

The general and the artist

Travel narratives in 1930s' Italy by Cai Tingkai and Huang Juesi

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The first half of the twentieth century witnessed unprecedented mobility from China to Europe. Many Chinese travelers came to Europe to travel or study and, once home, contributed in various ways to the construction of the newly born Chinese republic. During their journeys, many of them visited Italy for practical reasons—being the place to leave the continent via sea—or often under the influence of the education received in other European countries such as France, Belgium, Germany, and the UK, where the memory of the Grand Tour was still alive. The paper illustrates a research project on Italian cultural itineraries whose main purpose is to identify types of travelers and travel modes, and map cultural itineraries covered by Chinese people in Italy mainly through the analysis of Chinese travel literature written in the first half of the twentieth century. Particular attention is paid to the close relationship between literature and movement from a Mobility Studies perspective (Merriman & Pearce 2017), and to the variety of accounts dealing with Italy, its culture and society as perceived and narrated by this generation of Chinese travelers. The possibilities of quantitative and qualitative analysis of such a research project are then illustrated through two case studies: the accounts of the coeval journeys to Italy by the former general Cai Tingkai 蔡廷楷 (1892-1968) and by the artist Huang Juesi 黄觉寺 (1901-1988) which respectively led to the publication of the *Haiwai yinxiang ji* 海外印象记 (Impressions from abroad, 1935) and *Ouyou zhi shi* 欧游之什 (European writings, 1944).

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1. Preliminary remarks¹

The reconstruction of travel narratives can be very useful to understand past and present mobilities and interconnections, leading to an enriched global perspective on history. This is particularly true for cultural movements and transmissions which, in some cases, cannot be fully perceived if not

¹ This short essay is part of the research activities conducted within the SILC (SinoItalian Links and Crossroads <<https://www.forlilpsi.unifi.it/p535.html>>) coordinated by Valentina Pedone. I would like to thank Arendt Speser for providing me with valuable suggestions.

represented by individual actions. This article is part of an ongoing research project that aims to map the cultural itineraries of Chinese people in twentieth-century Italy through written memory in the form of travel literature.²

The emergent tradition of Chinese mobility in the last century can be explored from different perspectives, and the great variety of visions of Italy—written, read, and later disseminated in China—is still not well known. This variety will be illustrated through two case studies: the accounts of the coeval journeys to Italy by the general Cai Tingkai 蔡廷楷 (1892-1968) and by the artist Huang Juesi 黄觉寺 (1901-1988), which respectively led to the publication of *Haiwai yinxiang ji* 海外印象记 (“Impressions from abroad,” 1935) and *Ouyou zhi shi* 欧游之什 (“Writings on my European travels,” 1944).

In the last years, immobility imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of our lives and thinking, leading me to reconsider the relationship between body, movement, and mind. Lack of movement impacts not only the body but also thought processes and the ability to create and imagine new spaces, understood in the broadest sense. Michael Mewshaw (2005) has underlined how immobility immediately recalls the ultimate act of life—i.e., death—so that the freedom to move, which makes us feel alive, also provides us with the opportunity not only to assert our identities but to think, to imagine outside of the box, to be creative. Furthermore, as Mewshaw points out, to travel is a “crucial act” in literary terms (2005: 2). “Writers,” states Mewshaw, “need travel, its freedom, its stimulation, and exposure to new and innovative points of view in the same way they need air, editors, and a reading audience” (2005: 3).

Given these premises, the present essay aims to explore Chinese travel literature on Italy, mapping and highlighting the cultural itineraries traveled by Chinese during the twentieth century,³ and thereby shedding new light on the grey areas of cultural contacts between Italy and China. In addition, the ongoing research aims to look at the phenomenon of Chinese travel literature within two theoretical frameworks: Literary Studies (Chinese travel literature about Italy), and Mobility Studies (cultural mobility).

Travel has always had a fundamental influence on cultural construction and transmission. In his famous volume *Routes* (1997), James Clifford emphasizes how culture has more to do with “routes” than with “roots.” Clifford highlights the close relationship between movement and literature and points

² The research project is fully illustrated in Castorina (2023).

