for which there existed a ready demand in the colonising society. The purpose of marine enclaves was both commercial penetration and informal political control of the surrounding area, which was, naturally, of advantage only if the surrounding area offered possibilities of profitable trade or was otherwise strategically important. Finally, settlement colonies were established mainly with the purpose of utilising agricultural land and cheap labour. In practice, mixed forms often evolved in response to a variety of uses that one colony could have. It becomes clear, therefore, that whether it was natural riches, an existing market for the production surplus of the colonising society, or abundance of fertile land and cheap labour, certain structural or natural characteristics of the colonising society, the colonised territory, or both, were necessary in order to profit from colonies.

By the time Italy and Germany entered the colonial race, the model of pure exploitation colonies was already becoming rare. Easily accessible resources that simply needed to be extracted and sold elsewhere in order to create fabulous profits had become depleted, as in the case of South American gold and silver, the markets for them had shrunk, as in the case of slave labour, or were already under the control of other colonial powers, as in the case of Siberian furs or South African diamonds. Instead, colonies had acquired importance as markets capable of absorbing production surplus and reducing demographic pressure in the colonising states. The former presupposed, however, that the economy of the colonising society was complementary to that of the colony, and the latter that the living conditions in the colony represented an attractive alternative to the home country for potential settlers.

---

Apart from a few notable exceptions such as the British opium grown in India, the main export articles of colonial empires in the second half of the 19th century were industrial goods. This fact was of great significance for the rapid success of German imperialism. By the time the German Empire was proclaimed in 1871, large parts of the country had reached a substantial level of industrialisation. Towns like Essen grew sixteen times over between 1830 and 1890, rendering the Ruhr basin the largest industrial area in Europe. Moreover, not only the quantity but also the quality of German industrial products was high. Certain industry branches such as the steel and arms industries ranked among the best in the world, with the latter achieving absolute technological supremacy around 1870. At about the same time, the total investment into industry surpassed for the first time the total investment into agriculture, which is all the more impressive knowing that investments in agriculture were enormous due to the pressing need to feed the rapidly growing German population. The expanding German industry generated a significant production surplus, which could partially be exported to the neighbouring European countries but certain industry branches required more distant markets. For strategic reasons, none of the major European powers was in the position to neglect development of certain key industrial sectors such as chemistry, steel and weapons. This created an overall production surplus in these industry branches in Europe that could not be neutralised by mutual exchange. Furthermore, neighbouring countries were often classified by governments as potential opponents in case of a war and exchange of military technologies with them, including export of arms, was prohibited. Colonies and semi-colonies represented, therefore, ideal markets for this type of industrial goods. This is not to say, however, that the absorptive power of these markets was endless. Competition between industrial states was fierce and often merchant contacts and not the quality of goods were decisive for striking lucrative deals. In this sense, the position of the German Empire was further strengthened by the existence of trade contacts long established by northern German hanseatic cities. Their economic importance and the volume of overseas trade is best reflected by the fact that the two major northern German ports, the city states of Hamburg and Bremen, had by far the highest domestic product per capita of all the German federal states.

A similar pattern of economic and demographic change took place in Italy much later. The specific propinquity that existed between the Italian aristocracy and the bourgeoisie made the latter emulate the lifestyle of the former, instead of searching for ways of challenging it, as was the case

\[209\] Waller, Bruce: “Germany: independence and unification with power”. In: Bruce Waller (ed.): Themes in modern European history 1830-90, London, UK: Routledge, 1992, pp. 102.

\[210\] ibid, p. 110.

\[211\] Ziblatt, D.: Structuring the State, p. 36.
in Germany. While German bourgeoisie saw industrialisation as a way of increasing wealth and through the improved financial situation ultimately enhancing its social standing, the Italian middle class was already in a position of political power and remained attached to land, leading an essentially aristocratic lifestyle. This specific feature of the Italian society significantly postponed the industrial takeoff of the country. Only towards the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, industry started playing a more prominent role in the Italian economy and it was not until the 1930s that the contribution of Italian industry and mining to the national income exceeded that of agriculture. Even then, only 27% of the Italians were employed in industry, opposed to 49% employed in agriculture.

In other words, in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Italian economy resembled more the economies of colonies and semi-colonies than those of major colonial powers. Under those conditions, Italy was hardly in a position to profit from colonial trade. Moreover, even if colonies could be conquered by the force of superior weaponry, lack of trade was likely to lead to a lack of influence and eventually to an effective loss of colonies to the powers capable of generating trade. Once again, Antonio Gallenga was one of the first observers to realise that forceful conquest of colonies would prove to be of no advantage for Italy as long as there was no industry to generate growth and no trade to assure financial strength of the country:

\textit{Why should Italy yearn more to fight than to trade? What prevents the development of its industrial activity or what imposes a limit to its maritime enterprises? Perhaps that the Aegean or the Black Sea, the Hellespont or the Bosphorus, the Straight of Kerch or the Suez Canal are closed to its merchant vessels? Perhaps that the Russians or the Turks would forbid its merchants to settle at Galata or at Caffa? Why don’t Italian plantations rise on its ancient sites? Why is Brindisi not the great emporium of Levantine goods it used to be?}

\textit{The answer to these questions is easy and obvious: simply because Italy is a comparatively poor country.}

The Italian political class would not be dissuaded from its imperial ambitions by economic arguments, however. While well-meaning voices were reminding that “political conquest could be a simple formality […] if national activity cemented and reinforced the edifice with trade and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{212} Bauer, F.: \textit{Wie ‘bürgerlich’ war der Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Italien?}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{214} Labanca, N.: \textit{Oltremare}, p. 312.
\textsuperscript{215} Gallenga, A.: \textit{L Italia, il suo commercio e le colonie}, p. 690.}
industry\textsuperscript{216}, the government continued to acquire further East African territories of dubious economic value at the cost of permanent warfare with varying local tribes. Thus, whereas Germany first became an industrial country and then a colonial power, Italy was obstinately attempting the inverse way. Although this way, trodden previously by Britain and France, may have been possible prior to the beginning of industrialisation in Europe, by the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the competition of industrial nations had made it nearly impossible.

It became clear very quickly that Italians were not the real masters of even those territories that they acquired as colonies. Five years after the Italian conquest of Massawa, the only direct maritime connection between the Eritrean port and Europe was provided by the Austrian Lloyd. This caused not only significant financial losses for Italian customs, as East African goods were reaching Europe via the Austrian port of Trieste instead of Italian ports, but it also led to predominance of Austrian goods in Massawa.\textsuperscript{217} Despite high protective tariffs imposed on non-Italian merchandise, the total value of Austrian goods imported in 1887 amounted to £1,643,148 compared to £119,901 of Italian goods.\textsuperscript{218} The economic preponderance of Austria was such that even the Italian colonial government used the Austrian Thaler instead of the lira for financial transactions with local chiefs.\textsuperscript{219}

At the same time, Italy was not obtaining any strategically important goods from its colonies. Imports included sea salt, mother of pearl and hides but none of these products had any significant effect on the development of Italian industry or made costly imports from other European countries and their colonies unnecessary.\textsuperscript{220} Gold deposits in Eritrea and Ethiopia, which stirred imagination of many colonial enthusiasts and potential investors, proved to be too insignificant to be able to support industrial extraction. The lack of resources translated into lack of investments. Crispi’s dreams of an “Italian East Africa Company”, which was supposed to spur commercial exchange and industrial exploitation of colonies, was never realised despite promises of political protection and initial support of the National Bank.\textsuperscript{221} Throughout the era of liberal colonialism Italian banking and financial interests remained largely out of colonial enterprises and Italian banks had more direct investments in the Kingdom of Montenegro than all the African territories put together.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{216} Mola, A.: L’imperialismo italiano, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{217} Sonnino, S.: L’Africa italiana, p. 455.
\textsuperscript{218} ibid., p. 456.
\textsuperscript{219} ibid., p. 461.
\textsuperscript{220} Labanca, N.: Oltremare, p. 282.
\textsuperscript{221} ibid., p. 295.
\textsuperscript{222} ibid., p. 296
The lack of commercial exchange with colonies and virtually nonexistent investments reduced also the number of potential Italian settlers. The main obstacle for agrarian colonisation of East African colonies was, however, the quality of the soil. The first acquisitions along the Red Sea coast entirely excluded the possibility of agricultural use of land and it was only as territories towards the Ethiopian highlands were acquired that this possibility opened. Even then, however, the colonising efforts were accompanied by significant difficulties. Patches of arable land were often not contiguous, which made larger settlements impossible. Small settlements, on the other hand, were more vulnerable in case of attacks of indigenous tribes and more difficult to put under the protection of Italian soldiers. In addition to this, Italian settlers were entirely unfamiliar with African farming techniques. The combination of these factors led to the failure of liberal-era experiments of large-scale colonisation organised by the senator Leopoldo Franchetti within only a few years.\(^223\) It was not until much later, during the fascist era, that agrarian colonisation of East African colonies became an important aspect of Italian colonial rule.

Italian government thus failed to find a model of colonial development that could serve any of the possible purposes that colonies had in the age of imperialism. While Germany used its colonies in order to strengthen its trade and find markets for the production surplus of industrial goods, Italian colonial efforts were accompanied by financial losses due to the lack of industrial goods to sell. This general pattern of Italian colonial mismanagement was true for Italian colonial involvement in East Asia, as well. In March 1899, at the height of the Sanmen Crisis, the controversial Italian criminologist and jurist Cesare Lombroso correctly predicted the future development of the events in China: “We will end up, like we did in Africa, dispatching soldiers, employees of the state, and we will call benefit the expenses we will incur in order to support them there.”\(^224\) The Tianjin concession that Italy acquired in 1901 demonstrated like no other Italian colonial acquisition the sterility and the lack of purpose in the Italian imperial policy. For the next forty-six years, until it was officially restored to China in 1947, it remained a colonial possession without a commercial, political or any other strategic purpose. Although the character of Italian imperial policy was possibly best reflected there, Tianjin was no exception. It was only the most obvious example of tendencies that constituted the character of Italian liberal imperialism.

\(^223\) ibid., p. 314.
4. Italy and Germany in China

Why compare Italian and German imperialistic action precisely in China? For one thing, because the paths of Italian and German imperialism crossed nowhere else during the liberal era of Italian imperialism. But there is another answer, as well. The configuration of foreign political circumstances in China during the second half of the 19th century makes the comparison highly attractive. Italian and German efforts towards cultural, commercial and territorial expansion in China were impeded by the same difficulties. The French right to protect Catholic missionaries limited their cultural and political freedom of action, the British commercial preponderance hindered economic growth, and the imperative of political stability in China, as well as Europe, rendered forceful acquisition of territories and privileges an undesirable and highly volatile strategy. At least initially, the attitude of the Qing regime towards the two European late-comers was characterised by the same mixture of indifference, mistrust and hostility. In these virtually identical conditions, the success of Italian and German imperialisms depended to a greater extent on their inherent strengths and weaknesses than can generally be expected of complex foreign political situations whose outcome is frequently determined by exogenous factors. The comparison provides, therefore, a perfect, untainted illustration of the practical implications the differences discussed in the previous chapter had for colonial policies of the two countries. As with most historical processes, however, they did not become apparent immediately.

China, which Britain started exploiting early but was unwilling to turn into “a second India” and which was considered large enough to offer place for everyone even by ever-hungry professional colonialists, inevitably attracted the attention of Italy and Germany. German states, especially the ones traditionally oriented towards maritime trade, were the first ones to seek diplomatic contacts to China. Between 1829 and 1842 a British honorary consul represented hanseatic interests in Canton. In 1847, the German merchant von Carlowitz was nominated Prussian and Saxon consul in the same city and Bremen and Hamburg dispatched their own consuls in 1851 and 1852, respectively. In 1861, Prussia managed to obtain from the Qing dynasty the permission to establish a permanent diplomatic mission in Beijing and thus became de facto the representative of German interests in China. Italy, although it gained unity before Germany, took longer to

---

225 Banno, M: *China and the West*, p. 42.
226 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, Appendix to N. 416 (XX) from Beijing, 5 December 1898.
228 ibid., p. 39.
establish diplomatic relations with China. This was primarily due to the fact that the Italian commercial interests in China were virtually non-existent.\textsuperscript{229} No Italian counterpart to Bremen and Hamburg existed, hanseatic cities that, due to their traditionally close relations with British and Dutch merchants, had been participating in the East Asian trade since the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{230} Among the Italian states, Piedmont was the first to appoint an honorary consul in China in 1858. The Piedmontese, like the hanseatic cities, initially nominated an English merchant, although their representative was located in Shanghai rather than Canton.\textsuperscript{231} After the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, another four years\textsuperscript{232} passed before captain Vittorio Arminjon was dispatched to the Far East to sign the first official diplomatic treaty with the Qing Empire. Two main reasons motivated Italy to sign this treaty. One was that Italy felt compelled to follow the example of Great Britain, France, the United States, Norway, Sweden, Prussia, Russia, Denmark and the Netherlands\textsuperscript{233}, who had all done the same, in order not to be excluded from what was perceived at the time to be a market offering unprecedented opportunities. The other, possibly even more pressing one, was that Italy’s position as the largest producer of silk in Europe was seriously endangered. Hit hard by the pébrine silkworm disease, Italy became constrained to import increasingly large quantities of cocoons and raw silk from Eastern Europe and Asia.\textsuperscript{234}

In the years following the conclusion of the treaties, the “Fata Morgana of the endless Chinese market” remained out of reach for Italy and even the German states did not initially achieve the profits they had expected.\textsuperscript{235} In 1867, the cumulative tonnage that the Italian ships carried in and out of Chinese ports was 11,595 compared to 3,711,080 of the British, 1,673,759 of the American and 611,841 of the German ships. Five years later, the total number of Italian residents inscribed in the Chinese registers of the treaty ports was 23 compared to 1,780 Britons, 583 Americans, 487 Germans and 244 Frenchmen. Mere two Italian companies were listed in the same registers, together with 221 British, 42 American, 40 German and 17 French ones.\textsuperscript{236} The German China trade, although far larger in volume and overall market share, was not spared from

\textsuperscript{229} Nocentini, Lodovico: \textit{L’Europa nell’Estremo Oriente e gli interessi dell’Italia in Cina}. Milan, Italy: Ulrico Hoepli, 1904, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{230} Ratenhof, U.: \textit{Die Chinapolitik des Deutschen Reiches}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{231} Borsa, Giorgio: \textit{Italia e Cina nel secolo XIX}. Milano, Italy: Comunità, 1961, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{232} Arminjon left Italy from Naples on 8 November 1865. Boarding the \textit{Magenta} in Montevideo on 2 February, he set sail for East Asia, reaching Yokohama at the beginning of July. A commercial treaty with Japan was signed in Edo on 25 August. The commercial treaty with China was signed on 26 October 1866.
\textsuperscript{234} ibid., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{235} Ratenhof, U.: \textit{Die Chinapolitik des Deutschen Reiches}, pp. 43-44.
oscillations and significant setbacks, either. It grew approximately 50% between 1864 and 1872 only to plummet down to 20% of the 1872 volume in 1874.237 German shipowners, who controlled approximately 24% of the foreign coastal trade along the coast of China in the 1860s238, lost much of their market share to British and even Chinese shipowners in the course of the 1870s.239

In spite of similar initial difficulties, in the long run, the specific strengths of German imperialism became evident. By the end of the century, Germany had managed to obtain in China everything that Italy only unsuccessfully strove to achieve. In a diplomatic battle it had reclaimed its Catholic missionaries from France, a whole province had been declared a German sphere of influence, it had gained a naval station on the Chinese coast, and, perhaps most significantly, its naval traffic with China grew to become second only to the British240. In Rome, the realisation that Italy lacked internal strength for mounting an equally ambitious imperialistic policy was slowly permeating the governing class. For a while, it appeared even that Italy might abandon its colonial policy and concentrate its efforts on a programme of national restructuring and modernisation. To believe in this, however, meant to underestimate the vital force of Italian imperialism.

238 ibid., p. 44.
239 ibid., p. 63.
240 ibid., p. 567.
4.1. Catholic Missions

The Sino-Italian commercial treaty of 1866 hardly, if at all, brought any intensification of commercial, cultural or any other kind of exchange between China and Italy. Although the first Italian ambassador to the Far East, Vittorio Sallier de la Tour, was instructed that the scope of his mission consisted “principally in procuring new outlets and markets for the Italian commercial and industrial activity”\(^{241}\), the trade stagnated. The pressing reason that had to a great extent motivated the Arminjon mission to China had ceased to exist. The Italian silk industry was rapidly recovering and yielded between 1867 and 1870 profits of £148m, whereas between 1862 and 1866 it had yielded only £46m.\(^{242}\) The Italian government showed little interest in stimulating the trade with China beyond the vague instructions to its ambassador. Speaking of the years that followed the treaty, Lodovico Nocentini, a sinologist and the interpreter at the Italian legation in Beijing, lamented more than thirty years later:

Nor did the government believe it its duty to illuminate the country and favour, following the example given by other states, a stream of business affairs towards that remote region; instead it believed it more prudent, all the more as it spared it the trouble of studies and expenditures, to wait for interests to appear and solidify due to the spontaneous initiative of our industrialists and merchants. But this did not succeed; nor could it succeed in a country then first rising to freedom, while the industries, only just born, were battling with fiscal problems.\(^{243}\)

Under these circumstances, protection of Italian citizens in China, most of whom were Catholic missionaries, became “the only question of any import in the relations between Italy and China before the San-mun incident”\(^{244}\).

Like the treaties of the other western powers (and Russia) signed after 1858, the Italian treaty with China did not leave unmentioned the issue of evangelisation and protection of missionaries and converts. The article VIII of the treaty stipulated:

Italians practicing or preaching the Christian religion have the right to be protected by the Chinese authorities and no one of them shall be disturbed or persecuted if he is fulfilling his duties peacefully and without offending the laws. No

---

\(^{241}\) Borsa, G.: *Italia e Cina*, p. 35.
\(^{242}\) ibid., p. 21.
\(^{244}\) Borsa, G.: *Italia e Cina*, p. 51.
hindrance shall be posed by the Chinese authorities to any imperial subject wishing to embrace the Christian religion.\textsuperscript{245}

Italy thus reserved from the very beginning the right to protect Christian missionaries of Italian nationality and Chinese converts under their aegis. This right, far from being exercised only in hope of otherworldly compensation or as a service to the Church, was an important vehicle of political influence. Incidents in which Chinese insurgents or bandits assailed missionaries or Church property were almost invariably instrumentalised by European powers for obtaining political privileges, monetary gain, or both. The only difficulty lay in the fact that the right to protect Catholic missionaries in China was almost universally considered to be a prerogative of France.

The article VI of the treaty signed between the Second French Empire and the Qing Empire in 1858 stated that an indemnity for all the churches, schools, cemeteries, land and buildings that had belonged to the Christians persecuted before and during the Second Opium War was to be paid to the French representative in Beijing who was to distribute it to the damaged individuals and ecclesiastical organisations.\textsuperscript{246} Although neither this article, nor any other article of the treaty, in any legal way reserved for France the exclusive right of protecting Catholic missionaries in China, in practice it established France as their sole protector. Several factors contributed to this development. Most importantly, France was the only Catholic nation present in China in 1858. Britain was primarily interested in protecting Protestant missionaries, as was the United States. Russia, although sometimes mistakenly taken by the Chinese for a Catholic country\textsuperscript{247}, was protecting only its Orthodox mission established there in 1728. For this reason, in the aftermath of the Second Opium War, most of the Catholic missions in China turned to France for obtaining the indemnities guaranteed to them by the peace treaties. In doing this they established a precedent, especially in the eyes of the Qing bureaucracy, that the other Catholic nations later found difficult to obliterate. Secondly, the only two other Catholic nations having a significant number of missionaries in China at the time, Italy and Spain, contributed themselves to the French supremacy in religious matters. Initially, they did not deem it necessary or propitious to their interests to furnish missionaries originating from these countries with passports, which France readily did in their stead.\textsuperscript{248} The French text in the documents declared the passport bearers “under French protection”. The Chinese text, however, declared them “French subjects”, which led the Chinese at

\textsuperscript{245} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
\textsuperscript{246} ibid.
\textsuperscript{248} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
the time to call Catholicism “the French religion”.\textsuperscript{249} Thus not only did France become the protector of the entire Catholic fold in China but also rendered the whole Catholic fold French. Finally, the French right to protect Catholic missionaries in China, although it had no legal basis in the treaties between China and France, was openly recognised in papal bulls and actions of the Propaganda Fide.\textsuperscript{250}

In 1858 and the decade that followed, this may not have been a matter that caused serious discomfort to the rising Italian state. In fact, Sallier de la Tour was instructed to offer protection to Italian missionaries if their demands appeared to him “just and equitable”, but to act nonetheless prudently and avoid “interferences in all matters concerning internal affairs of the state and the authority of the government”.\textsuperscript{251} Implicit in these instructions was the desire of the Italian government, preoccupied with its plans of national expansion and unification, to avoid any deterioration of Franco-Italian relations on this account. After the conquest of Rome in September 1870, the relations deteriorated nonetheless, and the conflict, albeit not always an open one, was transferred also to the Chinese soil.

For France, the protection of Catholic missionaries in China and predominance in religious matters had been since the treaty of Whampoa an important way of outbalancing the competitive advantage Britain possessed in commerce. It offered a way of spreading the French culture and, after 1858\textsuperscript{252}, also reconnoitring China’s enormous hinterland. The role of a protector of the Catholic faith also gave France an advantage in Europe, as it strengthened its ties with the Vatican. This last reason gained on importance after the retreat of the French garrison from Rome during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the subsequent conquest of Rome by Italian troops. Italy, on the other hand, saw Italian missionaries in China as a possible vehicle for improving its relations with the Vatican and was unwilling, at least in principle, to abandon them to France.