³ For this article, only the first half of the century has been considered.

out that a ‘journey’ could be used as a new lens through which to look at literary phenomena (Clifford 1997). These reflections found a further formulation in recent years with the “new mobilities paradigm” theorized by Sheller and Urry (2006). This critical practice is characterized by strong interdisciplinarity that looks at many phenomena by placing the emphasis on movement itself rather than on its possible purposes or destinations, shaking off many implications linked to the concept of movement, especially when it involves people. Mobility as a new critical perspective not only concerns the social sciences but has also begun to be applied within the humanities (Merriman and Pearce 2017; Greenblatt 2010). In addition, the recording/memory of a journey, often reconstructed *a posteriori*, acts as a glue between the individual and the individuals who in the past have traveled the same roads, and helps to fix on paper the “mobility of travel” by transforming natural space into artificial (i.e., cultural) space.

2. Chinese travel literature on Italy

Italy’s Renaissance and Risorgimento have been at the center of the Chinese modern political and intellectual discourse since the end of the nineteenth century, as the work of Kyle D. Anderson underlines (2010). Their protagonists—Dante, Boccaccio, Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Cavour—were employed as models by modern Chinese intellectuals. Apart from Chinese intellectuals’ vision of Italy, what image of Italy has been projected in China by those who saw the country in person? What itineraries did they follow and why? What influences, if any, did these images and visions have on modern China? How were these first-hand experiences disseminated in China? These are some of the questions addressed in this paper, even though much more research on the subject must be done to organize the multifaceted and heterogeneous travel literature on Italy written by Chinese people in the last century.

The first comprehensive study on the subject is that by Chen Shiru (2007), which deals with the period between 1840-1945. Another research has been conducted by An Ran (2018), who concentrates on Chinese travels in Europe in the first part of the last century. Strictly speaking of works dedicated to twentieth century Chinese travel literature in Italy, several scholars have translated and analyzed part of this literature.⁴

⁴ There is not a systematic work on the subject but since the 2000s, some scholars had begun to publish articles and essays on twentieth century Chinese travel accounts about Italy, see for example: Abbiati (2007), Brezzi (2012 and 2014), Castorina and Pedone (2022); Findeisen (2000); and Jin (2015).

The great revolutions that hit Chinese literature at the beginning of the twentieth century also impacted the genre of travel notes or *youji* 游记. Writing about travel no longer belonged exclusively to the class of *literati* but opened to other types of writers; for example, students and journalists abroad at the turn of the last century gave birth to modern tourist narratives. To give an idea of this massive expansion of mobility, Marius Jansen writes: “The Chinese student movement to Japan in the first decade of the twentieth century was probably the largest mass movement of students overseas in world history up to that point” (Jansen 1980: 348). The movement of students towards Europe was also very large, fueled by Chinese political organizations in Europe and programs such as the Work-Study Program (*qingong jianxue* 勤工俭学).⁵ This mobility originated a production in Chinese travel writings without precedent (Mei 2010), reaching its peak between the 1920s-1930s and World War II (An 2018: 3).

Overseas travel notes were very popular during the Republican period and circulated among the public by means of new media such as newspapers and magazines. Together with translations of Western literature, new media enriched “common Chinese people’s cognition of the world’s geographic space” and provided fresh “impressions and images of Europe and ‘modernity’” (An 2018: 5). These accounts not only had an enormous influence among the intellectuals and the general public for more than a century, but also—taking Europe as a mirror—allowed many travelers to re-examine the past, narrate the present, and imagine the future of China (An 2018: v). Italy, at the same time, “was first represented as a re-emerging country which flourished in politics, economy, military, and then treated as the cradle of European civilization” (Jin 2015: 125).

During the 1920s and 1930s, people from all walks of life—students, politicians, entrepreneurs, soldiers, and journalists—went to Europe for study or tourism. Many also visited the Italian peninsula taking notes of what they saw. This is the case with the travels of Cai Tingkai and Huang Juesi, which offer rich insight into the forms of mobility and narrative aspirations made possible by modern travel conditions.

3. The general: Cai Tingkai and his *Impressions from abroad*

Born in Luoding (Guandong province) to a peasant family, Cai Tingkai chose a career in the army along with many of his fellow countrymen. In 1904, at the age of 12, he was forced to abandon his first schooling in the local village, due to his family economic restrictions. He then began to work as a tailor

⁵ On the origin and development of the program see, among others, Bailey (1988).

and expressed the desire to join the army. His family strongly opposed this aspiration and instead found him a wife, Peng Huifang 彭惠芳. In 1909, he secretly enrolled for the first time during the visit of the Qing New Army in Luoding. After the fall of the empire, Cai joined the army again as a private soldier and his military career gradually took off. The army gave him access to a wider knowledge; he began to read newspapers under encouragement from his supervisor (Luo 2005: 15) and later entered the military academy in Canton where he graduated in September 1921.

Within the Guomindang (GMD) Army, Cai participated in many battles and took part in the Northern Expedition (1926-28) amongst the divisions and splits that characterize the military forces in those years. The growing conflicts between the Nationalist and Communist military caused him to almost be killed by the Communists in June 1931 (Luo 2005: 17). In the same period, Japan was marching against China; the Nanjing government was bankrupt and had no money to pay its soldiers; Cai, therefore, planned to form a voluntary army (Luo 2005: 17). One of Cai's major challenges was to lead the China 19th Route Army in January 1932 to resist the Japanese attack in Shanghai, which lasted for 33 days, known as the January 28 Incident.⁶ As the Nanjing government was losing support, Cai was sent to Fujian as Peace Restoration Officer and Commander-in-Chief of the 19th Route Army. Together with Jiang Guangnai 蒋光鼐 (1888-1967) and others, they gave birth to a people's republican government in Fujian in November 1933, standing openly against the GMD government that sent an expedition against them in January 1934. Cai retreated, and part of his army was incorporated by the Nationalist government.

Without a post in the army, the general decided to leave the country. After a few months in Hong Kong, he left for his travel around the world, which lasted from April 12, 1934, to April 19, 1935. Once back in China, Cai occupied many political positions and collaborated with the newborn People's Republic of China. He was a founding member of the GMD's Democratic Promotion Party (DPP, *Minzhu cujin dang* 民主促进党) in March 1946 (Lau 2005: 21), and then, from June 1949, served as a member of the Central People's Government Committee under the guidance of the Communist Party. He was targeted by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, like many former GMD leaders, and died in Beijing in April 1968.

⁶ On this episode see Jordan (2001).

3.1 The travel and text of Cai Tingkai

As aforementioned, Cai Tingkai's travel abroad was motivated by political reasons. Having lost his job after the experiment of a democratic government and in open opposition to Nanjing governance, Cai's travel is more a flight disguised as an "observation trip," motivated to gain international support from foreign countries and from Overseas Chinese, to whom the book is dedicated. In the first page, Cai explains the reasons behind his leaving:

I, Tingkai, anxious to save my country, was outraged at the Nanjing government which has humiliated China and had no alternative but to organize a revolution in Fujian Province in November 1933, hoping to complete my aspirations nurtured in the battle of Shanghai. Later, because of the [political] atmosphere, I voluntarily quit. [...] After arriving in Hong Kong, I often thought that all of us are responsible for the rise and fall of the country: today our country is in crisis and needs to be saved urgently; the international situation is unstable, and it would be pressing in the days to come. Therefore, I asked Mr. Tan Qixiu and Mr. Qiu Zhaochen to join me, and hired Mr. Mai Ying as secretary and English [interpreter], preparing to go abroad together to change my personal situation, observe the international trend, and thank overseas Chinese for their generous support during the anti-Japanese war in Shanghai (Cai 1935: 1).

His trip was not directed to one specific place but was an around the world tour. Cai left China on the Italian *Conte Rosso*, a liner launched in 1922 that from 1932 connected Trieste to Shanghai (Eliseo and Miller 2004: 42-43). After a few pages dedicated to the countries visited during the journey across the sea (Malaysia, Ceylon, Bombay, and Egypt's pyramids), the liner arrived in Italy on May 3, 1934, where the (now ex-) general stayed until May 27th. Following his sojourn in Italy, he visited many European countries such as Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and France; he then left for New York from London in late August. Cai remained in North America for six months and visited many cities before leaving in February 1935, this time to visit Honolulu, Oakland, Sydney, and the Philippines. He returned to Hong Kong on April 19th, after most of a year roaming around the world. His account, *Haiwai yinxiang ji*, consists of 87 chapters plus three final chapters in six parts, titled *Huigu* 回顾 ("A retrospective view"), where he summarizes his ideas and impressions on the political, economic, and military issues afflicting China.