Compared to the French efforts to retain the protectorate over Catholic missionaries of Italian origin, the efforts of the Italian state to regain it were half-hearted at best. France, which was already allowing Catholic missionaries of all nationalities to travel free of charge on French merchant vessels and establishing consulates even in areas where no French lived but Catholic missions existed, was now spending significant financial resources to convince missionaries of Italian origin that France was the only power willing and capable to defend their interests in China. Their pecuniary needs were more than adequately taken care of by the French government and the

\textsuperscript{249} ibid.
\textsuperscript{250} Borsa, G.: \textit{Italia e Cina}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{251} ibid, pp. 53-54.
\textsuperscript{252} The treaty of Tianjin of 1858 allowed missionaries to travel across China.
permanent presence of French warships in Chinese waters instilled in missionaries a feeling of security.\textsuperscript{253} Italian representatives, on the other hand, for lack of clear guidelines and coordination with the government in Rome, initially did little to help Catholic missionaries. Without consulting the foreign ministry in Rome, the Italian consulate in Shanghai denied protection to an Italian rector of a predominantly French Jesuit mission\textsuperscript{254} and the Italian minister plenipotentiary in Beijing refused to transmit to the Pope a letter in which the ministers of the Zongli Yamen listed their grievances against the Catholic mission in Tianjin\textsuperscript{255}. The Italian government thus not only abandoned its citizens but also signalled to the Qing government that it held no authority over Catholic missions.

Actions of the Italian government during the Sino-French War of 1884-85 were significantly better coordinated, but they nonetheless failed to realise the full potential offered by that situation. Fearing for their safety, some Italian missionaries, bearing French passports, approached the Italian minister plenipotentiary De Luca requesting protection. He immediately offered to provide them with Italian passports, but they declined, stating that they were unable to accept the new passports without the express permission of the Propaganda Fide. Not having enough time to wait for the response of the Propaganda, De Luca, after reaching an agreement with the governor of Hunan and Hubei, settled for furnishing the missionaries with additional documents, issued by Chinese authorities, which clarified the question of their nationality but did not replace the French passports.\textsuperscript{256} The French minister plenipotentiary, stationed at the time in Shanghai because of the war, did not protest. Almost a decade later, the Italian minister in Beijing Pansa claimed that “in 1884, when the hostility of France towards China coincided with a period of truce, at least apparent, in our conflict with the Holy See”, the Vatican and France could have been induced to accept an Italian protectorate of Italian missions but that the royal government preferred to abstain from raising this question.\textsuperscript{257}

Much more decided was the action of German Catholic missionaries and the government in Berlin. The first German Catholic missionaries of the order “Societas verbum divini”, having arrived in 1879, established the first German mission already in January 1881 in Southern

\textsuperscript{253} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
\textsuperscript{254} ibid.
\textsuperscript{255} Borsa, G.: Italia e Cina, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{256} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
\textsuperscript{257} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1893, N. 277 (XX) from Beijing, 31 March 1893.
Initially still under the jurisdiction of Italian Franciscans, Southern Shandong was elevated to the rank of autonomous apostolic vicariate only four years later. Despite the opposition of bishop Cosi, the vicar of Shandong, Johann Baptist Anzer became the first vicar of Southern Shandong and was made bishop in 1886. The rapid series of successes of the German mission did not remain unnoticed by the German government. The same year, following reports by the German minister in Beijing, it started showing interest in taking over the protectorate. When in summer 1888 Berlin decided to start negotiations in this regard with the Zongli Yamen, Italy in Germany, already allies in Europe, became allies in China, too.

Throughout the summer of 1888, the German minister von Brandt and his Italian counterpart De Luca pursued the common idea of taking over the protectorate from France. In August, Germany finally signed a treaty with the Qing Empire that allowed the missionaries themselves to choose between French and German passports and, hence, French and German protection. De Luca managed in September to negotiate the same agreement, which also obliged the Chinese government to refuse to recognise a passport issued by France if the Italian legation declared that the bearer could be assumed beyond any reasonable doubt to be an Italian citizen. It was a modest beginning but von Brandt and De Luca continued to exert pressure on the Zongli Yamen for more. Here, however, the interests of Italy and Germany began to diverge. The Consulta was in favour of individual protection, and saw the issuing of Italian passports to missionaries as a token of the protection offered, but was reluctant to define the territories of Italian vicariates under its protection. Its goal, for the time being, was to render all the passports issued by France to Italian missionaries invalid, and replace them with Italian ones. Germany, on the other hand, desired precisely the opposite. Berlin did not mind German missionaries elsewhere bearing French passports, as long as the territory of the mission in Southern Shandong was under official German protection. Italy and Germany still cooperated as they could under these conditions. In December, von Brandt finally managed to obtain territorial protection for the German mission in Southern Shandong. After a long hesitation, the foreign ministry in Rome allowed De Luca to sign the same treaty referring to the Italian missions, adding a clause stipulating that the responsible bishops had to agree to Italian protection. As bishops were not acting autonomously in such matters but following instructions coming from the Vatican, little inclined to indulge Italy, this clause de

259 ibid.
260 ibid., p. 293.
262 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1893, N. 277 (XX) from Beijing, 31 March 1893.
facto annulled the treaty.\textsuperscript{263} The German and Italian treaties of 1888 did not represent a breakthrough in themselves. Rather, their practical value depended on actions that followed the publication of the treaties. Italy, interested only in reclaiming its missionaries, engaged in a series of fruitless attempts to force its nationals into subordination. Italian missionaries refusing to return French passports, and thus obeying the orders of the Propagande Fide, were denied pensions from the Italian state to which they were entitled. In one case, the Italian legation even demanded of the Chinese government, albeit without success, to arrest an Italian missionary refusing to accept the Italian passport.\textsuperscript{264} Germany proceeded in a different manner. In December 1888, it first managed to obtain a reluctant assurance from Quai d’Orsay that France would not “discuss any treaties between Germany and China”\textsuperscript{265}. It then convinced Anzer to put his vicariate under German protection, promising him financial support of the German state. When the latter agreed and the apostolic vicariate of Southern Shandong finally passed under German protection in June 1890, the French legation was informed of the \textit{fait accompli}. During Anzer’s journey to Rome in November of the same year, he was granted official papal permission for the change of protectorate.\textsuperscript{266}

In less than a decade, Germany thus managed to establish itself as the only power, besides France, directly exercising a protectorate over its Catholic missionaries in China.\textsuperscript{267} Italy, left alone and lacking a clear strategy, was not in the position to seriously challenge the French supremacy. Its position further deteriorated when France, working closely together with the Vatican, decided to reconsolidate its position. The last stop Auguste Gérard, the newly appointed French representative in Beijing, made on his way to China in 1894 was the Vatican, where he reached an agreement with the pope regarding the issue of the French protectorate of Catholic missions in China.\textsuperscript{268} At the same time, rumours reached the Italian legation in Beijing that the Vatican was planning to reshuffle the missionary body in China in a way that prevented ethnic predominance of Italians in any of the missions, thus practically destroying the national character of all Italian missions.\textsuperscript{269} In addition to this, the Vatican sought internally to prevent the missionaries from soliciting Italian

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{263} ibid.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{264} Borsa, G.: \textit{Italia e Cina}, p. 71.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{265} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1893, appendix to N. 277 (XX) from Beijing, 31 March 1893, dated Berlin, 19 December 1888.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{266} Mühlhahn, K.: \textit{Herrschaft und Widerstand}, p. 293.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{267} The importance of this fact became obvious almost exactly seven years later, when in November 1897 two German missionaries were murdered and Germany used this incident for obtaining the Jiaozhou Bay.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{268} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1894, N. 289 (XX) from Beijing, 21 April 1894.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{269} ibid.
\end{flushright}
In a letter to de Cariati, the new Italian representative in Beijing, Francesco Crispi summed up the hopelessness of Italy’s position:

*Italy remains thus alone in the struggle [...] and has against itself the French claims, the Chinese apathy, the hostility of the Vatican and the resistance of the missionaries themselves, who receive from their superiors orders and norms defining their conduct. All this leads us to assume that nothing would be obtained if a new discussion on the subject were to be opened.*

The matter was finally concluded in 1896. On 1 March, Italy suffered a crushing defeat at Adua that toppled the Crispi government in Rome. The effects of the defeat started becoming visible immediately after the new government under Marquis di Rudini was formed on 10 March. *Politica di rapprochement* became the word of the day and it also meant, implicitly, a rapprochement with France. The latter was a process, rather than an immediate change of suit, but it did involve putting, for the time being, all conflicts with France on ice.

This becomes obvious from comparing the dispatches that circulated between the Consulta and the Beijing legation in the period prior to March 1896 with those sent between 1896 and 1898. The issue of Italian missionaries with French passports remained a matter of great inconvenience for Italy. It was feared that it had a detrimental effect on the prestige of Italy in China and gave the mandarins, who had little understanding of the “relationship between the state and the church and even less of that between the Quirinal and the Vatican”, the impression that the Italian king did not exercise sufficient control over his own subjects.

Despite this, even though virtually every second telegraph from Beijing to Rome in the years between 1893 and 1895 dealt with this issue, it is mentioned only sporadically during the two years that followed Adua. Italy attempted to aid the Italian missionaries who sought help from Italian representatives but undertook no further diplomatic efforts to undermine the French protectorate over Catholic missions in China. The aspirations towards an Italian protectorate were, for all practical purposes, abandoned.

The question remains, however, whether Italy ever genuinely desired a protectorate over Italian Catholic missions in China and, if so, why it abstained from obtaining it in 1884 and again in December 1888?

---

270 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 369 (XX) from Beijing, 22 February 1898.
272 Decleva, E.: *Da Adua a Sarajevo*, p. 19.
273 ibid., p. 5.
274 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
275 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 327 (XX) from Beijing, 5 January 1898 and N. 328 (XX) from Rome, 7 January 1898.
Despite the attraction of an Italian protectorate, theoretically demonstrating military strength and political maturity of the country, Italian politicians were very well aware of the fact that it was beyond Italy’s ability to effectively exercise such a protectorate. Italian missions existed in ten of the sixteen Chinese provinces at a time when not a single Italian war vessel was stationed in Chinese waters. Nor was Italy able to maintain a fleet comparable to those maintained in the Far East by England, France and Germany. The power relations between European states were doubtlessly known also to missionaries themselves, who openly showed their disbelief that Italy would start a war in China in order to protect them. The question of protectorate was, hence, approached pragmatically by the Italian government, which was, in fact, more interested in abolishing the French protectorate over Italian missionaries than exercising a protectorate itself. This becomes obvious from frequent references in diplomatic reports to the goals of the Dunn mission as the optimal solution for Italy. The Dunn mission having failed, Italian politicians did not reject the idea of an Italian protectorate as such, hoping that it might become more realistic in the future, but concentrated at the time on solving the issue of the passports, perceived as detrimental to the image of Italy in China. Seen in this light, the Italian refusal to raise the question of protectorate during the Sino-Chinese War and the effective annulment of the treaty from December 1888 become rational decisions motivated by responsibility and political restraint rather than oversights with serious political consequences.

Italy and Germany thus both achieved goals dictated by Realpolitik. Doubtlessly, the Italian policy makers would have much rather followed a more ambitious China policy but they did not allow their desires to lead them away from the course dictated by political responsibility. After Adua, the need for the Italian foreign policy to abstain from unrealistic goals and colonial adventures became even more pronounced. All this changed less than three years later.

276 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1893, N. 285 (XX) from Beijing, 8 October 1893.
277 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
278 Still during the Sino-French war, pope Leo XIII wrote to the Guangxu Emperor, asking him to accord Catholic missionaries in China his own protection. Although pope’s advances did not yield fruit immediately, they did instigate the Zongli Yamen to start thinking about ways of weakening France by rescinding its protectorate. In January 1886, J. G. Dunn, an Englishman in the service of the Chinese Imperial Customs, was dispatched to the Vatican to negotiate sending of a papal nuncio to China, whose mission was to consist in representing the pope directly in Beijing and protecting Catholic missionaries, regardless of their nationality. Dunn reached an agreement with the Vatican but France stoutly opposed the plans, threatening to close its embassy at the Holy See. Pope Leo XIII yielded and the idea of a papal nuncio for China was abandoned.
279 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1893, N. 277 (XX) from Beijing, 31 March 1893.
4.2. Spheres of Influence
4.2.1 Italian Colonial Policy after Adua

Adua was not only an annihilating military defeat at the hands of a technologically inferior adversary. It was the event that marked the last decade of the 19th century in the political life of Italy, arguably even more momentous and destabilising than the Milan riots of 1898 or the assassination of Umberto I in 1900. The news of Italian defeat echoed in Europe and beyond\textsuperscript{280}, reaching all the way to China and fomenting contempt for a nation “beaten by a black king”\textsuperscript{281}. The prime minister Francesco Crispi presented his resignation, as Depretis had done after Dogali\textsuperscript{282}, hoping that he would be allowed to form another government.\textsuperscript{283} He had, however, underestimated the gravity of the situation. The Italians, rarely united by common sentiment in political matters, turned almost unanimously against him and voiced their discontent in a wave of violent popular unrests spanning the whole country, from Calabria to Lombardy.\textsuperscript{284} In the immediate aftermath of Adua, all but the most intransigent Crispists dissociated themselves quickly from the African adventure and the rest was reduced to silence by attacks from all sides. When marquis di Rudini formed a new government in May, it seemed for a while that colonialists had disappeared entirely from the Italian political spectrum and that the new politica di raccoglimento was to guide the country away from colonial enterprises for good.

Despite the appearances and di Rudini’s programmatic declaration that Italy would not be “led astray by desert mirages”\textsuperscript{285} anymore, Italian politicians continued to dream the dreams of imperial magnificence. Adua, as it turned out, was welcome for getting rid of Crispi but did not call for abandonment of all colonial pretensions, as some voices from the extreme left claimed.\textsuperscript{286} On the contrary, the support among politicians from virtually all political camps for remaining in

\textsuperscript{280}“The Italian Disaster in Abyssinia”. The Times (4 March 1896), p. 5.
\textsuperscript{281}ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 654 (XX) from Shanghai, 1 July 1899.
\textsuperscript{282}Adua was not, in fact, the first defeat Italy suffered in clashes with the Abyssinians. In January 1887, during the siege of the Italian-held town of Sahati, an Italian 500 men strong reinforcement column was attacked at Dogali by a much stronger Abyssinian force. The Italians ran out of ammunition and all but 80 perished. Although the foreign minister Robilant and the minister of war Ricotti-Magnani lost their positions in the subsequent restructuring of the cabinet, the prime minister Depretis was allowed to keep his position and a more serious political crisis was avoided. A few months before Adua, in December 1895, Italy was defeated at Amba Alagi and lost over 2,000 of its Ascari troops. The battle did not receive as much attention as that of Adua would, however, probably due to the fact that only a small number of Italian soldiers was involved.
\textsuperscript{283}Decleva, E.: Da Adua a Sarajevo, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{284}Farini, D.: Diario di fine secolo, p. 869.
\textsuperscript{286}Decleva, E.: Da Adua a Sarajevo, p. 17.
Africa, at least for a while longer, was much broader than the attacks on Crispi in the aftermath of Adua would have led one to assume.\textsuperscript{287} In other words, the dreams were not destroyed but they had to be dreamt in private until the storm passed.

It is not surprising then that the political statements intended to appease poverty-stricken working masses, becoming impatient with colonial enterprises in which they saw no immediate benefit, stood in contrast with the political action. In December 1896, di Rudini declared in front of the parliament that “Italy will not become a really great power as long as it is bogged in colonial enterprises disproportionate to our conditions and our interests”\textsuperscript{288}. Only two months later, however, Italy participated in the coordinated action of European powers during the Cretan Crisis in order to defend its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and underline its status of a great power.\textsuperscript{289} For the time being, the Italian government was not attempting any further colonial expansion but it was also unwilling to diminish in standing compared to other powers. When confronted by the question of the French foreign minister Hanotaux what the Italian intentions were regarding Crete, the Italian foreign minister Visconti Venosta replied: “The Italian government will, true to the European Concert, fulfil its duties, if all the other powers are doing the same and in the same measure as they. Not more and not less.”\textsuperscript{290} When the government did abandon some of its colonial pretensions, as in the case of Tunisia\textsuperscript{291}, it was only unwillingly and due to the economic imperative of improving its relations with France.

The entire concept of Italian post-Aduan foreign policy was based on maintaining the status quo whenever possible. Visconti Venosta was ideally suited for the task. Differently described by historians as a man who “would take his time, reflect, let the things mature”\textsuperscript{292} and a “\textit{cunctator}”\textsuperscript{293}, he was a undisputedly a man of great experience and political skill, and the most significant foreign minister the country had seen since the times of Cavour. Although a conservative, at the present juncture, he was deemed an appropriate choice for the foreign minister even by the socialist members of the government due to his well-known Francophilia.\textsuperscript{294}

\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{288} Siebert, F.: \textit{Adua, eine Wende italienischer und europäischer Politik}, p. 540.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., p. 564.
\textsuperscript{290} Ibid., p. 566.
\textsuperscript{291} In September 1896, Italy recognised the French protectorate in Tunisia, hoping to induce France in this way to sign a bilateral trade agreement that would end the Franco-Italian tariff war that had been going on since 1888. The agreement was signed only more than two years later, in November 1898.
\textsuperscript{292} Decleva, E.: \textit{Da Adua a Sarajevo}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{293} Siebert, F.: \textit{Adua, eine Wende italienischer und europäischer Politik}, p. 575.
\textsuperscript{294} Decleva, E.: \textit{Da Adua a Sarajevo}, p. 32.
Visconti Venosta was very well aware that Italy needed to consolidate its position in Europe before embarking on any colonial enterprises. He also knew, however, that the current opprobrium heard every time colonies were mentioned, was only a spell that would not last forever. Consequently, it cannot be claimed that Italian foreign policy after Adua simply turned from colonial policy to continental policy.\textsuperscript{295} Visconti Venosta regarded rapprochement with France without antagonising the allies in the Triple Alliance as the primary goal of the Italian foreign policy but he kept his eyes open for all other developments, including those overseas. Needless to say, both his goals in Europe and the still fresh wound inflicted by the disaster at Adua made the Italian position precarious. Every decision needed to be carefully analysed in terms of its broader consequences and not seldom inaction was better than action.\textsuperscript{296} In colonial policy, strict adherence to this approach was even more important than in continental policy since much was at stake immediately while the gains were only theoretical and to be reaped over a long period of time in the future.

4.2.2. German Action in China

German occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay\textsuperscript{297} in November 1897 came hence at a rather inopportune moment in time from the standpoint of the Consulta. After a brief period of relative tranquillity in the Far East that ensued after the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in April 1895, the occupation threw European diplomatic circles once again into a tizzy and woke up hopes and fears that China might be partitioned as Africa had been\textsuperscript{298}.

Although ostensibly an impromptu action, aimed at forcing the Chinese government to pay an indemnity for the murder of two German missionaries in Shandong on 4 November 1897\textsuperscript{299}, the occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay was, in fact, only the visible final coup of a strategy that the government in Berlin had been pursuing in China for almost four decades. Already in 1860, the Prussian government dispatched Friedrich Graf zu Eulenburg to China to sign a trade treaty but also to “explore the terrain from the scientific and the commercial standpoint” and “find a spot, where a Prussian colony could be successfully established”.\textsuperscript{300} When Eulenburg opened the trade treaty negotiations in 1861, they turned out to be so difficult that he decided not to mention the possibility

\textsuperscript{295} Siebert, F.: Adua, eine Wende italienischer und europäischer Politik, p. 562.
\textsuperscript{296} ibid., p. 551.
\textsuperscript{297} Most of the contemporary sources refer to it as Kiaochow, Kiau-Chau or Kiau-Tschau
\textsuperscript{298} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1897, N. 318 (XX) from Berlin, 22 December 1897.
\textsuperscript{299} Mühlhahn, K.: Herrschaft und Widerstand, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{300} ibid., p. 76.
of a Prussian colony in China at all\textsuperscript{301}, but the idea had already been born in the minds of Berlin policy makers.

Bismarck generally exercised extreme caution in colonial matters. Even so, the pressure in favour of a colonial expansion coming from northern German merchants, who kept requesting military presence in pirate-infested Chinese waters throughout the 1860s, was so strong that he finally assented to the establishment of a German naval station in China in 1868.\textsuperscript{302} Although this plan was later abandoned, two corvettes were dispatched to patrol the Chinese coast in the following year. In general, during the late 1860s, Prussia was more inclined to indulge the wishes of its hanseatic allies in order to wrestle them out of the traditionally firm British embrace and strengthen its claim as the foremost German state at the same time. The proclamation of the Empire in 1871, brought an end to this tendency. The cautious colonial policy Bismarck dictated within the North German Confederation became still more conservative under the Empire. Although his declaration of national saturation applied to continental foreign policy only, it implicitly ruled out expansion overseas unless this could be reconciled with interests of other colonial empires\textsuperscript{303}. Extremely reluctant to unsettle any of the European powers, he was inclined to abandon all colonial claims rather than risk military confrontation.

The Imperial Admiralty tended to be less cautious than Reichskanzler Bismarck. Founded in 1871, it provided the expansion-minded merchants and industrialists with a formidable and bellicose political ally. Headed by Admiral von Stosch, under the old pretext of protecting trade, it began pushing for acquisition of naval bases supported by colonies.\textsuperscript{304} The economic crisis that began in 1873, brought the navy and the merchants even closer together. Hoping to secure the financial support of the latter, the navy was at times prepared even to carry out reconnaissance missions aimed at identifying suitable locations for colonies without previously consulting the foreign ministry.\textsuperscript{305} Although such escapades of the admiralty occasionally led to indignation at the foreign ministry, Wilhelmstraße was not disinterested in acquiring information that these missions furnished.