Even if Cai Tingkai remained in Italy for less than a month, it is worth noting that the country occupies a large space in the travel account (11 pages), especially compared to other European countries with one or two pages of description, at most. In addition, the Italian tour of the ex-general is a 'Fascist military tour' of sorts, as can be seen from the following table, which lists the places he visited in 1934:

Date	Place or occasion
May 4	Venice
May 7	Rome
May 8	Meeting with the Chinese Ambassador Liu Wendao 刘文岛 (1893-1967)
May 9-14	Rome
May 15	Meeting with Benito Mussolini
May 16	Visit to the third division of the Italian Army and Caserma Mussolini in Rome with Gen. Enzo Emilio Galbiati (1897-1982)
May 17	Naples (Baia). Visit to the torpedo factory with Conte Valte[l]lina ⁷
May 18	Short visit to Pompei and visit to the Aeronautical Academy in Naples
May 19	Rome (Ostia). The new residential quarter of Mussolini (Borghetto dei Pescatori)
May 20	Rome (Ciampino). The airport with Col. Raffaele Senzadenari (1890-?) and Col. Umberto Grani (1897-1944), and again in Ostia
May 21	Cesano (Rome). Infantry school with Conte Valtellina
May 22	Milan
May 23	Visit to an Artillery school with Gen. Galbiati on the Apennine Mountains
May 24	Visit to a military camp on the Apennines
May 25-26	Visit to a motorcycle factory, aircraft factory, and firearms factory
May 27	Lake Como

Table 1. Cai Tingkai's itinerary in Italy

From the very first pages, Cai's interest in Italy is focused on its government and soaked in professional bias; his account—far from describing scenic or cultural spots—details Italy's political and military aspects. In the Italian diary, the author provides information on the organization, structure, numbers, and success of the Italian army in a way that is not very attractive for a liberal reader but gives a precise and unilateral view on the country.

In Venice, for example, he dedicates just a few words to the charm and history of the city, while the weaponry displayed in a museum attracts all his attention, one item in particular:

⁷ The name appears transliterated in this way in the text together with the Chinese name “Major Hua Duo'er” 華多爾華多爾少校. I have not been able to identify him yet. This could be Alessandro Voltolini di Valtellina but further research is needed.

[...] The most peculiar thing is that when ancient officers and soldiers set out on expeditions, they prevented their wives from committing adultery. The museum also displays the sealing instrument used on women's lower bodies. It is made of iron and is similar in shape to mousetraps found in our country's villages. If it is locked, there is no way to open it unless you destroy it completely or have the original key. Upon leaving, the soldiers locked the instrument and once back, they inspected it to make sure it was intact to determine whether their wives abided by the ethical rules for women (Cai 1935: 6).

The museum displays many items, but Cai's interest in chastity belts is indicative. Despite not expressing any particular judgment, Cai seems to appreciate, or at least comprehend, the 'value' of such a peculiar item, perhaps comparing it with his country's traditional ethics.

Similarly distasteful to most modern readers, one of the most thrilling moments for the general is his meeting with Mussolini. It took place on May 15, 1934, thanks to the mediation of Galeazzo Ciano,⁸ who he met in China during the famous battle of Shanghai.

On the afternoon of [May] 15, I went to visit the Italian Prime Minister Mussolini at his office with Secretary Mai in accordance with previous agreements. As I arrived, Mussolini extended his warmest welcome to me, shaking my hand for a few minutes. Turning to Secretary Mai, he declared: "I speak Italian, French, English and German. What do you prefer?" Mr. Mai replied that he preferred to speak English. Following a pleasant exchange of greetings, Mussolini asked: "Why do I want to welcome you? Because I have never met any Chinese who dared to fight against Japan except for the one and only General Cai. Your heroism must be admired not only by Chinese but also by foreigners. Regardless of the Chinese government's attitude towards you, today I would like to extend a warm welcome." He went on: "For this reason, I am going to give you a picture of me so that you will remember me. General, after returning to China, do your best to save [your country]." He then took a picture from a cabinet, signed it personally, and gave it to me (Cai 1935: 8).

The original autographed picture is attached to the account. However, apart from that, I found no written evidence so far of this meeting (or of Cai's passage in Italy) in the Central State Archive of Rome or other historical sources,⁹ and further research is still needed. The scene has a comical twist; consider the pompous and rhetorical dialogue aimed at exalting Cai's heroism, despite the latter's relationship with the Nanjing government, along with Mussolini playing the diva and giving the general an autographed photo in total accordance with the historical figure.

As a soldier, Cai's primary interests were in military and political reasoning. On May 22, he asked his escort, Mr. Valtellina, how he would explain fascism's success. Valtellina's response gave him an

⁸ Apparently, as Cai writes, they already met twice on the battlefields (Cai 1935: 7).