Bismarck’s firm opposition to colonial expansion under the given circumstances did not exclude establishment of colonies in the future. It was essential, however, to acquire intelligence

\textsuperscript{301} ibid.
\textsuperscript{302} Ratenhof, U.: Die Chinapolitik des Deutschen Reiches, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{304} Ratenhof, U.: Die Chinapolitik des Deutschen Reiches, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{305} ibid.
and develop expansion plans in advance so that the military action could proceed as smoothly as possible when the opportune moment arrived. This policy of the Reichskanzler was exemplified by the German action in Africa in 1884-5.\textsuperscript{306} In the case of China, however, this meant that more information was needed and more patience required. Years of reconnaissance and waiting for the opportune moment followed. No grandiose project of mapping China was conceived, coordinated or financed by the foreign ministry, but the foreign ministry was nonetheless careful enough to collect and use for its own purposes the information that innumerable explorers, missionaries and merchants were capable of providing.\textsuperscript{307}

The province of Shandong was favourably described already by Ferdinand von Richthofen, who undertook several expeditions to China between 1868 and 1872, and identified the Jiaozhou Bay as a natural port ideally suited for giving access to the riches of Shandong and developing the province. Richthofen’s detailed scientific report that included geological, geophysical, topographic and economic analyses of Chinese provinces, as well as information on their history, settlements and infrastructure, became one of the major sources of information on China for the German government.\textsuperscript{308} The references to several Shandong towns as thriving commercial and industrial centres and the mention of the Jiaozhou Bay were by no means left out of sight by the high political circles.\textsuperscript{309} Additional local expertise on Shandong was provided by the German missionaries from the vicariate of Southern Shandong who established a mission there in 1879 and officially came under German protection in 1888.

Finally, an important source of information and contacts was also the German armaments industry, which had been in business with Chinese provincial governors since 1870.\textsuperscript{310} The initial contacts were established by Krupp, by far the most significant German producer of steel and weapons. The business, although not very lucrative at the beginning, grew quickly.\textsuperscript{311} Krupp was able to establish itself as the market leader in certain market segments such as ship armament and the overall market leader in certain regions like Canton.\textsuperscript{312} The company did not only offer weapons to the Chinese but also frequently dispatched instructors and counsellors to train the soldiers and


\textsuperscript{307} Mühlhahn, K.: \textit{Herrschaft und Widerstand}, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{308} ibid., p. 62.


\textsuperscript{310} Ratenhof, U.: \textit{Die Chinapolitik des Deutschen Reiches}, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{311} ibid.

\textsuperscript{312} ibid., pp. 81-82.
advise the provincial governors in military matters. Some of these experts eventually ceased to work for Krupp altogether and became employees of the provincial governors or the Chinese state.\footnote{Mühlhahn, K.: \textit{Herrschaft und Widerstand}, p. 77.} The intensification of military exchange between Germany and China led to high-level political contacts. Towards the end of 1879, Li Feng-pao, the Chinese representative in Berlin, ordered coastal artillery for 130,000 Mk and continued to order further military equipment in the early 1880s. German influence in China expanded as, for the first time, other German private companies besides Krupp started filling Li Feng-pao’s orders for torpedo boats, cruisers and rifles.\footnote{Mühlhahn, K.: \textit{Herrschaft und Widerstand}, p. 72.}

Despite the prominent role that the German weapons industry played in the Sino-German economic exchange, it would be misleading to describe its relationship to the foreign ministry in Berlin as harmonious. As early as 1876, Wilhelmstraße showed signs of being concerned about China’s acquisition of modern weapons and berated Krupp for selling cannons to China and thus endangering German interests in the Far East.\footnote{ibid., p. 86.} In 1881, it even prohibited all armament exports to China and refused dispatching any further military experts. These policies did not last but they indicate that the foreign ministry did not rule out military engagement in China and that Bismarck’s firm opposition to an active colonial policy was primarily meant as a means of containing and keeping under control the expansionistic tendencies that began spreading in the economically depressed empire, rather than as damnation of colonial expansion as such.

Only with Bismarck’s retirement in 1890 did a more aggressive colonial policy find its way into the offices of the foreign ministry. A number of factors enabled such a change. Most visibly, the change of suit in German foreign policy was facilitated by a greater prominence that the expansionist-minded Wilhelm II enjoyed after 1890. With Bismarck’s departure from the political scene, the emperor’s power waxed and he used the newly acquired influence primarily to render the colonial policy more aggressive. One of the ideas that the new policy included was that of a “strategic offensive”, developed already in 1890-91. The “strategic offensive” was a war scenario based on the concept of cruiser warfare, which was supposed to move the naval battlefront away from the German coast, to foreign seas and oceans.\footnote{Mühlhahn, K.: \textit{Herrschaft und Widerstand}, p. 72.} The success of the concept depended, naturally, on a network of naval stations around the globe that would make provisioning of German war vessels possible. Under that premise, strategically positioned colonies acquired a new importance. Wilhelm II’s views were enthusiastically welcomed by the navy, which anticipated a

\footnote{Ratenhof, U.: \textit{Die Chinapolitik des Deutschen Reiches}, p. 84.}

\footnote{ibid., p. 86.}
more prominent position in the empire’s hierarchy, as well as its budget. After his return from China, where he had held the position of the Chief of the East Asian Squadron, Alfried von Tirpitz wrote:

The accretion of gigantic nations like Panamerica, Greater Britain [sic], the Slavdom, and possibly the Mongol race with Japan at its head, will destroy Germany in the coming century, or at least push it back completely, unless Germany becomes a power also beyond the borders of the European continent. The indispensable prerequisite for this purpose, in a world where things begin to clash against one another, is a fleet.\(^{317}\)

Not only the emperor and the navy hawks were of this opinion, however.

By the 1890s, the notion that a foreign policy focused on Europe was obsolete and that Germany was ready to engage in the Weltpolitik had pervaded virtually all classes of German society. Besides being in harmony with the well-known arguments of social Darwinism and the educating mission of the white race, colonialism also seemed to be the answer to a multitude of social and economic problems particular to the German society, such as overpopulation and overcapacity of heavy industry. While members of the colonial movement intended to reduce the demographic pressure in Germany by colonising territories overseas and the middle class hoped to better its social position through enhanced export opportunities that colonies were expected generate\(^{318}\), policy makers encountered no difficulties in bringing together the lofty notion of “the white man’s burden” with hard figures of the economic reality. From China, the director of the Imperial Maritime Customs in Tianjin, Gustav Detring wrote:

Germany will hence, for the time being, have to direct its efforts towards maintaining China’s territorial integrity; this corresponds to the educating mission that it has pursued in China so far. It is exactly in the energetic pursuit of its cultural and historical mission, however, that Germany can find means of securing its strategic position with respect to the other treaty powers. Foremost, however, it can find means of obtaining a natural counterweight to the planned tariff increase, which can be demanded of China with full justification.

In this sense, primarily to be considered are:

1. Development of further trade routes including the development of necessary industry,
2. Consolidation of power of the central government towards the interior.

\(^{317}\) ibid.

\(^{318}\) ibid., pp. 67-68.
Regarding the first point, two essentially different aspects are to be distinguished:

Opening of canals
Opening of railways

[...]\textsuperscript{319}

The ambitious suggestions of the customs director bore witness to a new approach to China policy that Germany adopted in the first half of the 1890s.

Patiently but relentlessly, the German government was acquiring expertise on China, spreading its influence and paving the way to the establishment of a permanent German base in East Asia. The government had already orchestrated the establishment of the German-Asian Bank and the Consortium for Asian Business precisely with the intention of financing and facilitating the kind of capital-intensive projects that Detring outlined.\textsuperscript{320} In addition to this, by bringing German capital to China, it hoped to partake in the lucrative business of furnishing the Chinese government with loans that it required for paying war reparations after 1895. Close cooperation between these institutions and the German diplomatic representatives in Beijing came as a matter of course, not only when the legation was supposed to offer guarantees for business transactions\textsuperscript{321} but also in personnel matters. In the early 1890s, the legation began actively infiltrating the ranks of Chinese institutions and strategically important companies with German experts, some of whom had been previously trained at the legation or employed by the German enterprises active in China. Besides the Imperial Maritime Customs in Tianjin, where the already mentioned Detring worked as a director, the legation also succeeded in finding employment for German experts at the office of the governor general in Hankou and an important Chinese railway company.\textsuperscript{322} German employees were strategically placed even at Chinese legations in Europe.\textsuperscript{323} In addition to this, it maintained the contacts to the military experts who had been working for local governments since the 1880s.

Relentless were also the merchants in their expansionistic demands. By the mid-1890s, the volume of Sino-German trade had grown to make Germany the second largest exporter of goods to China. At the same time, China became the most important buyer of German war material.\textsuperscript{324} These developments gave more political weight to the voices of the representatives of the German commerce and industry. In 1896, the German ship-owner Wahl, who did not make a secret of his

\textsuperscript{319} ibid., pp. 63-64.
\textsuperscript{320} Ratenhof, U.: Die Chinapolitik des Deutschen Reiches, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{321} Mühlhahn, K.: Herrschaft und Widerstand, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{322} ibid., p. 85.
\textsuperscript{324} Mühlhahn, K.: Herrschaft und Widerstand, p. 83.
wish to see a “German Hong Kong” along the coast of China, wrote to the new Reichskanzler, the Prince of Hohenlohe:

> Germany unfortunately still cannot call its own any naval station serving the needs of its commerce and its navigation, not even of the most modest kind. This, however, is urgently necessary if German navigation and German commerce should not recede, instead of going forward. Not mentioning the wishes and hopes of colonial nature regarding the partition – even if, at present, only an economic one – of China, which, considering the efforts and successes of other nations, in the German case, should like to see the valleys of Yangzi in the north and Xijiang in the south, as well as the provinces bordering the same in the North and the South, I permit myself with the extant petition only to emphasise to Your Excellency the great importance of a German naval station in Southern China as a centre of German navigation and commerce.\(^{325}\)

Wahl’s insistence is a reflection of the new confidence of German merchants but also of the fact that he knew that his views were to a great extent concordant with those of the government and the emperor himself. In 1896, the question discussed in the higher political circles in Berlin was not anymore whether a German colony in China should be established but where in China it should be established.

The decisive point in this regard came with the Sino-Japanese War of 1895. The Chinese defeat and the subsequent Treaty of Shimonoseki, dictated by the victorious Japanese, revealed the vulnerability of the Manchu Empire that persisted despite all the modernisation efforts. China was forced to cede large tracts of its territory to Japan and even though Japan was in turn forced by the strong diplomatic pressure of France, Russia and Germany to drop some of its claims\(^{326}\), it became clear that China could be forced to further concessions. In Berlin, these developments were taken as an indication that the long-awaited moment for planting the German flag along the Chinese coast had come.

Meticulous preparations began. In the course of 1895 and the first half of 1896 the question of the point along the coast of China most ideally suited for becoming a German naval point was thoroughly discussed by the German government. The Ministry of the Navy proposed simultaneous occupation of two points along the coast and proposed three alternatives consisting of two locations each. The Foreign Ministry, favouring occupation of one point only, immediately excluded all of them but the Jiaozhou Bay due to prior claims of other powers. A compromise could not be found

\(^{325}\) ibid., p. 84.

and the discussion reached a dead end. Finally, the Gordian knot was cut by the emperor himself who expressed his dissatisfaction with the indecisiveness of his government and ordered a quick resolution of the problem. A series of personnel changes followed. Baron von Heyking was dispatched to Beijing as the new German envoy to China and von Tirpitz was ordered to personally reconnoitre the Chinese coast and identify a suitable point for the establishment of a naval base. Von Heyking and von Tirpitz concurred that the Jiaozhou Bay was to be preferred to all other alternatives and the navy finally assented on 5 November 1896.327 Already three days later, Wilhelm II ordered a detailed plan for invasion of the Jiaozhou Bay to be prepared. After the plan was developed and approved by the emperor on 22 December, the final preparations began. They included formation of a colonial troop charged with carrying out the actual occupation and grouping of the vessels of the East Asian Squadron at Wusong. Additionally, a construction officer was dispatched to China to prepare a plan for the construction of a port and defensive structures at Jiaozhou.328

At the same time, the diplomatic terrain was being prepared. The Jiaozhou Bay had been claimed by Russia and the Russian envoy to Berlin, count Cassini, indicated this in August 1896 to the German government. During his personal visit to Russia, Wilhelm II was informed by his cousin Emperor Nikolay II, however, that Russia had no long-term plans or interests associated to the Jiaozhou Bay. The German government considered this as sufficient and decided to consult no other power beforehand.329

Finally, in June 1897 Otto von Diederichs was named the Chief of the East Asian Squadron and instructed to prepare immediately the occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay. The only still missing part of the puzzle was the pretext. A weak one was furnished when SMS Cormoran was stoned by the local populace at Wuchang on 31 October. While von Heyking and von Diederichs were still discussing how to instrumentalise the incident, a more serious one occurred on 4 November. Two German missionaries were murdered in Shandong.330 On 7 November, the German envoy received the instructions from the foreign ministry to present reparation demands high enough that they could not be paid by the Chinese government. On the same day, Wilhelm II ordered von Diederichs to carry out the occupation, which the latter did without bloodshed on 14 November.331

4.2.3. The Sanmen Crisis

328 ibid., p. 92.
329 ibid., p. 93.
331 Mühlhahn, K.: Herrschaft und Widerstand, pp. 94-96.
Visconti Venosta would have doubtlessly preferred to pursue the China policy he had inherited from his predecessor and which was limited in scope to two goals: protecting Italian citizens, the majority of whom were missionaries, and trying to facilitate the trade between Italy and China and increase its volume.\textsuperscript{332} The German move in the Far East, however, made the premises on which that strategy was based obsolete. In one way or another it required action of the Italian foreign minister. Visconti Venosta was very quick to apply himself to this question. He arranged, for the first time since the establishment of the Italian diplomatic missions in China, a navy warship to be dispatched to the China Seas\textsuperscript{333}. Compared to the British and Russian China fleets of 27 and 16 vessels, respectively, or even the German one, consisting of eight\textsuperscript{334}, this was a modest and belated beginning, but it responded, at least to a certain extent, to the long-standing wishes of both Italian envoys\textsuperscript{335} and missionaries\textsuperscript{336}. At the same time, plans were being forged for creation of syndicates, which were to furnish capital for ventures in China.\textsuperscript{337} These actions were, nonetheless, carefully weighed and did not pledge any very serious involvement in the Far East. Less than two years after Adua, sobriety still prevailed over political cupidity. Most importantly, the stakes had to be proportionate to the possible gains. In the wake of the Jiaozhou Crisis, Annibale Ferrero, the Italian ambassador in Britain, reiterated from London:

\begin{quote}
Italy, least of all powers, should feel the need to make sacrifices that are greater than the interests it has to defend. If a nation, due to its own errors or the force of circumstances, cannot claim a sufficiently large part of the globe, its interest should be to see the developments take place so slowly as to allow it to regain its powers to such an extent that would render the fulfilment of its goals possible.\textsuperscript{338}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{332} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 331 (XX) from Rome, 13 January 1898.
\textsuperscript{333} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 331 (XX) from Rome, 13 January 1898.
\textsuperscript{334} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 334 (XX) from Beijing, 1 December 1897.
\textsuperscript{335} Italian representatives voiced their concerns with regard to the absence of the Italian navy from the China Seas many times and increasingly often after the German gunboat diplomacy yielded fruit at Jiaozhou Bay. See ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 334 (XX) from Beijing, 1 December 1897 and N. 350(XX) from Beijing, 2 January 1898.
\textsuperscript{336} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1895, N. 292 (XX) from Naples, 14 June 1895.
\textsuperscript{337} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 331 (XX) from Rome, 13 January 1898.
\textsuperscript{338} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 329 (XX) from London, 6 January 1898.
Ferrero’s views were typical for the firmly consequentialist attitudes that shaped the Italian colonial policy after Aduа and still at this point in time they were not likely to find much opposition anywhere in the Italian diplomatic corps. Slowly, however, bolder ideas that ultimately led to the Sanmen Crisis of 1899 were being born.

Visconti Venosta found an ambitious China envoy in marquis Salvago Raggi who had arrived in Beijing in the spring of 1897 and was acting as the chargé d’affaires at the Beijing legation. A man of his time, not immune to sweeping generalisations when it came to describing China and the Chinese\textsuperscript{339}, he was still a diplomat of no small political acumen, able to appreciate the general situation in the Far East and the role Italy could play in it. After the occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay, he began suggesting to the foreign ministry in Rome that Italy might be well advised to emulate the German example. At first, he did this clearly but rather discreetly\textsuperscript{340}, but when Visconti Venosta did not react by ruling this option out and implicitly encouraged it by requesting more information\textsuperscript{341}, he dared to propose an outline of a more detailed strategy. Salvago Raggi believed that, at the end of the day, the Chinese yielded only to a decisive display of force\textsuperscript{342} but he nonetheless thought that careful preparations were of vital importance and that a precipitated action would probably lead to failure.\textsuperscript{343}

Both Visconti Venosta and Salvago Raggi were well aware that the government in Rome would not support colonial adventures of any kind and that if any action in China was to be endeavoured, it required preparation comparable to that demonstrated by Germany prior to the occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay. On 8 March 1898, Salvago Raggi sent to Rome a detailed and comprehensive report in which he outlined the Italian position in China and proposed preparatory measures that needed to be taken before any further diplomatic or military steps were taken. He deemed it necessary, above all, that detailed information be acquired regarding the Chinese coast and the situation in the Chinese provinces in general. Expressing the opinion that this task would take at least a couple of years to complete, he insisted that the network of consular offices needed to

\textsuperscript{339} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 326 (XX) from Beijing, 23 November 1897.
\textsuperscript{340} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 345 (XX) from Beijing, 21 December 1897.
\textsuperscript{341} In fact, Visconti Venosta was thinking along the same lines as Salvago Raggi and requested a detailed report from the latter in January 1898, even before receiving his dispatch from 21 December 1897. See ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 331 (XX) from Rome, 13 January 1898.
\textsuperscript{342} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 364 (XX) from Beijing, 7 February 1898.
\textsuperscript{343} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 370 (XX) from Beijing, 8 March 1898.
be significantly extended, especially in Southern China, in order to have more immediate access to information and that the Italian navy would be required to reconnoitre the coast as the German navy had done prior to the invasion of the Jiaozhou Bay. Secondly, he believed that it was of great importance that the consular staff be more adequately trained for their service in China and provided a detailed example of the training programme implemented by the British embassy in Beijing. Finally, he recommended enhancing Italian prestige in China by permanently stationing more navy vessels in the China Seas and increasing the budget of the Beijing legation to be spent on servants, palanquins and mounted guards. Salvago Raggi did not obscure his support for the idea of obtaining a naval station in China and even proposed a few possible points along the Chinese coast, one of them being the Sanmen Bay, which were, in his opinion, suitable for such a use. He repeatedly pointed out, however, that Italy was ill-prepared and hence not in the position to take any steps in that direction at the moment.

As Salvago Raggi was completing his report, the Marco Polo, the warship announced by Visconti Venosta, was about to reach Chinese waters. The reports dispatched by captain Incoronato stood in stark contrast to the careful language of Salvago Raggi. On 21 March, only a few weeks after his arrival in China he reported to the minister of the navy:

*If Italy does not want to be a mere spectator of the developments in China, it needs, in my opinion, to act immediately with force and capital, taking advantage of the complete confusion that has ensued after the latest events, relying completely on Germany, as all the other nations are ill-disposed towards newcomers.*

Incoronato’s report is historically relevant for two reasons. Firstly, it bears evidence of the same impetuosity that would characterise the actions of the Italian minister De Martino a year later. This is in itself a matter of no small importance as Incoronato was the only person who remained involved in the Sanmen affair from its inception early in 1898 until its disastrous climax in March 1899. Secondly, whether by pure chance or led by his political instinct, Incoronato correctly assumed that Italy could not count on British assistance in this matter, an assumption that Canevaro, tragically for him, would not share.

344 ibid.
345 ibid.
346 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 371 (XX) from Hong Kong, 26 March 1898.
347 All other noteworthy protagonists from early 1898 would be gone by March 1899. Visconti Venosta would be replaced by Canevaro as the foreign minister, chargé d’affaires Salvago Raggi would be replaced by the new Italian minister to China De Martino and the minister of the navy Brin would be replaced by Palumbo.
The Captain of the *Marco Polo* believed that precisely for this reason Italy was well advised to act immediately:

*All this leads me to deduce that now is the appropriate moment for Italy to act, assuming it does not want to be left out. Any delay in launching an action with this goal could wake England’s attention, now occupied with other and graver matters.*

Incoronato’s advice to Brin was thus diametrically opposed to Salvago Raggi’s advice to Visconti Venosta although both Incoronato and Salvago Raggi were in favour of an Italian naval station on the Chinese coast. The former, being a navy officer, tended to see the matter in more simplistic terms. Although his good intentions cannot be denied, he lacked a deeper understanding of the political situation both in Italy and China. In July, he wrote to the minister of the navy:

*I, personally, always motivated by the benefit of the country, hold any occupation for dangerous, but only when by the word occupation is meant what was disgracefully done in Africa. But if the occupation of a port served the purpose, at least for now, of providing the vessels stationed here with a small deposit of coal, this possession could be useful, which, however, should not oblige Italy, I repeat, to spend even one cent, but it should rather be left to private enterprises to develop, in the course of time, the commerce in that port.*

He firmly believed that Italy was in the position to enhance its prestige in the Orient if it could muster its courage and strength quickly enough. Incoronato thus clearly represented the heroic element in the Italian colonial politics, to make use of Weber’s terminology, led by the ethics of ultimate goals rather than political responsibility.

It is difficult, and equally fruitless, to try to imagine what would have happened if Incoronato’s advice had been followed. It remains to be said that even Salvago Raggi, who was certainly more aware of the political responsibility he bore, started giving signs of having changed his mind towards the end of the month. On 25 March, he reported to Visconti Venosta that:

*The unanimity of the powers in obtaining naval stations in China and the notion of seizing the current propitious moment, such as may not present itself again, could make it necessary for Italy to imitate actions of the others, disregarding the*

---

348 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 371 (XX) from Hong Kong, 26 March 1898.
349 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 388 (XX) from Nagasaki, 25 July 1898
unfavourable circumstances in which we are regarding the knowledge of the country, the lack of personnel, the lack of preparation.\textsuperscript{350}

A couple of paragraphs later, referring to the “long time required by correspondence to reach Rome from Beijing”, he allowed himself a few final “observations”:

\[\ldots\] in case also Italy should find it soon necessary to demand of China concessions analogous to those already obtained by other powers.

\textit{It is to be expected, in my opinion, that Italian demands will be received by these ministers with a compliance less complete than that demonstrated towards other nations, as they have never been taught a lesson by us and, not being familiar with our country, they fear it less; but doubtlessly we would not face a categorical and definite refusal. All opposition would be limited to a greater obstinacy in negotiations, which could last a bit longer than the German and the Russian ones.}

\textit{For this reason, I believe, in the case of this eventuality, one should proceed with firmness and follow the tactics employed by Germany and Russia of occupying what one is, in fact, demanding. For this no great deployment of forces would be necessary.}\textsuperscript{351}

Even now, Salvago Raggi restrained himself to giving an opinion without asking for the permission to act, as De Martino would repeatedly do later. Interspersing his report with conditionals, he clearly signalised to Visconti Venosta that all the responsibility for this action was weighing on him. The report reached the foreign ministry more than a month and a half later, on 14 May 1898.

Domestic political instability prevented any further action in the Far East. Ironically, it had nothing to do with China but Visconti Venosta was at the centre of it. His resignation, as a sign of protest against the government’s repressive treatment of Catholic organisations, precipitated a crisis that led to the fall of government on 1 June. After an abortive attempt by Marquis di Rudini to reorganise his cabinet, general Luigi Pelloux formed a new government on 29 June, appointing the navy admiral Felice Napoleone Canevaro as his foreign minister.

In the meantime, Incoronato was acting with a great deal of autonomy in China and seeking pragmatic and immediate solutions to problems. Thus, when informed that the viceroy of Nanjing had issued a proclamation instructing his subjects to obstruct the trade of silk cocoons, he saw Italian interests endangered and immediately demanded to be received by the viceroy. At first, he was denied a reception under the pretext that the viceroy, due to his old age, would not be able to

\textsuperscript{350} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 374 (XX) from Beijing, 25 March 1898.
\textsuperscript{351} ibid.
return the visit, the returning of a visit being a standard part of diplomatic ceremonial. The captain of the *Marco Polo* readily responded that a returning visit was not necessary and demanded to be received by the viceroy nonetheless. The reception granted, the viceroy apologised, claiming that the proclamation had not been translated well and was in no way intended to harm commercial interests of the Europeans. Incoronato responded, however, that “it was not sufficient not to impede the trade, but that it was necessary to protect the Europeans and their property and facilitate all their commercial activities”.\(^{352}\) The viceroy assured him that this would be put into practice and the captain reported that the results of his visit were immediately visible as the purchase of cocoons went well that year “whereas in the previous years, for one reason or another, there had always been matters to deplore, more or less serious”.\(^{353}\)

It is difficult to tell whether Incoronato’s actions from the summer of 1898 influenced the Sino-Italian relations in a positive or a negative way and whether they, for that matter, left a lasting impact at all. While three foreign ministers and as many ministers of the navy passed in succession in Rome and the Beijing legation was being handed over by Salvago Raggi to De Martino, he enjoyed a great degree of freedom in his actions.\(^ {354}\) His own accounts suggest that he may have caused more than one diplomatic embarrassment, although he did not seem to perceive them as such. Contrary to his practice from Nanjing, in Beijing he insisted on receiving a returning visit by the ministers of the Zongli Yamen and even berated one of the ministers openly for his reluctance to render him one. In his report to Palumbo, he frankly admitted that he, “as a captain, was not entitled to receiving a returning visit by a minister, but having obtained one, and having complained about it was an achievement in itself.”\(^ {355}\) Salvago Raggi, who was also present, did not mention the incident in his reports.

By the autumn of 1898, the stage was set for the final act of the Sanmen affair. Canevaro, who had been the navy minister in the short-lived June government headed by di Rudinì, was now at the Consulta under Pelloux and De Martino had taken over the Beijing legation. In his memoirs, Salvago Raggi would later claim that De Martino had firmly set his mind on occupying a strip of Chinese coast even before arriving in Beijing in September.\(^ {356}\) His claims are supported by De

\(^{352}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 383 (XX) from Shanghai, 18 June 1898.

\(^{353}\) ibid.

\(^{354}\) ibid.

\(^{355}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 388 (XX) from Nagasaki, 25 July 1898.

Martino’s correspondence with Canevaro, in which he requested to be granted permission to act immediately. On 17 October, he telegraphed to the foreign minister:

Captain Incoronato deems a coaling station absolutely indispensable for securing autonomy of our vessels, which could otherwise be put out of action, as happened to the Marco Polo last spring. I believe that it would be easy to obtain this station from China, in the area of San Mun, in the province of Ce-kiang [sic]\(^{357}\), which is the only coastal province still free. It is preferred by captain Incoronato, and being far away from all the interest spheres, one would not face difficulties posed by the powers, while the distance would make our abstention in any possible complication practicable. This being a simple coaling station, the cost would be reduced to maintenance of the vessels. Kindly authorise me to make use of the current favourable circumstances. As the Marco Polo will have completed the inspection of the coast in one month, I believe we will still be in time, but only just. Without this station, which, as far as China is concerned, makes us equal to other powers, we will have to renounce all hopes of gaining other advantages of whatever kind; being in possession of this station, however, we could obtain concessions for important mines, obtain agreements for building railway in Ce-kiang, which is one of the richest provinces, develop thriving commerce with Italy.\(^{358}\)

De Martino’s ideas were little more than wishful thinking. Even though the British minister in Beijing seemed to be in favour of an Italian action in China\(^{359}\), it was clear that the government in London could not remain indifferent to yet another demand that threatened to destabilise the region. The British public opinion saw itself threatened by every move endeavoured by other powers\(^{360}\) and reacted with considerable excitation.\(^{361}\) Ferrero had indicated as early as March 1898 that “the primary concern of the British government [...] is to avoid that the example Germany gave by occupying Kiao-Ciou [sic] be imitated and start, with unpredictable consequences, a partition of the

\(^{357}\) Ce-Kiang or Cekiag was the transliteration commonly used in Italy for 浙江 (Zhejiang). In English texts the predominant transliteration is Chekiang.

\(^{358}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 392 (XX) from Beijing, 17 October 1898.

\(^{359}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 378 (XX) from Beijing, 27 April 1898.


\(^{361}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 355 (XX) from London, 9 March 1898.
Incoronato seconded his opinion a few weeks later in his somewhat simplistic manner:

_England, today, cannot see favourably our intervention that may pose new difficulties for the politics of financial profit, which inspires its actions in these waters._

In August, Ferrero reported from London that critics of the foreign minister, Lord Salisbury, were becoming more vocal, accusing him of having ceded in China to other powers more than the “political and commercial interests of Great Britain allowed.”

De Martino’s nonchalance regarding the possible reactions of other powers in response to Italian demands was, hence, a rather dangerous and misleading signal to Rome.

Equally unfounded were his claims that obtaining a coaling station would automatically lead to further railway and mining concessions. The Qing government was extremely reluctantly giving strategically important concessions, mostly in cases in which it was threatened either militarily or financially and no other solution seemed possible, and obtaining concessions was always a strenuous process with uncertain outcome. This fact, which was well known to Salvago Raggi, must have been known to the new Italian minister, as well.

Only a day after sending this telegram, De Martino dispatched a confidential report in which he outlined the preliminary results of Incoronato’s preparations for his reconnaissance mission:

_Captain Incoronato has studied, as was his duty, the points of the coast among which we could choose one for our coaling station [...] though reserving the right to say his final word after having inspected the entire coast, he believes that the locality of San-Moon [sic] should, in all respects, be preferred._

In the report, De Martino repeated the primary arguments from his telegram and supported his convictions with more details:

_In the meantime, I can confirm what I had the honour to telegraph; that is, that I believe it to be an easy thing, at the moment, to obtain this station from China. The_
impotence of this government has now reached the highest degree; the revolution at the palace, which has de facto dethroned the emperor, has removed from power every man who had experience, merit and the strength of character; the counsellors of the dowager empress are, due to the circumstances in which they were raised, motivated by blind reaction against anything European and, at the same time, dominated by immense fear of European powers; and it is uncertain which is greater, their confusion or their weakness.

Some of my colleagues have not obscured from me the fact that it is now enough to desire in order to obtain, as long as one desires seriously. But such a state of affairs cannot last; the imbecility of the current cowardly administration will destroy its own self; for this reason, I considered it my duty to warn, in my telegram, that if I believed we were in time to safeguard our interests in the only efficient way, these favourable circumstances were offering themselves to us for the last time. And it is my conviction that this is the last time, also because I cannot doubt that as happened with Fokien [sic] it will occur with Ce-Kiang that this last free strip of the coast will not remain a res nullius for much longer; and that we, not only for now, but for ever, will be excluded from such a place of activity, of profits, and of riches, that the exclusion equals to decay.367

De Martino thus in no way relativised his previously expressed beliefs but expressed them with even more insistence and supported them with what seemed to be insight into the internal political affairs of the Beijing court. Once again, to follow his conclusions meant to follow him on the path of believing what was desirable rather than what was realistic. After the coup d’état on 21 September ended the Hundred Days’ Reform of the young Guangxu Emperor, the Empress Dowager Cixi quickly and efficiently restored her power. With the support of anti-western conservatives368 she veered back to the more bellicose and unbending political course that would eventually lead to the military confrontation with foreign powers in 1900.369 In other words, the propitious moment that De Martino was hoping to seize had already passed and the chances of obtaining a coaling station from the die-hard conservatives by then in power were much lower than they would have been prior to the coup.

367 ibid.
The minister’s detailed explanations were not necessary. Less than a week after receiving his telegram and before receiving the detailed report, Canevaro signed the authorisation for negotiations *ad referendum*. From this moment on, the machinery was set in motion and the events quickly followed one another. On 24 November, De Martino reported that Incoronato had finished inspecting the coast and that the only suitable point for establishing a coaling station along the Chinese coast was indeed the Sanmen Bay, “excellent from the navigating aspect and having various anchorages”.

The naivety, or bias, of his previous assessments was becoming visible already at this early stage: he had to admit that further expenses would be necessary for building jetties as the tide was between 15 and 21 feet. He underlined nonetheless, that “considering the commercial, industrial and political advantages in the future of this station” his opinion, as well as that of Incoronato, was in favour of the occupation.

On 3 December, he telegraphically informed Canevaro that “Salvago’s investigations confirmed that the representatives of Russia, France, Germany and Great Britain would not oppose an occupation in Ce-Kiang [sic]”. De Martino then moved on to insist that preliminary negotiations *ad referendum* were “absolutely impossible” in China and that the whole plan should be completely abandoned if the government was not “determined to proceed without retreating”. Instead of the preliminary negotiations *ad referendum*, he proposed simply revealing the Italian need of a coaling station to the Chinese government and proceeding to the actual occupation in the case of refusal. He requested further battleships as reinforcement, noting that he had been assured by Incoronato that the *Marco Polo* could begin the occupation on its own.

The Italian minister might not have been untruthful but he was certainly withholding important information from the foreign minister. Salvago Raggi’s report was in fact much more nuanced than De Martino’s summary implied. Firstly, it clearly stated that he had not openly asked the representatives of the mentioned countries what their reaction to an Italian attempt to obtain a concession in Zhejiang would be. He had instead referred to the rumours then circulating in Beijing that Japan was intending to do so and attempted to infer from their reactions how they might respond to a similar Italian endeavour. This detail became known to Canevaro only on 4 February.

---

370 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 393 (XX) from Rome, 24 October 1898.
371 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 397 (XX) from Shanghai, 24 November 1898.
372 ibid.
373 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 399 (XX) from Beijing, 3 December 1898.
374 ibid.
1899 when Salvago Raggi’s report reached Rome. Secondly, only in the case of Germany did Salvago Raggi indicate that no opposition was to be expected. In the case of Russia, he indicated that while the Russian chargé d’affaires stated that in China “il y a de la place pour tout le monde” and that if the Japanese were sensible enough to remain in the South no one would try to prevent them from doing that, it was still possible that Russia might, in the case of Italy, “for reasons of general politics, make use of this opportunity to cause us embarrassments”. He also pointed out that France modelled its China policy very much after the Russian China policy and that only if one could be certain that Russia would make no objections to the Italian demands, one could also count on French neutrality. Finally, and most importantly, De Martino chose to ignore the following paragraph from Salvago Raggi’s report in his telegram to Canevaro:

I found out, however, from a secretary of the British legation that when England obtained the promise that no concession would be granted in the provinces surrounding the Yang-Tze, Ce-kiang was meant, which, although it does not reach Yang-tze, England considered important to protect from any occupation due to its riches and its commerce, and it was observed that, using the Ciusan [sic] islands as a pretext, one could intervene against a cession to other powers.

In fairness to De Martino, it has to be said that the British minister MacDonald, referring to the Japanese, also said that there was “enough space to settle down so far from the Ciusan as to not inconvenience us” but it should not be forgotten that it was only his personal opinion whereas the mentioned secretary had explained the logic behind the long-term strategy of the Foreign Office. Even more importantly, once again the Italian minister chose to fully obscure the information that could influence the decision of the Italian government with regard to occupation of the Sanmen Bay in what he believed to be an unfavourable way. Forwarding all the information that Salvago Raggi’s report furnished to Rome was certainly impracticable as telegraph costs were considerable, but it is nonetheless evident that in decocting the report to one sentence De Martino was not led by the idea of frugality only.

In the meantime, Canevaro was trying to arrange diplomatic support abroad. While the government in Rome was still discussing the idea of obtaining a coaling station he telegraphed to

---

375 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, Appendix to N. 416 (XX) from Beijing, 5 December 1898.
376 ibid.
377 ibid.
378 ibid.
379 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 367 (XX) from Beijing, 7 February 1898.
Lanza, the Italian ambassador in Berlin, to inform the German secretary of state about the Italian design, soliciting his support.\textsuperscript{380} Similar instructions were given to the new ambassador in London, de Renzis.\textsuperscript{381} In both Berlin and London, there was a certain level of hesitation with regard to the Italian plan. Von Bülow, the German secretary of state for foreign affairs, merely said that he would inform the Emperor and became visibly reticent. From this and the private conversations he had had with von Bülow, Lanza inferred that the German secretary of state was of the opinion that Italy “should not undertake a grand colonial policy, which could weaken the country internally, and cause expenses, before the Italian economic and financial situation improved.”\textsuperscript{382} Salisbury’s response was generally more positive but he refused to give any pledge of definite commitment before he studied the situation in more detail.\textsuperscript{383} A week later, he informed the Italian ambassador that Britain would not oppose the plan as long as Italy pledged not to cede the concession to any other power.\textsuperscript{384} To make the matter more complicated, de Renzis was not completely candid with the British foreign minister during their initial conversation. Believing it to be more prudent to see, at first, what the general British attitude was, he indicated that Italy was interested solely in the islands in the Sanmen Bay and not the coast itself.\textsuperscript{385} What de Renzis did not know was that Canevaro had already intimated to Currie, the British ambassador in Rome, that the “Italian influence could spread over all the parts of Cekiang which were not yet under the British influence.”\textsuperscript{386} Salisbury, having demanded from de Renzis a clarification in this regard and having been assured that it was the intent of the Italian government to demand only the islands, did not insist further. He gave his approval but the approval was for obtaining the islands in the Sanmen Bay and not the entire bay.

Canevaro, deluded or unwilling to understand the conditions of Salisbury’s acquiescence, began firmly believing that he could count on British support. The official text of the approval reached the Consulta via Currie on 4 February, the same day he received the original text of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1898, N. 400 (XX) from Beijing, 16 December 1898.
\item ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 405 (XX) from Rome, 12 January 1899.
\item ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 408 (XX) from Berlin, 13 January 1899.
\item ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 406 (XX) from London, 12 January 1899.
\item ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 411 (XX) from London, 23 January 1899.
\item ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 412 (XX) from London, 12 January 1899.
\item Borsa, G.: Italia e Cina, p. 85.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Salvago Raggi’s report. Canevaro might have been well advised to compare the two. The letter of the British ambassador was showing clear signs of being in accordance with what Salvago Raggi had been told by the unnamed secretary at the British legation in Beijing:

*Her Majesty’s Government [...] do not make any objection to the proposal of the Italian Government to obtain from China the lease of the above mentioned islands [Tafu, Kingang and Nintin] in the Bay of San Mun for use as a coaling station. San Mun Bay is however in close proximity to the Chusan Archipelago, in regard to which Great Britain has Treaty rights and engagements with China, and the islands in question are moreover situated off the coast of Chekiang, a Province included in what has recently been defined as the Yangtze region. In view of these circumstances Her Majesty’s Government consider that they are fairly entitled to ask the Government of Italy for a written assurance that, in the event of their obtaining from China the cession or lease of the islands referred to, or any part of them, Italy will never alienate them by cession, grant, lease or otherwise, to any other Power.*

The Italian foreign minister was either unable to understand that Salisbury’s approval was, in fact, clearly stating how far the latter was willing to go in the support of the Italian demands or he believed that with additional pressure more could be obtained from the Foreign Office. On 6 February, he wrote to Currie thanking for the support already promised and requesting that it should be extended to the whole of Zhejiang province. At the same time, he sent instructions to de Renzis to explain to Salisbury “with the greatest frankness” how the misunderstanding had occurred.

What he did not realise was that Salisbury and MacDonald, unwilling to refuse Italy openly but also finding it extremely inconvenient to yield completely to its demands, had begun playing a double game. MacDonald, who initially might even have been in favour of an Italian naval station in Zhejiang, started feeling increasingly uncomfortable with regard to De Martino’s unrelenting demands. On 16 February, referring to a telegram he had dispatched to Salisbury on 10 February, he admitted that the telegram had been “sent at the special request of the Italian Minister” and added:

---

387 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 418 (XX) from Rome, 2 February 1899.
388 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 419 (XX) from Rome, 6 February 1899.
389 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 420 (XX) from Rome, 6 February 1899.
I gathered from my conversations with Signor De Martino that the scheme originated with himself and that he was afraid that his Government were inclined to view it with disfavour. He evidently thought that the Italian Government would be mainly guided by the opinion of her Majesty’s Government in the matter.\(^{390}\)

Salisbury, on the other hand, seems not to have been overly enthusiastic about the Italian plan from the very beginning but was ostensibly cooperative in order not to spoil the traditionally good relations with Italy. His willingness to give sincere support to the Italian efforts was further reduced by the beginning of secret Anglo-Russian negotiations in February 1899, which were successfully concluded two months later with mutual pledges that no further concessions would be demanded by either power in the Yangtze valley and north of the Great Wall. An English diplomatic action supportive of the Italian demands would thus have directly endangered the negotiations and opened another race for concessions between the two archrivals.\(^{391}\) This development rendered it necessary for Salisbury to find a way of torpedoing the Italian operation subtle enough to remain invisible for the Italian government.

The Foreign Office decided to use inaction as a positive policy. It is formulated in fairly obvious terms in the report sent by MacDonald on 16 February, probably the crucial document for understanding the logic behind the British actions in the Sanmen affair. In a confidential appendix to the report, he wrote:

*I cannot say that I view the scheme with favour myself, for it is another step towards the dismemberment of China, and an example likely to be followed by other Powers. There is at present a lull in enterprises of this nature, and it appears to me very undesirable to encourage their renewal. Still I should be very averse to opposing the scheme, for I am of opinion that the Chinese Government will never grant the concession without pressure of a kind which the Italian Government are hardly able to apply, and our opposition would be keenly resented by the Italians.*\(^{392}\)

In other words, MacDonald was implying that in order to cause the Italian plan to fail it was enough to do nothing. Not wishing to take any risks, Salisbury went even further. During his next conversation with de Renzis, he stated “very amiably” that Britain would not make any obstacles if the Chinese government decided to acknowledge the province of Zhejiang as an Italian interest.

\(^{391}\) ibid., p. 116.
\(^{392}\) ibid., p. 198. Interestingly enough, the importance of this document for the outcome of the Sanmen affair has never been sufficiently emphasised. Borsa found it important enough to reprint it in his book but then surprisingly came to the conclusion that England had supported the Italian demands (p. 124).
sphere but only if Italy refrained from using military force during the negotiations. The head of the Foreign Office knew very well that without auxiliary use of force, the Italian diplomats had no chance of succeeding in their efforts. It was, after all, his own minister in Beijing who had told De Martino only a couple of months earlier: “Il n’y a de vrais avec les chinois que l’affirmation de lord Elgin: les chinois ne comprennent que la force”.

Salisbury’s stratagem possibly worked out better than even he himself had hoped. It drove a wedge between Canevaro and De Martino, who, from this moment on, would have two very different notions of the preferred modus operandi. The Italian minister in Beijing, grave though his previous mistakes and even greater his irresponsibility might have been, understood the situation at the current junction much better than his superior in Rome. He knew well that without the coercive power of Italian battleships his words at the Zongli Yamen meant little. Already in December, he had been warning Canevaro about this, albeit in a report which reached Rome only on 4 February. Needless to say, when the latter informed him that, “following the advice of lord Salisbury”, he was to employ only diplomatic means during the negotiations, he might have been less than completely satisfied. Canevaro, on the other hand, led by both his political and moral convictions, was fully relying on his agreements with Salisbury and reporting his every step to London. Believing that the matter regarding supportive diplomatic action of the British minister in Beijing had been settled, he began taking care of other preparatory steps with great diligence. He first telegraphed to the Italian ambassador in Berlin to inform Italy’s most important ally in Europe about the Italian intentions in China, including the full text of the telegram sent to De Martino with the precise geographical coordinates of the area to be requested from the Chinese government. On the following two days, he gave similar instructions to the Italian representatives in Tokyo and Washington, this time, however, referring only to a “naval station in Ce-kiang”. The

393 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 426 (XX) from London, 15 February 1899.
394 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 417 (XX) from Beijing, 6 December 1899.
395 ibid.
396 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 427 (XX) from Rome, 18 February 1899.
397 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 428 (XX) from Rome, 18 February 1899.
398 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 429 (XX) from Rome, 18 February 1899.
399 When Salisbury showed signs of hesitation on 22 February (see ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 437 (XX) from London, 22 February 1899), Canevaro suspended his order that the Government of the United States should be informed (see ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 438 (XX) from Rome, 22 February 1899). The
government of the third member of the Triple Alliance, Austria-Hungary, as well as the governments in Paris and St. Petersburg, were, for the moment, being kept in the dark. Canevaro then arranged that the Elba, another battleship of the Italian navy, be sent to the Sanmen Bay where it was supposed to, as his orders stated, “study the area without waking suspicions, gain affection of the local officials and inhabitants, spending generously, if necessary, but without exceeding 8000 dollars”\textsuperscript{401}.

It seems probable that he was also careful enough to start preparing the terrain at home. On 22 February, he made an appearance at the Chamber of Deputies. The appearance was ostensibly due to a question on the “governance of our interests in China”, presented by the deputy Valle Angelo, but the evident benevolence of the questioning Valle Angelo and his speech, in which he urged the minister to “speedily obtain from the Chinese Government the same treatment given to other nations [and] use all his energy in order to make possible that our vessels may anchor in ports in which the Italian flag flutters in the wind”\textsuperscript{402} make it conceivable that the question had been conceived by the minister himself.

While De Martino was awaiting orders to begin the negotiations and Canevaro was awaiting a formal confirmation from London that MacDonald would not only be benevolently indifferent to the Italian demands, but give active diplomatic support\textsuperscript{403}, Salisbury did not see a reason to rush. Prior to giving his final consent, he insisted:

\textit{[...]} that the exclusive interest of Italy in Che-kiang, the recognition of which by the Chinese Government is desired, does not extend to any part of the drainage valley of the Yangtsze [sic], does not apply to matters of industry or commerce, that no impediment of any kind will be placed in the way of British commercial enterprise, and that, in the event of any railways being constructed in the Province by the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[400] ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 452 (XX) from Rome, 27 February 1899.
\item[401] ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 430 (XX) from Rome, 19 February 1899.
\item[403] ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 428 (XX) from Rome, 18 February 1899.
\end{footnotes}
agency of British subjects or companies, they will not be precluded from taking mortgages on the lines as security for the loans advanced for building them.  

The delays in responses from London rendered the coordination between Canevaro and De Martino, as well as that between the latter and the Elba, rather difficult. The danger that the Chinese government might infer from the movements of the Italian vessels that Italy was about to demand the Sanmen Bay, and declare it an open port beforehand, preferring this as a lesser evil to ceding it to another country, was growing daily. Conjectures regarding Italian intentions in China began appearing in newspapers, rendering the danger all the more realistic.

Finally, Salisbury having instructed MacDonald to lend his support to the Italian colleague, Canevaro ordered De Martino on 26 February to begin with negotiations. The government in Vienna was informed the same day. Canevaro would wait until 28 February, the day the negotiations actually began, to inform the governments of Spain, France and Russia. Only on 1 March, a day after De Martino had spoken with the ministers of the Zongli Yamen, Canevaro instructed de Renzis to inform the Chinese minister in London, who was also accredited in Rome, about the beginning of negotiations.

During the first half of March, the critical events of the Sanmen affair unfolded. Although they may appear, at first sight, as a concatenation of unfortunate circumstances that led Italy into a diplomatic disaster they are only a logical continuation of the events that had preceded them. On 2

---

404 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 440 (XX) from Foreign Office, 21 February 1899.
405 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 454 (XX) from Rome, 27 February 1899.
406 De Martino expressed his fear of this scenario several times. See ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 425 (XX) from Beijing, 12 February 1899. His opinion was shared by other diplomats; see ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 446 (XX) from Beijing, 25 February 1899.
409 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 450 (XX) from Rome, 26 February 1899.
410 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 451 (XX) from Rome, 26 February 1899.
411 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 455 (XX) from Rome, 28 February 1899.
412 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 456 (XX) from Rome, 1 March 1899.
March\textsuperscript{413}, the ministers of the Zongli Yamen responded to De Martino’s request by returning the note that he had sent them and saying that what had been requested “would be detrimental to the relations of trust and friendship, maintained until now, between the two states”.\textsuperscript{414} De Martino reported to Canevaro on the following day and expressed his opinion that the diplomatic outrage the Chinese had committed by rejecting his note furnished a pretext for obtaining “everything the other powers had obtained”. In the same breath, he requested the permission to send the Marco Polo to the Sanmen Bay immediately.\textsuperscript{415} As was to be expected, Canevaro telegraphed immediately to de Renzis and instructed him to inform Salisbury about the Chinese reaction, hoping that the latter could be induced to exert pressure on the Chinese government to retake the note.\textsuperscript{416} Unfortunately for Canevaro, his telegram reached de Renzis only on the following day, a Sunday, and Salisbury was out of London.\textsuperscript{417} While waiting for a response from London, Canevaro was considering his alternatives. On 6 March, he desired to know from De Martino and Incoronato whether they considered feasible an occupation of the Sanmen Bay with only the Marco Polo, the Elba and the Vespucci\textsuperscript{418}, the last vessel being due in the China Seas within a week\textsuperscript{419}. By doing this, Canevaro certainly did not give any new ideas to either De Martino or Incoronato, who were both in favour of an occupation, but he did indicate that he saw the occupation as an option to be considered, in the given circumstances, despite the attitude of lord Salisbury. As if sensing that Canevaro was indecisive, both De Martino and Incoronato telegraphed to Rome even before receiving his telegram. The former informed the foreign minister that the Chinese ministers refused to retake the note even after interventions of the British and the German representatives and urged him to proceed to occupation.\textsuperscript{420} The latter, in a telegram to Palumbo, showed more restraint but nonetheless expressed

\textsuperscript{413} Borsa claimed that the response of the Chinese ministers reached De Martino on 3 March (p. 98). From reading carefully De Martino’s telegram (ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 467 (XX) from Beijing, 3 March 1899) it becomes clear, however, that he had received their response on 2 March.

\textsuperscript{414} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 467 (XX) from Beijing, 3 March 1899.

\textsuperscript{415} ibid.

\textsuperscript{416} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 468 (XX) from Beijing, 4 March 1899.

\textsuperscript{417} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 472 (XX) from Beijing, 5 March 1899.

\textsuperscript{418} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 473 (XX) from Rome, 6 March 1899.

\textsuperscript{419} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 469 (XX) from Rome, 4 March 1899.

\textsuperscript{420} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 476 (XX) from Beijing, 7 March 1899.
the opinion that the Sanmen Bay should be occupied immediately. Once Canevaro’s telegram reached the Italian legation, De Martino promptly answered that, judging by the German experience of the Jiaozhou Bay, three vessels were absolutely sufficient and added that “Incoronato had declared himself ready to act”.

When he issued the authorisation for presenting an ultimatum shortly before 14h on 8 March, Canevaro may have believed that a “pacific occupation”, an occupation without military engagement, was possible. He instructed de Renzis to inform Salisbury about the ultimatum in these terms. More probably, however, he followed De Martino’s understanding that the act of occupation did not represent a betrayal of the agreement with Britain but simply meant that, from that point on, Italy would have to proceed without the British support. He certainly did not expect a vehement reaction from London. The reaction came nonetheless, only a couple of hours later, from Rome. Currie was informed that the authorisation for presenting an ultimatum had been telegraphed to Beijing and hurried immediately to the Consulta. He urged the foreign minister to suspend the authorisation, stating that Salisbury should not be put in front of a fait accompli. Currie’s exhortations did not fail to leave an impression. Already at 16:32h, Canevaro suspended the authorisation and subsequently also suspended the instructions for informing Salisbury that he had sent to de Renzis. In his desire to inform De Martino in time about the change of strategy, he ordered that the telegram should be classified as “urgent”.

---

421 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 477 (XX) from Beijing, 7 March 1899.
422 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 479 (XX) from Beijing, 7 March 1899.
423 Borsa claimed that the telegram had been sent at noon (p. 107). The original of the telegram (ASDMAE, Serie Politica P, 86 – Cina – Rapporti Politici, 1899, 406, N. 499 from Canevaro to De Martino, 8 March 1899) states clearly, however, that the telegram was sent at 14h. Since the telegram needed to be coded first, this implies that Canevaro had issued the order shortly before 14h. This detail is important in order to get an idea of how quickly Currie reacted.
424 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 482 (XX) from Rome, 8 March 1899.
425 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 443 (XX) from Beijing, 23 February 1899.
426 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 492 (XX) from Beijing, 9 March 1899.
427 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 483 (XX) from Beijing, 8 March 1899.
428 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 484 (XX) from Beijing, 8 March 1899.
Fig. 1. Canevaro’s second telegram to De Martino from 8 March 1899

The telegram reached De Martino at 7:30h on 10 March.\textsuperscript{430} The British minister in Beijing claimed later, that he believed the suspension order to be referring to his own telegram he had sent on 7 March, in which he had implicitly requested the authorisation to present an ultimatum.\textsuperscript{431} Thus when he received another telegram that authorised him to present the ultimatum at 14:15h, which Canevaro had sent first but not classified as “urgent”, he did not realise that the two telegrams had arrived in the reversed order. De Martino proceeded to present the ultimatum the same evening but informed Canevaro only on the following day.\textsuperscript{432}

It has been convincingly argued that De Martino was, if not fully aware of the reversal in the order of arrival of the telegrams, not completely certain of the correctness of his conduct and

\textsuperscript{431} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 547 (XX) from Beijing, 22 March 1899.
\textsuperscript{432} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 516 (XX) from Beijing, 11 March 1899.
probably suspected that he was ordered to suspend the presentation of the ultimatum and await further instructions.\textsuperscript{433} He probably preferred, however, to take the matter in his own hands, possibly exasperated by Canevaro’s hesitation and his unwillingness to act independently from Britain. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that he presented the ultimatum immediately after receiving the second telegram on 10 March, without previously consulting MacDonald.\textsuperscript{434}

Canevaro immediately recalled De Martino\textsuperscript{435} and committed an even graver error. Desiring to show to Salisbury that there had been no hidden agenda behind the accidental presentation of the ultimatum, in the same breath, he ordered De Martino to hand over the legation to the British minister.\textsuperscript{436} Canevaro’s hastiness cost him the ministerial position. Although he seemed to have fended off parliamentary attacks, albeit very mild ones, on 14 March\textsuperscript{437}, the deputies attacked him with renewed vigour after the Easter recess. On 2 May, Pelloux and Canevaro were invited to appear at the Chamber of Deputies. The prime minister and the foreign minister were criticised at length on the account of the general China policy of the government but also, more specifically, for their management of the current situation, including the recall of De Martino and the handing over of the legation.\textsuperscript{438} On the following day, Pelloux informed the chamber, in a very heated atmosphere, that the ministers had offered their resignations to the king.\textsuperscript{439}

Visconti Venosta returned to the Consulta when the new cabinet was formed on 14 May. As Salvago Raggi had been appointed the new minister to China after the recall of De Martino, the constellation resembled very much the one that saw the initiation of the Sanmen scheme. The resemblance was, however, only a superficial one. Salvago Raggi, who had initially been in favour of postponing any territorial demands but showed signs of having changed his mind towards the end of March 1898, became by now fully convinced that after the Sanmen Bay had been demanded, there was no way of retreating without “destroying all our prestige here, and completely renouncing

\textsuperscript{434} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 584 (XX) from Beijing, 10 March 1899.
\textsuperscript{435} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 517 (XX) from Beijing, 11 March 1899.
\textsuperscript{436} ibid.
\textsuperscript{437} BCD, Atti del Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei Deputati, Sessione 1898-99, 2\textsuperscript{a} della XX Legislatura, Discussioni, Volume III: dal 16 febbraio al 23 marzo 1899, LXXXII – Tornata di Martedì 14 Marzo 1899, pp. 2934-2940.
\textsuperscript{438} BCD, Atti del Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei Deputati, Sessione 1898-99, 2\textsuperscript{a} della XX Legislatura, Discussioni, Volume IV: dal 25 aprile al 30 giugno 1899, CII – Tornata di Mercoledì 3 Maggio 1899, pp. 3660-3662.
the idea of obtaining, even in the future, any industrial or commercial advantage”\(^\text{440}\). Visconti Venosta, on the other hand, realised that the Sanmen affair had awakened too many unpleasant reminiscences of Adua and that the political climate in Rome did not consent any new adventures. In other words, it was necessary to close the chapter quickly, saving some modicum of national pride, if at all possible.

How this was to be done, was a question that even the foreign minister himself could not answer. Initially, he hoped that instead of a naval station a settlement in an open port could be demanded, as a concession more likely to be obtained.\(^\text{441}\) This, he believed, would have provided a “practical solution to the current difficulties”.\(^\text{442}\) Salvago Raggi opposed the idea vehemently, believing that a military occupation of the Sanmen Bay was the only solution “reconcilable with the honour of the country”\(^\text{443}\). The differences in opinion between the foreign minister and the minister plenipotentiary persisted throughout the rest of the year escalating at times in harsher tones arriving from the Consulta.\(^\text{444}\)

Reconciliation was made impossible by the different goals that the two diplomats had set themselves. Salvago Raggi was determined to find a solution that kept the hope of a future Italian expansion in China, be it commercial or territorial, alive. Visconti Venosta, on the other hand, was prepared to abandon all such hopes and was merely looking for a diplomatic result, which, even if having no practical value in itself, would give the public opinion in Italy the impression that something had been obtained. Thus when Salvago Raggi proposed that instead of a settlement in an open port, which he considered to be “completely useless”\(^\text{445}\), the legation should rather demand industrial concessions for Italian citizens\(^\text{446}\), Visconti Venosta opposed the idea, saying that a settlement was, “at least in appearance, a more concrete result”\(^\text{447}\).

---

\(^{440}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 594 (XX) from Shanghai, 13 May 1899.

\(^{441}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 602 (XX) from Rome, 23 May 1899.

\(^{442}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 605 (XX) from Rome, 28 May 1899.

\(^{443}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 603 (XX) from Shanghai, 27 May 1899.

\(^{444}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 642 (XX) from Rome, 7 July 1899.

\(^{445}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 609 (XX) from Shanghai, 2 June 1899.

\(^{446}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 614 (XX) from Shanghai, 6 June 1899.

\(^{447}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 615 (XX) from Rome, 8 June 1899.
The actions of the foreign minister may appear to be motivated by the egotistic desire to preserve his own ministerial position. While such motives can never be fully excluded, it remains a fact that Visconti Venosta was rendering Italy an important service at the same time. Knowing from the experiences of Adua and the Sanmen Bay what deleterious effects an ill-conceived foreign policy could have on political stability of the country, he considered it his primary goal to prevent the colonial policy from becoming, once again, the source of political instability. His primary concern in China was hence to avoid further humiliating defeats, whereas any step toward expanding the Italian influence there was to be taken only if the risk of failure could be considered negligible. It is for this reason that, after being convinced by British diplomats that an Italian demand for a settlement would certainly be refused, he accepted Salvago Raggi’s proposal about the industrial concessions that he had previously rejected.

Avoiding a definite refusal, whatever the demand, and maintaining the status quo if nothing could be obtained became the new goal of the Italian China policy. When Salvago Raggi finally reached Beijing and reopened the negotiations in early August, he was acting according to the instructions to conduct the negotiations “in a way such as to avoid absolute refusals, leaving questions open if they cannot be resolved at the present moment.” The Italian demands, in their final version drafted in August, consisted of two mining concessions, one of them including a short tract of railway serving the mine, and a separate railway concession. All the demands were private demands of Italian citizens, two of them having been submitted to the Chinese government before the Sanmen crisis. The demands themselves, however, were of secondary importance. The political goal for Visconti Venosta consisted in keeping the negotiations open and, if refusals proved to be inevitable, postponing them as long as possible. Salvago Raggi was fulfilling this task with

448 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 649 (XX) from Rome, 10 July 1899.
449 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 618 (XX) Aide Mémoire delivered by the British chargé d’affaires, 13 June 1899.
450 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 649 (XX) from Rome, 10 July 1899.
452 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 660 (XX) from Beijing, ... August (received 3 August) 1899.
453 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 652 (XX) from Rome, 20 July 1899.
454 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 681 (XX) from Beijing, 23 August 1899.
455 ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 688 (XX) from Rome, 29 August 1899.
great stoicism although he more than once expressed his fears that a definite refusal was imminent.\textsuperscript{456} Visconti Venosta, on the other hand, did not grow weary of repeating that it was necessary “to give the negotiations a dilatory character, avoiding at all costs the possibility of refusal, suspending them even, if necessary, without compromising them.”\textsuperscript{457} When Salvago Raggi finally reached a dead-end in November, Visconti Venosta authorised him to “leave the negotiations at the point they have reached”\textsuperscript{458}, informing the Zongli Yamen that the Italian government needed to dispatch a governmental commission to China in order to study the country and determine how Italian interests in China could best be furthered.\textsuperscript{459}

In this way, a diplomatic stalemate was reached. By then, the Chinese government was convinced that Italy would not resort to military force in order to obtain what it was demanding. This was first intimated to them in the early days of the Sanmen crisis by MacDonald, who, in a conversation with the ministers of the Zongli Yamen, clearly indicated that the British support of the Italian demands excluded any use of force on the Italian side.\textsuperscript{460} The first indication that what MacDonald had told them was true, was the attitude of the Italian government after the presentation of the ultimatum, subsequently confirmed by the long pause in the negotiations and Salvago Raggi’s temporising once they were continued. Finally, when Reuter announced in August that the \textit{Marco Polo} needed to return to Italy in order to be serviced\textsuperscript{461}, the ministers of the Zongli Yamen immediately understood that the danger of an occupation was gone, and made use of the news to modify their negotiating strategy.\textsuperscript{462}

The Qing dynasty came out of the Sanmen crisis strengthened, both militarily and morally\textsuperscript{463}. The claims that it never intended to yield to the Italian demands\textsuperscript{464} are corroborated by the purchase

\textsuperscript{456} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 692 (XX) from Beijing, 30 August 1899.
\textsuperscript{457} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 694 (XX) from Rome, 1 September 1899.
\textsuperscript{458} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 766 (XX) from Rome, 29 November 1899.
\textsuperscript{459} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 767\textsuperscript{bis} (XX) from Rome, 4 December 1899.
\textsuperscript{460} Borsa, G.: \textit{Italia e Cina}, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{461} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 667 (XX) from Beijing, ... August (received 8 August) 1899.
\textsuperscript{462} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 692 (XX) from Beijing, 30 August 1899.
\textsuperscript{463} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 795 (XX) from Beijing, 26 December 1899.
\textsuperscript{464} Borsa, pp. 168-173.
of four German torpedo boats\textsuperscript{465} and two English cruisers\textsuperscript{466}, as well as the hasty servicing of old military vessels the Chinese navy already possessed\textsuperscript{467}. Recent research based on Chinese sources has shown that secret mobilisation of troops took place in the spring of 1899 in south-eastern China and that preparations for a pre-emptive strike were made.\textsuperscript{468} It seems that in the course of the Sanmen Crisis the determination of the Chinese government to adopt a more unyielding attitude towards foreign powers and wage another attempt at regaining its sovereignty had already replaced the insecurity that followed the Treaty of Shimonoseki. This attitude coupled with the insatiable thirst of the colonising powers for more trade, industrial and territorial concessions and coinciding with the growing popularity of the Boxer movement led in 1900 to another major military confrontation between China and the West.

\textsuperscript{465} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 587 (XX) from Port Said, 2 May 1899.
\textsuperscript{466} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 622 (XX) from Port Said, 8 June 1899 and ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 635 (XX) from Port Said, 23 June 1899.
\textsuperscript{467} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1899, N. 644 (XX) from Shanghai, 20 May 1899.
4. 3. Armed Conflict

Riots and violence against foreigners were by no means uncommon in China at the turn of the twentieth century. Arrogance of Christian missionaries and their blatant disrespect for local traditions and power structures often caused friction between them and Chinese converts on the one hand and the rest of the Chinese populace on the other.\(^{469}\) Anti-imperialistic and anti-Christian sentiments of the Chinese were further strengthened by the occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay in November 1897, and the frequency of attacks on missionaries increased significantly after that date. Nevertheless, in January 1900 the anti-foreign activities reported by the European press seemed to have reached such an unprecedented intensity\(^{470}\) that a worried Visconti Venosta telegraphed to Beijing asking for clarifications and inquiring about the security of foreigners.\(^{471}\)

Salvago Raggi seemed unconcerned:

> For the moment, the security of the foreigners is not threatened more than it is usually. An English missionary was murdered in Shantun [sic], where there is unrest. The legations of England, France, the United States and Germany have sent an official note to the Chinese government, demanding that the security of their missionaries be ensured. I did the same.

The Italian minister in Beijing conducted his affairs as usual and did not believe that the unrest spreading in Shandong was essentially different from what he had experienced in China until then. Nor was he alone in such an appraisal of the situation. The diplomatic representatives in Beijing heeded little the warnings that started coming with increased frequency from Christian missions in the provinces. In general, they tended to believe that the missionaries were alarmists and primarily interested in getting diplomatic support for obtaining further concessions from the Chinese government.\(^{472}\) Even when it became apparent that Christian missions were more seriously threatened than he had previously thought, Salvago Raggi primarily saw the developments in the light of the Franco-Italian protectorate conflict and “intervened [at the Zongli Yamen] for the sake


\(^{471}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 792 (XX) from Rome, 29 January 1900.

\(^{472}\) Xiang, L.: The Origins of the Boxer War, pp. 146, 152, 199.
of not missing a favourable opportunity for reaffirming our right of protection\textsuperscript{473}. The events that followed, however, forced foreign diplomats in Beijing to reappraise the situation.

In February, Shandong villagers began attacking and destroying German railway facilities after the Germans had refused to modify the planned railroad route that was supposed to cut through graveyard areas that the Chinese considered sacred. German troops were sent immediately to the afflicted area but did not engage as the local government managed to suppress the riots before the troops arrived. In fact, Yuan Shikai, the governor of Shandong, was in general fairly successful in suppressing the Boxer movement in Shandong, where it originated. By February, however, the movement had spread northwards, reaching Tianjin and directly endangering the capital.\textsuperscript{474}

Although initially excluded from discussions between the representatives of Britain, Germany, France and the United States on how the Boxer threat was to be dealt with\textsuperscript{475}, officially due to the fact that the organiser of the meetings, the British minister Sir Claude MacDonald, “was unaware that Italy had missionaries in Shandong”\textsuperscript{476}, in February, Salvago Raggi started being invited to take part in them. By then, the representatives of the western powers had realised that the current unrest exceeded, both in its intensity and the area it covered, all the anti-foreign riots they had seen until then. Even at this point, however, internal rivalries within the foreign diplomatic community in Beijing impeded coordinated action. Consensus could be reached only on an initiative to demand from the Chinese government publishing of edicts prohibiting the anti-foreign sects “The Fist of the Just Harmony”\textsuperscript{477} and “The Big Knife”\textsuperscript{478}. Although the diplomats came to the conclusion that a display of naval power was necessary in order to intimidate both the Chinese government and the rebels\textsuperscript{479} no action followed until the end of May when the uprising reached the confines of Beijing.

\textsuperscript{473} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 797 (XX) from Beijing, received 27 February 1900.
\textsuperscript{474} Xiang, L.: The Origins of the Boxer War, pp. 149-150. See also ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 817 (XX) from Beijing, 3 March 1900.
\textsuperscript{475} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 808 (XX) from Beijing, 1 February 1900.
\textsuperscript{476} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 809 (XX) from Beijing, 3 February 1900.
\textsuperscript{477} These two sects of different origins gave rise to the Boxer movement. The name “Boxer” is derived from the reference to “fist” in the name of the former. For the origins of the two sects see Xiang, L.: The Origins of the Boxer War, pp. 104-128.
\textsuperscript{478} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 817 (XX) from Beijing, 3 March 1900.
\textsuperscript{479} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 800 (XX) from Beijing, 9 March 1900.
On 28 May, after the Boxers burned down two train stations close to Beijing and destroyed the only railway access to the capital, the foreign representatives finally telegraphed to the vessels of their respective nations stationed in Chinese waters and demanded detachments of marines to be sent immediately to Beijing for protection of the legations.\textsuperscript{480} On 31 May, 41 Italian marines\textsuperscript{481} arrived in Beijing together with their French, British, American, Russian and Japanese counterparts. Two days later, the Germans and the Austrians arrived, as well.\textsuperscript{482} Overall, 429 marines and 24 officers\textsuperscript{483} managed to reach Beijing before the legations became cut off from the rest of the world. From the beginning of June, the situation deteriorated rapidly. By 3 June, the railroad connection between Tianjin and Beijing was disrupted and further allied troops headed for Beijing had been forced to retreat by Boxers.\textsuperscript{484} On 6 June, the Chinese government issued a proclamation blaming Christians for the unrest and thus indirectly legitimised the action of the Boxers.\textsuperscript{485} Another relief column led by the British admiral Seymour left Tianjin on 10 June, but was forced to retreat a few days later after suffering serious losses in repeated clashes with the Boxers and imperial troops. That the situation was out of control was finally demonstrated on 11 June, when a chancellor of the Japanese legation was murdered in the street by imperial soldiers.\textsuperscript{486} This not particularly reassuring news was the last that Salvago Raggi could send to Rome before the telegraph connection was interrupted on 12 June.\textsuperscript{487}

In Europe, the governments represented in China were receiving information from their consulates in other parts of China and news agencies. The direct telegraphic connection with Beijing being completely disrupted, however, even this information was based, to a greater or lesser

\textsuperscript{480} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 830 (XX) from Beijing, 28 May 1900.
\textsuperscript{484} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 834 (XX) from Beijing, received 4 June 1900.
\textsuperscript{487} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 851 (XX) from Beijing, 12 June 1900.
extent, on hearsay. Obtaining reliable information on the actions of the Chinese government or the general situation in China was impossible and communication with the vessels in Chinese waters greatly delayed. Nevertheless, the situation in China required making quick decisions. The admirals of the foreign powers decided, hence, without explicitly consulting their governments, to storm the Dagu forts on 17 June. The Boxer War thus began, without being officially declared.

Paradoxically, the Qing court was no better informed than the European governments. Two days later, the information about the loss of the Dagu forts was still being withheld from the empress dowager. Although she guessed that the allied powers might have launched an attack, there was no certainty. In a tense atmosphere, and after four full court meetings on the same day, she ordered that a persona non grata note be delivered to all foreign representatives in the legation quarter leaving them 24 hours to depart from Beijing. By that time, the foreign diplomats would have been only too glad to leave, but considering the murder of the Japanese chancellor, as well as the number of Boxers and the increasingly hostile imperial troops around Beijing, they believed it imprudent to abandon the legation quarter without previously receiving any guarantees regarding their security from the Chinese government. It was these guarantees that the German minister von Ketteler sought to obtain when he left the legation on 20 June and headed for the Zongli Yamen accompanied only by a translator. As soon as he left the legation quarter, however, he was shot dead by an imperial soldier. The same day the empress dowager was finally informed that the Dagu forts were lost. With the expiry of the departure ultimatum at 16h, the imperial army

\[\text{\footnotesize 488 A rumour that left a particularly strong impression, both on the diplomatic circles and the public opinion, was spread on 16 June by the British news agency Laffàn. It stated that the legation quarter in Beijing had been stormed and the German minister murdered. The news was completely unfounded but it turned out to be prophetic: the German minister was murdered indeed four days later.}
\]

\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 490 The Dagu Forts near Tianjin, constructed to defend access to Beijing from the sea, had seen clashes between Chinese and Western forces already in 1859, during the Second Opium War.}
\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 491 Some authors (e.g. see Felber, R.: Die Kriegserklärung der Kaiserinwitwe, p. 59.) see an act of aggression and thus the beginning of the Boxer War already in the departure of the Seymour column from Tianjin on 10 June. Whereas it can be argued that the mission of the Seymour column was in its nature defensive, there can be no doubt that the allied action at Dagu was offensive.}
\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 492 Xiang, L.: The Origins of the Boxer War, p. 327.}
\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 493 ibid., p. 308.}
\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 494 Martin, B.: Die Ermordung des deutschen Gesandten, p. 87.}
\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 495 Xiang, L.: The Origins of the Boxer War, p. 350.}
\]
opened fire on the legation quarter and the siege officially began.\textsuperscript{496} The empress dowager officially declared war on foreigners the following day.\textsuperscript{497}

4.3.1. German Military Action in China

In less than three years, between November 1897 and the summer of 1900, the German outlook on China changed dramatically. Whereas in 1897, German politicians were impatiently waiting for an opportunity to gain a footing in China, by 1900, Germany was an established power in the Far East, increasingly challenging the British predominance. Hence, whereas Friedrich von Holstein, the head of the political department of the German Foreign Office, called the murder of two German priests that furnished the pretext for the occupation of the Jiaozhou Bay “an act of fate” that sent the excited Kaiser telegraphing to the Reichskanzler that “the hypercautios policy [...] was to come to an end”\textsuperscript{498}, the news of the Boxer uprising and von Ketteler’s murder were hardly received with the same amount of enthusiasm by Wilhelmstraße. Nevertheless, they were developments that required an adequate answer.

What was an adequate answer exactly, was a matter on which opinions greatly diverged. The Foreign Ministry, including the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the future Reichskanzler von Bülow, believed that a conflict that could destabilise the Qing government and bring about a partition of the empire was not in German interest as the current conditions, if maintained, could only lead to waxing of the German influence in China.\textsuperscript{499} Even after the murder of von Ketteler, who had recently been reprimanded for spreading rumours that a partition of China was imminent and was generally rather a liability than an asset to the German diplomatic corps due to numerous scandals he created\textsuperscript{500}, he did not change his views. Equally conservative in his views was the Secretary of State for Imperial Navy, von Tirpitz, who offered logistic support in the case of a punitive expedition being sent to China but excluded all but symbolic participation of the Navy in the military operations themselves. He maintained that anything more than that would put a strain on the navy budget and endanger realisation of a construction programme aimed at rendering the German navy a formidable force not inferior to the British one. Von Tirpitz had in his actions full support of industrial and merchant elites who feared that a military escalation would be detrimental

\textsuperscript{496} ibid.
\textsuperscript{497} Felber, R.: \textit{Die Kriegserklärung der Kaiserinwitwe}, pp. 73-75.
\textsuperscript{498} Xiang, L.: \textit{The Origins of the Boxer War}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{500} Martin, B.: \textit{Die Ermordung des deutschen Gesandten}, pp. 81-85.
to their economic interests and that a destabilisation of the Qing dynasty could endanger realisation of their long-term projects.\textsuperscript{501}

Opposed to these moderate views were the Imperial Admiralty Staff, headed by now by the recently promoted vice admiral Otto von Diedrichs, who had carried out the invasion of the Jiaozhou Bay, the Prussian Ministry of War and, most importantly, the Emperor himself. Wilhelm II felt strongly about the Far Eastern policy of the German Empire and considered it a prerogative of his to shape it and direct it. Indeed, due to his commitment to the design of obtaining a naval station in China, the acquisition of the Jiaozhou Bay was considered the “emperor’s own, most personal achievement”\textsuperscript{502}. Nor was the emperor himself inclined to see the matter any differently. In 1899, he intimated to Marquis de Noailles, the French ambassador in Berlin: “\textit{L’avenir du commerce, ce n’est pas en Afrique. C’est en Chine et c’est pour ça que je suis allé et que je me suis installé à Kiaochow [sic].}”\textsuperscript{503} His interest in Far Eastern affairs was not dictated by economic factors only, however. During the Jiaozhou crisis, not only his personal commitment became apparent but also his emotional involvement, reflected in a speech addressing soldiers destined for China shortly after the successful invasion:

\begin{quote}
\emph{May it now be clear to every European out there, the German merchant out there, and above all, the foreigner out there, on whose soil we are or with whom we will deal, that the German Michael has firmly planted his shield adorned with the imperial eagle in the soil, in order to offer protection, now and forever, to everyone who asks for it; […] Should, however, anyone ever endeavour to injure or destroy our just rights, then at him with your mailed fist! And as God wills, may laurel weave around your young head, and no one in the whole German Empire will look with envy upon it.}\textsuperscript{504}
\end{quote}

The emperor felt so strongly about the Far Eastern affairs because they represented the intersection of his two great obsessions, the one he craved and the one he feared: a formidable navy and the “yellow peril”.\textsuperscript{505} Establishing strong German influence in China was necessary both for achieving the former and keeping under check the latter.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{504} Mühlhahn, K.: \textit{Herrschaft und Widerstand}, p. 97.
\bibitem{505} Dandolo, I.: \textit{A Modern Anabasis}, pp. 319-320.
\end{thebibliography}
Wilhelm II may have been the only man of significant political weight in Europe who was rejoicing at the prospect of a war in China in the summer of 1900. In fact, he had made plans for a punitive expedition to China even before he heard of von Ketteler’s death\textsuperscript{506} and ordered mobilisation on 19 June\textsuperscript{507}. In general, the emperor made abundant use of his role as the supreme commander of the German armed forces and decidedly refused to allow the parliament to convene in order to discuss extraordinary expenditures for what he considered to be “my East Asian expedition”\textsuperscript{508}. On 4 July, he hurriedly ordered four ships-of-the-line to depart for East Asia, which they did a week later after having been provisioned at Wilhelmshaven.\textsuperscript{509} Despite the cautious attitudes of von Bülow and von Tirpitz, the emperor had his way in the end. The expedition to China became a huge enterprise involving the Prussian Ministry of War, the Great General Staff, the Imperial Naval Office, the Admiralty and the Cabinet. By the end of July, a large expeditionary force counting 11,790 soldiers, 28 pieces of artillery and 3,484 horses was ready to depart for China on 18 transporters and 39 steamers in order to join the East Asian Squadron, the 3. Marine Battalion, the complete German marine infantry and all the overseas cruisers stationed in Africa and the Americas, which were already in China or on their way there.\textsuperscript{510} When the troops gathered in Bremerhaven on 27 July, the emperor bid them farewell with his famous “Hunnenrede”:

\begin{quote}
If you encounter the enemy, then know, mercy shall not be given, prisoners shall not be taken. Who falls into your hands, belongs to you. Like the Huns thousand years ago under their king Attila made their name known, so that even now in the lore it appears formidable, so may the name of Germany become known in China in such a way that never again a Chinese will dare as much as to look a German askance.\textsuperscript{511}
\end{quote}

Under the command of Field Marshall von Waldersee, who was named the supreme commander of the allied forces in August, the emperor’s order was carried out to the letter but not in the context he had hoped for.

\textsuperscript{506}Martin, B.: \textit{Die Ermordung des deutschen Gesandten}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{508}Martin, B.: \textit{Die Ermordung des deutschen Gesandten}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{511}Martin, B.: \textit{Die Ermordung des deutschen Gesandten}, p. 90.
Despite the emperor’s zeal, the troops left for China too late. In fact, the supreme commander von Waldersee left Europe from Naples only on 23 August\textsuperscript{512}, more than a week after the siege of the legations was lifted. In contrast to the Japanese who could move their troops quickly to the neighbouring China and the Russians, the British, the French and the Americans who had significant numbers of soldiers stationed in Manchuria, India, Indochina and the Philippines, Germany had only a relatively small number of soldiers stationed in Qingdao whereas the rest had to be transported from overseas. German naval and marine units present in China at the outbreak of hostilities participated in six military operations\textsuperscript{513} alongside the forces of the other allied nations, playing at times a very prominent role as during the conquest of the Dagu forts, but they failed to arrive in time to participate in the lifting of the siege of the legations on 14 August. Their commander and the supreme commander of all allied forces arrived in China only on 25 September and did not reach Beijing until 17 October\textsuperscript{514} thus missing not only the lifting of the siege but also the ceremonial and highly symbolic parade of the allied forces through the Forbidden City on 28 August. On the former occasion his role was assumed by the British major-general Gaselee and on the latter by the Russian general Linievich.\textsuperscript{515}

This put von Waldersee in a difficult position as the emperor’s primary concern was that Germany should play a prominent, even predominant, role in the war. The Boxer War was the first war that the German Empire fought since the unification in 1871 and setting a good precedent was imperative, all the more as foreign observers were carefully following the German action in China and awaiting to see whether the bellicose speeches they had been hearing from Berlin since 1897 were backed by genuine military strength.\textsuperscript{516} Germany’s future in China and its future as a colonial power even, depended, hence, on being able to demonstrate during the expedition that the German army was a formidable force it claimed to be. These claims were further fortified by von Waldersee’s nomination as the supreme commander of the allied forces. For von Waldersee himself, however, the supreme command was an additional challenge. France simply did not recognise him as the supreme commander of the allied forces due to the prominent role he had


\textsuperscript{513} Petter, W.: \textit{Die deutsche Marine auf dem Weg nach China}, pp. 149-150.

\textsuperscript{514} von Waldersee, A.: \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, pp. 19, 34.


played in the Franco-Prussian War thirty years earlier and the United States did likewise.\textsuperscript{517} The British government unwillingly put its troops under his “supreme direction” but not his “supreme command”.\textsuperscript{518} Russian troops officially recognised von Waldersee as their supreme commander but had already retreated to the North by the time he arrived in Beijing and were simply too far away from him to make any interaction possible.\textsuperscript{519} The German allies, Austria-Hungary and Italy, recognised him as the supreme commander but were reluctant to dispatch significant forces to China. Austria-Hungary refused to send any army units and participated only with a small number of ships and marines.\textsuperscript{520} Italy initially intended to dispatch only a battalion of bersaglieri but eventually yielded to German demands for a more significant participation.\textsuperscript{521} In general, the allied forces were everything but allied in spirit. Although soldierly camaraderie sometimes existed among the lower ranks, the higher ranks were riven by mistrust. There were officers present whose sole mission consisted in observing the members of other contingents, their attitudes towards other nationalities and their behaviour and cooperation in a war situation.\textsuperscript{522} The Boxer War was generally perceived by the participating European nations as “a sort of military exhibition by which one can see to what degree each army taking part is trained and disciplined”.\textsuperscript{523} The importance of such information is best reflected in the communication sent by General Prudente, the Italian military attaché in Berlin to the Italian General Staff on 10 August:

\begin{quote}
General von Wittich, aide-de-camp to William II, said that it was the intention of His Majesty, the Emperor of Germany, not to send other military units to China until he saw how relations between the various nations interested in China developed. Actually he would not exclude the possibility that the war started now in the Far East might later end in Europe.\textsuperscript{524}
\end{quote}

Under these conditions, von Waldersee decided that merciless punitive expeditions against the remnants of Boxer forces were the best way of fulfilling his mission.\textsuperscript{525}

This was easier said than done since, though peace was still not concluded, the war was for all practical purposes over. In fact, as the German troops under von Waldersee’s command were

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{517} Dandolo, I.: \textit{A Modern Anabasis}, p. 328.
\bibitem{519} von Waldersee, A.: \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, p. 40.
\bibitem{521} Dandolo, I.: \textit{A Modern Anabasis}, p. 322. See also ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1058 (XX) from Berlin, 25 July 1900.
\bibitem{523} Dandolo, I.: \textit{A Modern Anabasis}, p. 329.
\bibitem{524} ibid.
\bibitem{525} von Waldersee, A.: \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, p. 22.
\end{thebibliography}
marching towards Beijing, parts of other contingents were already leaving.\footnote{ibid., pp. 20, 40.} Russia, supported by France, had already proposed a complete withdrawal of all allied forces from China. For Wilhelm II, a retreat was out of the question\footnote{ibid., p. 14.}. Considering the efforts put into the expedition, the expenses it generated and its actual goal, which consisted in demonstrating German strength and military prowess rather than defeating the Boxers, withdrawing the expeditionary force before it had fired a bullet was equal to defeat. Von Waldersee knew that he needed to find Boxers whether they existed or not. The Boxer War, or its last phase, turned thus into a “German-Chinese war with a rather one-sided German activity”\footnote{Petter, W.: \textit{Die deutsche Marine auf dem Weg nach China}, p. 151.}. A series of punitive expeditions against alleged Boxer strongholds followed, in which not only Boxers but also civilians, women and children were indiscriminately murdered and entire villages burned down.\footnote{Kuß, Susanne: „Deutsche Soldaten während des Boxeraufstandes in China: Elemente und Ursprünge des Vernichtungskrieges“. In: S. K. and Bernd Martin (eds.): \textit{Das Deutsche Reich und der Boxeraufstand}. Munich, Germany: Iudicium Verlag, 2002, p. 181.} That the pretexts for the expeditions were often purely fictional\footnote{ibid., p. 171.} seemed to bother no one. The emperor’s orders given at the departure in Bremerhaven were fulfilled with such brutality that even some of the participants were shocked:

\begin{quote}
What happens here now during the war, dear mother, is impossible to describe since such murdering and butchery is perfectly insane, which is caused by the fact that the Chinese are outside of the international law, for which reason no prisoners are taken but everything is shot or even bayonetted in order to save bullets.\footnote{ibid., p. 178.}
\end{quote}

Others took the war crimes committed much more calmly and described them as a necessary evil:

\begin{quote}
No prisoners are taken. That is to say, if any are made, they are at once shot down when the battle is over...At first the butt ends or our rifles helped us considerably, but they broke off easily in the case of the ’98 rifle, so that the bayonet took their place. It was terrible to see, and one almost fell pity, but when one reflected on the treatment which those fellows would have doled out to us if they once got the whiphand of us, that thought kept down any such feeling.\footnote{Dillon, E. J.: “The Chinese Wolf and the European Lamb”. \textit{Contemporary Review}, No. 79 (Jan./June 1901), p. 25.}
\end{quote}

Even for the standards of colonial empires, which used excessive violence as the \textit{prima ratio} for solution of colonial conflicts\footnote{Walter, Dierk: “Warum Kolonialkrieg?”. In: Thoralf Klein and Frank Schumacher (eds.): \textit{Kolonialkriege}. Hamburg, Germany: Hamburger Edition, 2006, p. 24. Also Klose, Fabian:} and were used to massacres of civilians\footnote{ibid., p. 24.}, the conduct of the
German soldiers seemed excessive. The participation of other contingents in German punitive expeditions, which was moderately high in the beginning, dwindled. In the end, the official German military report boasted of 18 clashes or skirmishes with the Chinese regulars, 11 with the Boxers and 76 punitive expeditions, 51 out of which were carried out by German troops only. The emperor’s wish for fame, or notoriety, comparable to that of Attila was fulfilled completely.

This development was significantly facilitated by the fact that the political, and hence civilian, authorities in Germany lost all control over the German troops during the China expedition. The expedition was decided on and prepared without consulting the parliament, which was, only in November 1900, asked to approve it post hoc. Von Waldesee, who believed that only military principles applied in war, refused to cooperate with any civilian authorities and reported only to the emperor himself. In this manner, knowing the emperor on his side, he attained complete freedom of action for himself and his troops, outside of law and customs of war. War crimes were tolerated and sometimes even explicitly ordered. Due to such attitudes of their superiors and even the emperor himself, the soldiers often showed no sign of remorse:

Everything that came our way, whether a man, a woman or a child, everything was slaughtered. How the women screamed! But the emperor’s order is: show no mercy! -; and we have sworn loyalty and allegiance and that we keep.

The atrocities committed were hence no excesses of undisciplined soldiers but rather the manner of waging war intended by the military leadership.
Although nationals of the other allied powers voiced their consternation regarding the brutality of German soldiers\textsuperscript{544}, savagery of western armies in colonial conflicts was neither new nor particular to Germans. The conviction that brutality and disregard for the customs of war was the only adequate answer to the fighting methods that were not a part of the western military tradition was commonly accepted in all colonial metropoles\textsuperscript{545} and put in practice from South Africa\textsuperscript{546} to the Phillipines. In that sense, the indignation regarding the conduct of the German soldiers voiced by the members of other contingents and diplomatic corps was little more than the hypocritical tendency to put blame for the worst transgressions on others and thus relativise one’s own, seen already during the Anglo-French intervention in China in 1860\textsuperscript{547}. What was new and particular to the German troops nonetheless, however, was the radicalness and thoroughness in destruction of both human life and material things.\textsuperscript{548} Such purposeful and total destruction, which was later even theoretically buttressed in German military textbooks and further refined during the First World War\textsuperscript{549}, earned German troops the unflattering reputation reflected in the nickname “Huns” but it achieved the purpose that such military tactics had had since the times immemorial: that of striking terror in both friend and foe.\textsuperscript{550}

Von Waldersee was not in haste to leave China. The presence of troops was supposed to facilitate peace negotiations\textsuperscript{551} and force the Chinese side to more significant financial concessions. In fact, such were the explicit orders of the emperor:

\textit{The emperor put great hopes in the expedition regarding our commercial future in East Asia, he asked me also to impose on the Chinese an indemnity as large as possible, which he urgently needed for the fleet.}\textsuperscript{552}

\textsuperscript{549} ibid.
\textsuperscript{552} von Waldersee, A.: \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, p. 6.
With the newly acquired fame of the German troops, the first fruits of the intervention started showing quickly. When the Boxer War was officially concluded on 7 September 1901 with the signing of the Boxer Protocol, Germany claimed a lion’s share of the total indemnity of 450m Tael to be distributed among the allied nations. A sum of 90m Tael, equalling to 300m Mark, was to be paid off in yearly instalments until 1940 with an annual interest rate of 4%. The indemnity thus more than covered the expenses of 250m Mark incurred by Germany during the expedition. On the symbolic level, the Chinese Empire agreed to dispatch an expiatory mission under the leadership of an imperial prince to Germany in order to offer an apology to Wilhelm II for the murder of the German ambassador, as well as to construct a memorial arch on the spot of von Ketteler’s death. The newly acquired prestige of Germany in China was reflected also in the fact that the clause concerning the expiatory mission to Germany constituted the first paragraph of the Boxer Protocol. By the end of 1901, Germany had not supplanted Great Britain as the most influential foreign nation in China but it was beginning to seriously challenge its predominance. While it was not commercially successful like Britain nor controlled immense territories as Russia did in the North, in terms of political influence it had managed to close the gap that had been separating it from the two leading powers in the Far East. The causes of this enhanced status were not to be found in the military intervention only, however.

Although no civilian authority had any influence on the German troops and the entire China expedition was essentially coordinated by Wilhelm II, in the background, far away from Beijing, the Imperial Naval Office and the Foreign Ministry were fighting a war of their own. Both von Tirpitz and von Bülow realised that in order to improve Germany’s position in China it was not enough to defeat the Chinese but that it also required inflicting a diplomatic defeat on Britain. The moment could hardly have been more propitious. In addition to the Boxer War, Britain was also fighting the Boer War in South Africa and was critically overstretched. In these conditions, it tried to defend its interests as best it could. Already on 13 June 1900, while the Seymour column was still unsuccessfully trying to reach Beijing on land, the British Admiralty was instructed to

557 ibid., p. 164.
prevent any foreign intervention in the Yangtze valley if the war spread southwards. As soon as Admiral Seymour returned to Dagu, he left northern China and headed south. Although his mission consisted primarily in awaiting further development of the situation and fighting the Boxers if the uprising spread into southern provinces, the concentration of British naval units along the Yangtze River also had the aim of showing strong military presence in the area and thus reasserting the claim on the Yangtze valley as a British sphere of influence. At this critical juncture, Admiral Bendemann, the Chief of the East Asian Squadron, was instructed to sail south and demonstrate German presence in the Yangtze basin, as well. For the moment, Germany managed to establish naval superiority in the area. The move caused serious political tension between Berlin and London but did not lead to any hostilities. The British political leadership was very well aware of its vulnerability and knew that it had to make concessions in order to preserve its predominant position in China. Negotiations between Germany and Britain followed, which resulted in the German-British Yangtze Agreement signed on 16 October 1900. Stipulated in it was application of the “open door policy” on the whole of China, which enabled Germany to leave the confines of Shandong and start spreading its influence in other regions, until then considered spheres of British interest. The agreement represented a major victory of the German Weltpolitik and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs von Bülow, who was made the Reichskanzler on the following day.

Von Bülow’s concept of being able to act freely on the international stage regardless of the opinions of other powers, the so-called principle of the “Politik der freien Hand”, embodied Germany’s new confidence in international affairs. Although Bismarck’s careful colonial policy based on consensus among colonial stakeholders had been abandoned already in 1897, when the Jiaozhou Bay was invaded without the approval of other powers, never before had the German Empire so openly defied any other European country as it defied Britain, the most formidable of them all, in 1900. Internally, the successes of both the military expedition and the diplomatic initiative against Britain, which was to a certain extent also made possible by the display of military power, facilitated future cooperation between the political and the military leadership. They also led, however, to a power shift in the direction of military authorities. The excesses of the punitive

559 Martin, B.: Die Ermordung des deutschen Gesandten, p. 89.
563 ibid., p. 168.
expedition in China were quickly forgotten and ignored by all but individual socialist leaders.\textsuperscript{564} In this way, the course of a new, expansionistic German foreign policy aimed at achieving global dominance was determined. Ironically, as Wilhelm II had predicted, it led to a major conflict in Europe. One that brought an end to the German Empire.

4.3.2. Italian Military Action in China

If von Bülow was not thrilled by the news coming from China in the first half of 1900, Visconti Venosta was even less so. When he returned to the Consulta in May 1899, agreeing to take up a position no one else dared to fill\textsuperscript{565}, his most urgent task consisted in liquidating political liabilities derived from the Sanmen Affair. This he did as well as it could be done. No concessions were obtained but a shameful episode of the Italian foreign policy was closed and Visconti Venosta hoped that he would be able to turn his attention to the pressing issue of maintaining the fragile balance of powers in the Mediterranean basin.\textsuperscript{566}

By June 1900, however, it had become clear that the problems in China would neither go away by themselves nor could be solved by a mere display of naval power, as initially thought. This development meant that Visconti Venosta needed to sail between Scylla and Charybdis. If Italy participated in the allied intervention being prepared in the European capitals, this was doubtlessly going to be interpreted as a betrayal of the \textit{politica di raccoglimento} by the parliamentary opposition. Moreover, in the Italian political discourse, ‘China’ had since 1899 become a term awaking unpleasant reminiscences imbued with the notion of political irresponsibility, and an action in the Far East, of whatever kind, was likely to provoke emotional responses across the political spectrum. If the expedition turned out to be unsuccessful, the China policy was almost certain to become, yet again, the reason of a grave governmental crisis and all the efforts put in liberating the country from the heavy political burden of the Sanmen Affair were to become vain. If Italy, on the other hand, abstained from the allied intervention, its already considerably shaken international prestige was to suffer further deterioration. In addition to this, an abstention from an expedition clearly favoured by the German emperor meant confirming the doubts the German military staff harboured regarding the value of a military alliance with Italy\textsuperscript{567}. The problem

\textsuperscript{565} Decleva, E.: \textit{Da Adua a Sarajevo}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{566} ibid., pp. 117-118.
\textsuperscript{567} Ropponen, R.: \textit{Italien als Verbündeter}, p. 120.
appeared to be virtually unsolvable. To make the matters worse, the internal political situation was highly volatile and made long-term planning even more difficult than usually.

Already on 18 May, after a parliamentary cul-de-sac had been reached three days earlier, the Chamber of Deputies was dissolved and new elections were scheduled for 3 and 10 June. The election results revealed a massive shift to the left, forcing the reactionary prime minister Pelloux to resign. On 24 June, a new government of national reconciliation was formed under Giuseppe Saracco, an aged moderate of little charisma and even less political ambition. Although Visconti Venosta remained in power, unlike the minister of the Navy Bettolo who was replaced by Marin, he was now responsible to a parliament significantly more attached to the idea of politica di raccoglimento.

Nevertheless, Visconti Venosta, whom none less than von Bülow considered a “refined, intelligent, cool, cautious and calculating […] political realist” was very well aware that Italy needed to participate in the intervention not only in order to safeguard its international prestige but also to protect its vital interests in Europe. Since the fall of the francophile Crispi government in 1896, Italy had entered an era of rapprochement with France, much to the discontent of Germany, its main ally in Europe. As Franco-Italian relations slowly but steadily improved between 1896 and 1900, the purpose of the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, forged in 1882 as an essentially anti-French alliance, started becoming compromised. For Italy, however, unlike Germany and Austria-Hungary, the alliance also had another, equally important, raison d’être. Italy had entered the alliance in order to protect its interests in the Mediterranean from the French threat, but also as a way of avoiding an Italo-Austrian conflict that would have become inevitable without the alliance. A continuation of its existence was hence an imperative of Italian foreign policy even once the threat of a French aggression ceased to be real. In order to convince Germany of its loyalty to the Triple Alliance, which was due to be renegotiated in 1902, Italy needed to offer a pledge of its commitment. A participation in the China expedition at the side of the German troops served the purpose perfectly.

García Sanz, Fernando: “La política exterior de Italia en el norte de África: de Adua a la Conferencia de Algeciras”. In: José Antonio González Alcantud and Eloy Martín Corrales (eds.): La conferencia de Algeciras en 1906: un banquete colonial. Barcelona, Spain: Edicions Bellaterra, 2007, pp. 103-104.
ibid., pp. 242, 254-256.
Defending this position from oppositional attacks, even under the changed conditions, was the easier part of the task for Visconti Venosta as long as the expedition did not prove to be a failure. Even more so, as it did not contradict his general stance on colonial policy. Never falling prey to unrealistic grandiose schemes but also unwilling to abandon claims that could be defended, he maintained:

*I have always believed and believe still, that it does not become Italy, in the present circumstances, to overstate its political action, assuming objectives that are not proportional to the means with which we can and want to dispose [...] This policy is called prudence, it is called concentration [raccoglimento], as one prefers, but it needs to be followed under two conditions: one, that Italy does not abandon its place in the concert of Powers while doing so; the other, that at the same time, the issues which concern it most directly, are not compromised to its detriment.*

When he was invited to appear at the Chamber of the Deputies and explain the reasons for Italy’s renewed interest in the Far Eastern affairs, it was not difficult for him to continue along the same lines:

*We believe that when an important question arises, that is relevant for our general policy and interests, as it is also in the interest of Italy that China remains open to free competition of the civilised world, when concerning this question, in the supreme interest of peace, there emerges an agreement and a collective action of the powers, we believe, that it does not become Italy to separate and dissociate itself from this collective action; but that it should, appropriately to the circumstances, take a part in it and maintain its due position in the general concert without overstating it, but without deserting it either.*

The newly appointed deputies demanded prudence and responsible action but abstained from vehement attacks on the foreign minister. The more conservative ones among them even openly seconded his views. Visconti Venosta knew, however, that such a response was to be expected at this early stage of the enterprise. He was also aware that in the case of a failure the tide could change as quickly as in the spring of 1896 and that opportunistic attacks from all sides would crush him as they had once crushed Crispi. This awareness shaped his strategy.

---

575 Ibid., pp. 86-89.
The difficult part of the political manoeuvre that Visconti Venosta was about to perform consisted in committing little, making the commitment look significant and minimising the risk of a military failure at the same time. Essential for the scheme was accurate information regarding Austro-Hungarian participation in the expedition. Throughout the second half of June 1900, Visconti Venosta was trying to acquire reliable information regarding the steps Austria-Hungary intended to take in China. While he was being briefed by the Austro-Hungarian representative in Rome\(^{576}\), members of the Italian diplomatic corps were trying to verify the information he was receiving using both official channels\(^ {577}\) and espionage\(^ {578}\). Immediately after being given official assurances from the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister that Vienna would not dispatch any ground troops to China\(^ {579}\), Visconti Venosta informed von Bülow that “in addition to our naval cooperation we could add a contingent of ground troops, ca. 900 men”\(^ {580}\). In this way, he hoped, the Italian commitment would appear more significant than the Austro-Hungarian one, against which it would be inevitably measured in Berlin. At the same time, the government in Rome was not in haste to follow up on the promise. Despite the fact that after Germany ordered mobilisation on 19 June, the Consulta was almost immediately aware of it\(^ {581}\), the Italian Ministry of War did not order mobilisation until 5 July\(^ {582}\). This was in part due to the governmental crisis Italy was going through but the delay also reflected Visconti Venosta’s strategy that foresaw a late arrival of Italian troops in China:

>This contingent, even if it departed the soonest possible, would probably not arrive in time to take part in the action taking place there now, in which the vessels we have there are participating. But it is possible that once order is re-established in Beijing, the powers will need to leave troops there, at least for a period of time, in

\(^{576}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 871 (XX) from Vienna, 19 June 1900.

\(^{577}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 881 (XX) from Vienna, 21 June 1900.

\(^{578}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 885 (XX) from Vienna, 22 June 1900.

\(^{579}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 894 (XX) from Vienna, 24 June 1900.

\(^{580}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 897 (XX) from Rome, 25 June 1900.

\(^{581}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 880 (XX) from Berlin, 21 June 1900.

charge of maintaining order and supporting and controlling the Chinese government itself, which will need to give the necessary guarantees.\(^{583}\)

The Italian foreign minister was determined to risk as little as possible. By arriving late, the Italian contingent, consisting of one infantry battalion, one bersaglieri battalion, one machine gun company, one detachment of engineers, one field hospital and one field kitchen\(^{584}\), could still claim participation in the international expedition while minimising casualties and avoiding the danger of a military disaster similar to the one suffered at Adua.

![Fig. 2. Italian marines at Dagu Forts](image)

If Visconti Venosta had been able to receive telegraphic dispatches from northern China, he might have felt more at ease regarding the prowess of Italian soldiers. The 39 marines from the Elba under the command of lieutenant Paolini and sub-lieutenant Olivieri, who had reached Beijing prior to the blockade of the legation quarter, were serving their country more than respectably. Sub-

---

\(^{583}\) ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 897 (XX) from Rome, 25 June 1900.

lieutenant Olivieri even became one of the heroes of the siege, having managed against all odds to
defend from Boxer attacks the Beitang cathedral in the north of Beijing. Following an intervention
of the French bishop Favier at the Italian legation\(^{585}\), Olivieri left the legation quarter with ten
marines and together with thirty Frenchmen under sub-lieutenant Henry fortified himself in the
cathedral housing about 3000 missionaries and Chinese converts. After Henry’s death, he assumed
full control of the defence of the cathedral and endured there, suffering heavy losses, until 16
August when they were relieved by Japanese forces.\(^{586}\) Outside of Beijing, another four
detachments of marines disembarked from the Elba and the Calabria participated in the Seymour
column and fought bravely during the siege of Tianjin\(^{587}\), earning praises for their “unflagging
energy and zeal” from admiral Seymour\(^{588}\). Too few in numbers, however, they were doomed to
wait for the arrival of additional troops.

In Italy, meanwhile, the Ministry of the Navy and the Ministry of War were taking steps to
dispatch reinforcements to China. Oceanic Naval Forces in the Far East were formed again, after
having been dissolved in April 1900, and included cruisers the Fieramosca, the Stromboli, the
Vettor Pisani and the Vesuvio. At the time of reconstitution, the Fieramosca was in Colombo and
proceeded to China directly whereas the remaining three cruisers departed from Italy.\(^{589}\) The
embarkation of ground troops, now officially called Royal Italian Troops in the Far East, that were
to build the core of the expeditionary force, was scheduled to take place in Naples over three days,
between 18 and 20 July. The plan was abandoned shortly afterwards, as king Umberto I, who was
supposed to review the troops prior to their departure, needed to leave for vacation. The
embarkation had to be sped up and completed in two instead of three days.\(^{590}\) Finally, in the
evening of 19 July, the Singapore, the Giava and the Marco Minghetti, the three steamships leased
by the government for the transport of troops, left the port of Naples bearing 2,445 soldiers, 96
officers\(^{591}\), 170 horses and equipment to China. They sailed into unknown, to an even greater extent
than they imagined.

Italy was ill-prepared for the expedition. While all the other participating nations, with the
exception of Austria-Hungary, had established territorial presence in the Far East and had,
therefore, detailed knowledge of the coast, the climate, the landscape, the available food and the

\(^{586}\) USMM, 172/02, N. 1283.
\(^{587}\) Manzari, G.: Cina – 1900, pp. 6-9, 12-14.
\(^{588}\) USMM, 172/02, without number.
\(^{589}\) USMM, 172/01, N. 18 (classified) from Shanghai, 6 August 1900.
\(^{590}\) Dandolo, I.: A Modern Anabasis, p. 323.
\(^{591}\) ibid., p 327.
infrastructure, Italy lacked such information almost entirely. This state of affairs even led to serious diplomatic embarrassments as in March 1900 when the Italian cruiser the Carlo Alberto unknowingly entered the closed Japanese port of Mihara.\textsuperscript{592} For avoiding such and more serious incidents during the expedition, Italy depended on the help of other participating nations. This included sometimes even the most basic information and material. In early July, a five-page “\textit{Notice sur la climatologie, l’hygiène, les productions et les ressources de la Chine septentrionale, et particulièrement de la région de Tientsin à Pékin}” could be obtained from the French navy\textsuperscript{593}, while the American navy provided North Pacific pilot charts\textsuperscript{594}. The scarcity of Italian consulates along the coast of China represented another source of uncertainty. At Singapore, Rear Admiral Candiani, the commander of the Oceanic Naval Forces in the Far East, received a telegram from Rome informing him of a rumour that five Chinese cruisers were posing a threat to the safe passage of vessels towards the North. Eventually, the rumour proved to be unfounded but it delayed the progress of the Fieramosca for three days. Another delay followed at Hong Kong, when the news of the assassination of Umberto I at Monza reached the Italian flagship and funeral honours lasting two days were rendered.\textsuperscript{595} To make the matters worse, the vessels of the Oceanic Naval Forces in the Far East had been insufficiently serviced in Italy due to the hasty departure and had to undergo repairs along the way.\textsuperscript{596} Finally, on 13 August, the Fieramosca reached the roadstead of Dagu, to be followed by the three steamers carrying aboard the troops and escorted by the Stromboli only on 29 August, two weeks after the relief of the legations.\textsuperscript{597}

The Singapore, the Giava and the Marco Minghetti were loaded with men, horses and equipment to the point of bursting. In fact, in Naples, material had to be left behind on the docks as not only the holds but also the decks were fully packed.\textsuperscript{598} Lack of space for walking and exercise, presence of humans and animals on limited space, as well as extreme heat and humidity for which the vessels were insufficiently prepared, presented serious health hazards that eventually led to an outbreak of typhoid fever aboard the Giava, delaying the progress for ten days.\textsuperscript{599} In addition to this, much of the perishable cargo, which ended up at the bottom of the hold during the hasty

\textsuperscript{592} USMM, 172/01, N. 3827 from Rome, 11 June 1900.
\textsuperscript{593} USMM, 167/9, from Paris, 3 July 1900.
\textsuperscript{594} ACS, Ministero della Marina Militare – Gabinetto (1891 – 1910), 155, 24 September 1900.
\textsuperscript{595} USMM, 172/01, N. 18 (classified) from Shanghai, 6 August 1900.
\textsuperscript{596} ibid.
\textsuperscript{597} USMM, 172/02, without number.
\textsuperscript{598} Manzari, G.: \textit{Cina – 1900}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{599} Dandolo, I.: \textit{A Modern Anabasis}, p. 325.
embarkation at Naples, went spoiled in the course of the journey due to inappropriate storage.\textsuperscript{600}

Once the roadstead of Dagu was reached, further difficulties became apparent.

The insufficient sea depth off the coast of Dagu forced the steamships to anchor ten miles away from the land. This made indispensable use of tugboats and rafts, none of which were in possession of the Italian navy. The equipment had to be borrowed. Chinese junks borrowed from the British, rafts from the Russians and even a small steamer provided by the Germans were used until a tugboat could be purchased from the American navy.\textsuperscript{601} Once again, a significant amount of victuals and material perished during the transit.\textsuperscript{602} The landing completed, further challenges awaited colonel Garioni, the commander of the Royal Italian Troops in the Far East. He realised that a military campaign in China necessitated a large number of coolies adjoined to the regular troops, a fact no one at the Ministry of War in Rome seems to have been aware of. The British and the French armies, taking advantage of their rich experience gathered during the previous military campaigns in China, provided for their needs on time and had 2,900 and 505 coolies, respectively, in their service. The German army lacked such experience but was nonetheless well-informed about the exigencies of military campaigns in the Far East and had secured well in advance a sufficient number of contracted Japanese coolies working for four marks per day.\textsuperscript{603} Colonel Garioni had to improvise. Managing to gather some coolies here and there and disposing with a number of oxen, he subdivided the distance between Dagu and Beijing into a number of short stages and began transporting the material. Soon he realised, however, that the oxen might prove to be the cause of embarrassment to his troops along the way and left all of them but one in Tianjin.\textsuperscript{604} Gradually, the discomforts of the journey and the constant improvisation were beginning to take toll on the sense of self-esteem of his soldiers:

\begin{quote}
\textit{[...] pulled by the horses never before put to the test, on the streets of Tianjin, we made the impression of those charlatans who wander through our villages with their enormous carts pulled by famished and tired nags.}\textsuperscript{605}
\end{quote}

It was not only the undignified appearance on the march to Beijing that pained the Italian soldiers and officers. Many of them were aware that the insufficiencies of the Italian army were more serious than that:

\textsuperscript{600} ibid, p. 324; See also Manzari, G.: \textit{Cina – 1900}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{602} ibid., p. 38.
\textsuperscript{603} Dandolo, I.: \textit{A Modern Anabasis}, p. 326.
\textsuperscript{604} Borghese, Rodolfo: \textit{In Cina contro i Boxers}. Rome, Italy: Edizioni Ardita, 1936, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{605} ibid., p. 14.
Beyond the sad figure, we are worse than everybody else, infinitely worse, and our operations have suffered from enormous delays. We will end up spending much more while doing the things much worse. I don’t know if these facts are going to get out but it seems to me that they can hardly be maintained secret. I am assuring you that I am feeling most deeply ashamed for our country.\textsuperscript{606}

This was not merely grumbling of simple soldiers and low-ranking officers. Once the news of the lifting of the siege became known\textsuperscript{607}, for many soldiers the mission lost its sense. By the autumn of 1900 everyone from private to the king seems to have been asking himself what Italy was doing in China. Lacking the verve and the ideological preparation of the soldiers of the German expeditionary force, members of the Italian contingent were quick to spot the absurdity of their Far Eastern enterprise. While some of the soldiers in China were being tried for openly giving anti-military speeches\textsuperscript{608}, the commanders were venting their frustration in private correspondence. Rear Admiral Candiani wrote to his friend Cesare Nerazzini, the Italian consul at Shanghai:

What are we going to do in China where capital is necessary – we who are now selling mines on Elba and marble quarries to all kinds of industries due to the lack of capital! The Chinese are buying and selling us three times a day when it comes to commerce. They have rich solid companies, well-funded – they have their own steamliners with their own flag – what can we send down there? [...] The Navigazione Generale is excessively subsidised and if it is supposed to establish a new China line it will take millions. At the end of the day, we have already spent a few millions before we have even started. And then we will have to pay the administration costs, the costs of law and order, all with Italian money and we will not receive a penny from the taxes. May they all go to hell\textsuperscript{609}

Back in Italy, the new king, Vittorio Emanuele III, was virtually echoing Candiani’s thoughts:

China has become a concern of no small import; I have found myself between two currents and so far I have managed to control them; some want to conquer a piece of China, others, on the other hand, do not want to hear a word about the Far East. The truth is that China will never become an agricultural colony for us, not

\begin{footnotes}
\item[606] Canevari, Emilio and Giovanni Comisso (eds.): \emph{Il Generale Tommaso Salsa e le sue campagne coloniali}. Milano, Italy: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1935, p. 329.
\item[607] The news reached Dagu on 17 August; See USMM, 172/01, from Dagu, 17 August 1900.
\end{footnotes}
producing anything but the products we are producing ourselves and not having enough space for a great expansion of a European population, as the Chinese are starving themselves, being too many in their own house; the coal mines of Shan Si are a mirage since they are far away from the sea, close to the Russian territory, and since the costs of transport from China to Italy are such as to render an Italian exploitation of the mines completely profitless. As regards competing with the English, the Germans, the Americans and the Japanese on the Chinese markets, it shouldn’t even be considered. Hence, I believe, we have occupied the enemy’s capital and we have avenged the insult done to our flag; as soon as we make China pay us the non-negligible costs incurred during the expedition, we should finish this Chinese adventure, and let the private initiative do what can be done down there; soldiers shouldn’t be sent before merchants; in one word, we shouldn’t create a second Africa.\footnote{Bondioli Osio, M.: \textit{La giovinezza}, p. 714.}

Seemingly, the only Italian who had a clear idea what Italy was supposed to achieve in China was Visconti Venosta.

In fact, his plan was functioning perfectly. Already in late July, he became aware of the first conciliatory moves of the Chinese government.\footnote{ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1068 (XX) from Berlin, 23 July 1900.} On 8 August, the first telegram from Salvago Raggi since 12 June reached the Consulta\footnote{ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1103 (XX) from Beijing, received 8 August 1900.}, informing the minister of the grave situation in Beijing but also indicating that the Chinese side, now allowing communication between the diplomatic representatives and their governments, was becoming more open for compromises. When Visconti Venosta learned, on 14 August, that the Qing government had charged Li Hong-Chang with negotiating peace\footnote{See ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1120 (XX) from Rome, 14 August 1900.}, it became clear that the end of the siege was near. Four days later, the news of the relief of the legations finally reached Rome\footnote{ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1160 (XX) from Shanghai, 18 August 1900.}. From this moment on, Visconti Venosta’s plan had all the chances of succeeding. It sufficed that the Italian troops, due to reach Dagu on 29 August\footnote{ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1200 (XX) from Dagu, 25 August 1900.}, took their place in China at the side of the German troops and demonstrated their presence. Having confirmed to the Italian ambassador in Berlin that Italy accepted the controversial
nomination of von Waldersee as the supreme commander of the allied forces\textsuperscript{616}, he continued to telegraph directly to Candiani, without going through the Ministry of the Navy:

\textit{The government, having full confidence in you, intends to leave you complete freedom of action. From the political standpoint, however, I am expressing my wish to you that our troops may, following their impending arrival, be directed, completely or at least in part, to Beijing, being important that, from now on, also an Italian contingent participates and takes its due place in the international occupation of Beijing.}\textsuperscript{617}

After overcoming numerous difficulties, the Italian expeditionary force indeed reached Beijing on 5 October\textsuperscript{618}.

Being the second smallest contingent, the Italians were “taillable et corvéable à merci”\textsuperscript{619} by the commanders of the more numerous contingents. Prior to von Waldersee’s arrival, they participated in several lacklustre actions under the British and the Russian command without firing a single bullet\textsuperscript{620}. On 1 October, during an allied attack on the Shanhaiguan forts, the Italian troops got a chance to engage in combat for the first time since their arrival in China\textsuperscript{621}. A brief encounter with a Chinese rear guard and occupation of several already abandoned forts\textsuperscript{622} represented the pinnacle of the military engagement of the Italian expeditionary force in China. The subsequent expeditions under the supreme command of Field Marshall von Waldersee offered little opportunity for gaining military glory. The punitive expedition against the town of Baoding failed as the French forces acting autonomously arrived there first\textsuperscript{623} and the target of the Kalgan expedition in November were herds of Mongolian ruminants rather than the Boxers\textsuperscript{624}. Whereas the Italian marines present in China at the outbreak of hostilities in June had had plenty of opportunities to demonstrate their valour and ended up paying a heavy blood toll, the expeditionary force dispatched from Italy in July participated only in skirmishes and minor conflicts with the Boxers and Qing regulars. Most of the casualties the expeditionary corps suffered were due to illness, accidents and

\textsuperscript{616} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1102 (XX) from Rome, 8 August 1900.
\textsuperscript{617} ASDMAE, Documenti Diplomatici, Serie XX – Cina, 1900 (Gennaio – Agosto), N. 1176 (XX) from Rome, 21 August 1900.
\textsuperscript{618} Manzari, G.: Cina – 1900, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{619} Dandolo, I.: A Modern Anabasis, p. 327.
\textsuperscript{621} ibid., pp. 42-43.
\textsuperscript{622} Manzari, G.: Cina – 1900, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{623} ibid., pp. 42-43.
\textsuperscript{624} Dandolo, I.: A Modern Anabasis, p. 332.
fights with members of the other contingents. As the year was drawing to a close, the only remaining enemy of colonel Garioni’s troops became the Beijing winter.

The absence of dramatic news from China could not but please Visconti Venosta who was hoping that the expedition might slowly and inconspicuously slide out of the visual field of the Italian public opinion. Once again, his hopes were to be frustrated. As the universal jubilation following the relief of the legations gradually abated in European capitals, in the press, reports of atrocities committed by the allied forces slowly started replacing the reports of those committed by the Boxers. Although the blame was initially put on Germans, soon it became clear that all contingents participated in looting, murder and rape. Parliaments across Europe began discussing participation of their contingents in the committed outrages. By early December, the wave had reached Italy. Invited to appear in front of the Chamber of Deputies, the minister of war, Ponza di San Martino, categorically denied any war crimes committed by the Italian troops and maintained even that the localities where the alleged atrocities took place, as reported by newspapers, did not exist. He buttressed his claims by “a letter, published also in our newspapers, dated 14 September, of the English major general Darward [sic], who commanded the expedition to Pao-ting [sic] and acknowledged good behaviour and excellent military qualities of our soldiers.” The minister was either poorly acquainted with Chinese geography or did not read the reports coming from China very carefully. Brigadier general A. R. F. Dorward indeed commanded an expedition in which Italian troops took part. It was, however, directed against the village of Duliuzhen and not Baoding as the minister claimed. The Baoding expedition, one of the major actions during the allied occupation of China, took place a full month after the date the minister mentioned. He was right, however, in claiming that brigadier general Dorward was satisfied with the performance of the Italian soldiers under his command:

*The excellent marching capacity of your troops, their cheery spirit under discomfort and their soldierly and orderly conduct under much temptation during the*

627 BCD, Atti del Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei Deputati, Sessione 1900, 1a della XXI Legislatura, Discussioni, Volume I: dal 16 giugno all’8 dicembre 1900, Tornata del 6 dicembre 1900, p. 1097.
628 ibid.
629 The village of Duliuzhen is referred to as Tiu-Liu, Tu-Liu or Tu-Liu Ts’un in most contemporary reports.
occupation of Tiu-Liu were the subject of admiration of the whole force, consisting of troops of five nations [...]  

Dorward’s reference to “orderly conduct under much temptation” became one of the sources of the myth that the Italian soldiers did not participate in the looting that became one of the trademarks of the allied occupation of China. Giuseppe Messerotti Benvenuti, a member of the medical staff of the Italian contingent, had, however, a much more prosaic explanation for the supposed moral rigour of the Italian troops:

If our soldiers have done less harm, this is due to the fact that, even though they went everywhere, they always arrived late, when the villages had already been looted and burned to the ground. The few times they arrived on time, they did as everyone else.

Colonel Garioni’s actions, if not his official reports, suggested that Messerotti Benvenuti may have been right. Suspecting that the men under his command may not be a representative sample of the Italian armed forces, he meticulously analysed their matriculation papers only to find out that two hundred members of the expeditionary corps were convicted felons, condemned in Italy up to thirteen times. As denunciations for robbery, murder and carnal violence, as well as insubordination and service offences were piling up, Garioni finally decided to establish a military tribunal to deal with them.

At Montecitorio, these facts were unknown. Whether for reasons of genuine conviction or political conformism, most of the deputies demonstrated their willingness to believe in the picture of the Italian soldier that Ponza di San Martino had painted. Only isolated voices from the left dared to question the veracity of the minister’s claims and demanded a retreat from China. Nevertheless, a few days later, a motion “for the retreat of Italian troops from the country where the name and the goals of civilisation have been offended” was presented. In an inspired address in

630 USMM, 172/02, from Tianjin, 14 September 1900.
634 USMM, 172/02, from Beijing, 7 November 1900.
636 ibid.
637 BCD, Atti del Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei Deputati, Sessione 1900, 1ª della XXI Legislatura, Discussioni, Volume I: dal 16 giugno all’8 dicembre 1900, Tornata del 6 dicembre 1900, p. 1099.
favour of the motion, the philosopher and republican Giovanni Bovio exposed the hypocrisy of the foreign presence in China and demanded immediate retreat:

*Is it really civilisation that old Europe is bringing to China? [...] It has been said: the West will return to the East more than it has taken: it took from the East the religions and it is returning science and the rights of peoples. It is a beautiful pretext, the rights of peoples. Which of the great powers can name them? After so many invasions, after the famous Concert of Europe supported Turkey against the Hellenic movement, after the criminal acquiescence of all in the face of the Armenian massacre, after the raid on Transvaal, the most uncivilised in the human memory, which of the powers has the moral right to invoke the rights of peoples? The great powers dare to present to Italian acumen, which resplended in the times of renaissance with the wisdom of Venice, Florence and Genua, shams that would bring to laughter even secretaries of the remotest rural communes. They should say that they are going to the East in order to protect and extend the possessions already acquired, to attempt gaining new ones, to block the way to a most feared and invading power, to ward off the danger of being excluded from a future division of prey, to prevent China striving for a vast federation from a real evolution, like Japan, this they should say and many more things but not talk of the rights of peoples. It is known that today, these rights, outside of books, are diplomatic fiction supported by cannons. The Italian minister should have responded to the powers: You would like my country to be your partner in a civilising mission? I am coming. But when civilisation becomes complicity, I retreat. My coming is vindication; my retreat is condemnation: because Italy, aware of its origin and its mission, cannot blemish itself.638

Bovio’s address was too idealistic for most of the other deputies and the course of action he proposed simply impracticable. Prime minister Saracco asserted that the government would not repatriate the troops until this became permitted by “the interest and the dignity of the nation” and Giovanni Giolitti, one of the most controversial but also most influential political figures in Italy of the late 19th and the early 20th century, succinctly described Italy’s position:

*We have gone to the Far East, I am not sure exactly if with an alliance, but certainly with an agreement between the powers and I do not believe that a nation

---

638 BCD, Atti del Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei Deputati, Sessione 1900-901, 1a della XXI Legislatura, Discussioni, Volume II: dal 10 dicembre al 7 febbraio 1901, 2a Tornata dell’ 11 dicembre 1900, p. 1353.
can retreat decorously from an agreement made, simply because it encounters some difficulties. If we were to follow such a policy, we would never again find someone who would assume a commitment with us.\textsuperscript{639}

Giolitti expressed not only the rationale for staying in China but also the rationale for going there in the first place so clearly that even the foreign minister would have found it difficult to explain his course of action more tersely and more precisely. The understanding and approval, implicit in his words, also indicated that Visconti Venosta had managed to sail between Scylla and Charybdis.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig3.png}
\caption{Unveiling of the monument to the fallen Italian soldiers at the international cemetery in Beijing on 22 July 1901}
\end{figure}

Although the troops were still in China, the intervention was over. The Italian forces remained inconspicuous throughout the occupation but they demonstrated their presence and offered the much needed pledge of loyalty to the German ally. In June 1901, the Chamber of the

\textsuperscript{639} ibid., p. 1359.
Deputies approved the extraordinary expenses caused by the expedition. On 5 August, even before the official Boxer Protocol was signed, most of the soldiers of the Italian contingent embarked on two ships bound for Italy. Finally, Visconti Venosta could be pleased.

Italy did not reap from the Boxer War the kind of profits that the German Empire did. It gained a small piece of land in Tianjin that became the first and the only Italian settlement in China. The settlement was not a substitute for the Sanmen Bay. It lacked access to the sea and offered no opportunity of industrial exploitation. At the Consulta, however, the ambitions associated to the Sanmen Bay had long been put ad acta. The Tianjin settlement merely fulfilled a symbolic role. It was the token of “the prestige restored to the Italian name in the Far East, compromised by the thoughtless undertaking of San Mun” that Visconti Venosta and Salvago Raggi unsuccessfully sought to obtain in the autumn of 1899. This obtained, Italy had no further pretensions in China. Early in 1905, the Naval Division in the Far East was dissolved, marking the end of the short-lived Italian gunboat diplomacy in the Far East. On the financial side, Italy received 26.6m Tael equalling to £97.8m, which more than compensated for the military expenses and the damages suffered by the Catholic missions and private individuals in China, amounting to £14.8m and £22.8m. With respect to the other powers, Italy’s position hardly improved. Instead, the realisation was slowly settling in that China could hardly be turned into an area of profitable business operation as long as Italy did not readily command significant amounts of capital and its heavy industry lagged far behind those of its European competitors. The structural characteristics of the Italian state made these deficiencies virtually impossible to remove.

5. Conclusion

Few historical episodes illustrate Hegelian dialectic more clearly than the Italian involvement in China during the last quarter of the 19th century. A dream of an oriental colony, its brutal destruction in the course of the Sanmen crisis and the Aufhebung in form of the Italian concession in Tianjin form unmistakably the sequence of the abstract, the negative and the concrete. Following Vico, one might recognise a similar sequence of events repeating itself in the age of fascism, only characterised by an even greater peak-to-peak amplitude, more irreconcilable differences between the desired and the real, more momentous consequences of their clash. The key to understanding Italian imperialism lies, however, in recognising that liberal imperialism and fascist imperialism are not merely recurrences, independent instantiations of the same tendencies in two discrete ages like in Vico’s theory. Rather, they form parts of one and the same movement, head and tail of the same heritage that was woven deeply into the fibre of the Kingdom of Italy.

Unlike the rationally motivated imperialisms of major colonial empires, Italian imperialism was in its essence an aftershock of the Risorgimento and a consequence of a missed paradigmatic change. Whereas the success of Italian national unification depended on military victories and the promise of greatness during this early phase of nation building lay in territorial expansion, once the unification was achieved, further waxing in power required political consolidation and extensive modernisation. Failing to recognise this and falling prey to romantic notions about bonds of heredity binding the Kingdom of Italy to the Roman Empire, Italian political leadership attempted to achieve greatness through further territorial expansion. These attempts, not buttressed by internal strength, were doomed to failure. Too few were at this stage politicians and thinkers who realised where the problem lay, and too strong the enchantment with the glorious past. Instead of having a sobering effect, frustrations provoked an even more ardent desire.

The change that occurred with the arrival of fascism was therefore rather a quantitative than a qualitative one. Unlike his liberal predecessors, Mussolini realised that the achievement of ambitious political goals required harnessing the power of the entire nation. Using mass media, intimidation and political terror648 he finally reached, at least apparently, the “uniformity of outlook” that Sidney Sonnino had demanded more than three decades earlier. For the first time, Italians supported imperialistic enterprises in greater numbers, not only in ideal but also in material terms, offering as a sacrifice, in a highly symbolic manner, even their wedding rings at the altar of

648 Reichardt, S.: Faschistische Kampfbünde, pp. 84, 88-89.
While Mussolini proclaimed that “more complicated forms of civilisation required greater restrictions on the freedom of the individual”, children and grandchildren of those Italians who the contemporary observers accused of being little better than beasts and guided only by immediate selfish interests demonstrated an amount of selflessness rarely seen even in the most developed civil societies.

Notoriously, the structure ceremonially unveiled in 1936 as the Italian Empire, that initially appeared to embody the long awaited fulfilment of the Italian imperialistic dream, collapsed quickly and without offering much resistance in 1943. The official abandonment of all colonial pretensions in 1947 and the fiduciary administration of Somalia granted by the United Nations in 1948 strangely resembled the events from 1899 and 1900.

---

649 Following the invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy. In order to counterbalance the effects of the sanctions on the national economy and the flow of capital, the fascist government launched the campaign “Oro alla Patria” in which Italians were called upon to donate their gold and silver to the state. In the context of this action, on 18 December 1935, the so-called “Giornata della Fede” (fede meaning in Italian both ‘faith’ and ‘wedding ring’) was organised, when the Italians were asked to donate their wedding rings. The solemn celebration took place at the “Altar of the Fatherland” in Piazza Venezia.
Figures:
1. Canevaro’s second telegram to De Martino from 8 March 1899
   (ASDMAE, Serie Politica, 406/86/1899, “Incidente dei telegrammi”)
2. Italian marines at Dagu Forts
   (USMM, 172/02)
3. Unveiling of the monument to the fallen Italian soldiers at the international cemetary in Beijing on 22 July 1901
   (USMM, 172/01)

Archives:
ACS Archivio Centrale dello Stato
ASDMAE Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri
BCD Biblioteca della Camera dei Deputati
USMM Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare

Bibliography:


Gioberti, Vincenzo: *Del primato morale e civile degli Italiani*. Brussels, Belgium: Meline, Cans e Compagnia, 1845.


Kolinsky, Martin: *Continuity and Change in European Society: Germany, France and Italy since 1870*. New York, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974.


La Pegna, Ernesto: *Codice politico ovvero statuto fondamentale del Regno d’Italia*. Naples, Italy: De Angelis, 1871.


Morasso, Mario: Uomini e idee del domani. Turin, Italy: Fratelli Bocca, 1898.


Sanfilippo, Matteo: “Tipologie dell’emigrazione di massa”. In Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina (eds.): *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana*. Rome, Italy: Donzelli editore, 2001, pp. 77-


Newspaper Articles:

Corriere della Sera
“La commemorazione del cinquantenario dello Statuto”. 5-6 March 1898.

The Times
“Count von Bülow on the Crisis”. 20 November 1900, p. 5.
“Discussion in the French Chamber”. 20 November 1900, p. 5.
“The French Troops”. 28 December 1900, p. 3.
“The Italian Disaster in Abyssinia”. 4 March 1896, p. 5.

The New York Times
“Powers Oppose Great Britain”. 7 August 1900.

New York World
“Interview with Karl Marx, head of L’Internationale”. 18 July 1871.