⁹ For example, I have searched one of the most popular newspapers of the time, *Popolo d'Italia*, without finding any news about the general's visit.

opportunity to express his thoughts about the sad situation of his country and increased Cai's admiration for the fascist regime, which seemed to provide a solution to the difficulties facing China. According to Cai Tingkai, the key to success is to stand with the people and cooperate with them to ensure a better future for China, as the Fascist Party had done in Italy. At the end of the Italian tour, the author summarizes his experiences giving some conclusive considerations, not sparing rhetorical propaganda enveloped in a very questionable predictive sense:

During World War I, Italy collapsed, regardless of the politics of the time. After Mussolini's dictatorship, considerable progress was made in organizing the budget, improving the monetary system, reducing rail costs, and developing hydroelectricity. What people call dictatorship maybe is the premise to enrich the country and benefit the people. After Mussolini jumped onto the Italian political stage, the national government became increasingly strong and one of the five great powers. The diplomatic relations with our country are also extremely close. Once I asked an Italian child, "Do you love Chinese people?" He replied, "I love Chinese people the most." I asked again, "Why do you support Mussolini?" The answer was: "Mussolini is for the country and the people, so we support him." Mussolini's public loyalty to the country won the people's faith. How could a dictatorship like this be of any harm? (Cai 1935: 17).

Cai's vision is clearly influenced by what have been called the "golden years" in the history of relations between Italy and China (Samarani and De Giorgi 2011) and by the emergence of what became known as 'Chinese Fascism.' If and how this trip to Italy modified his political vision, however, is not yet clear from current research. What is certain is that from 1937 onwards, bilateral relations between the two countries gradually worsened and Cai ended up serving the People's Republic of China after 1949.

4. The artist: Huang Juesi

Unlike Cai Tingkai, much less is known about Huang Juesi. Nevertheless, he is one of the most important Chinese names related to the introduction of Western painting techniques and esthetics in his country, and one of the most important art educators of the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Despite his influence and role in spreading artistic education in China, Huang has found little space in academic research apart from the work of Zhang Xuefei (2016), and almost no space in scholarship outside China.¹¹

¹⁰ The biographical information on Huang Juesi is taken from Zhang X. (2016).

¹¹ Julia Andrews (1994), for example, does not even mention his name.

Huang Juesi was born in the district of Wujiang in Jiangsu province.¹² He was interested in writing and painting since childhood; in 1922, he followed one of the teachers of the local school, the famous painter and art educator Yan Wenliang 颜文樑 (1893-1988), to Suzhou.¹³ Together with other artists of the time, they founded the Suzhou Summer Art School (*Suzhou xiaqi tuhua ban* 苏州暑期图画班), predecessor to the Suzhou Academy of Fine Arts (*Suzhou Meizhuan* 苏州美专). Huang was one of the first 13 students to graduate (Zhang X. 2016: 10). After graduation, he was asked to remain at the alma mater. He devoted himself to teaching drawing and researching art history, while continuing to paint and show his works in several exhibitions in Suzhou and other cities. When the Suzhou Art Museum was founded in 1927, Huang was chosen to direct the construction work. In 1929, he invited Xu Beihong to teach at the Suzhou Academy of Fine Arts, thus initiating their friendship.

After studying in France between 1929 and 1931, Yan Wenliang chose Huang Juesi and Zhang Ziyu 张紫屿 (1902-1984) to go at the l'Ecole des beaux-arts de Paris, probably with a scholarship program from the province (Cinquini 2017: I, 389). Between 1935 and 1936, Huang studied with the famous painter André Devambez (1867-1944) but had to return to China due to his father's death (Zhang X. 2016: 32). While in France, he wrote an important volume entitled *Sumiao hua shuyao* 素描画述要 (“On Drawing and Painting”), which was later used as a textbook in schools and attracted the attention of the public in China, republished several times through the years (Zhang X. 2016: 25-29). Another book by Huang with an enormous impact, *Ouzhou minghua caifanglu* 欧洲名画采访录 (“Collection of European Famous Paintings,” published in 1939), introduced Western museology in China (Zhang X. 2016: 32-35). In 1944, Huang published his travel memories in the volume *Ouyou zhi shi* 欧游之什.

Huang Juesi was involved in art magazines in China. He was, for example, editor-in-chief of *Yilang* 艺浪 (“Art Waves”)¹⁴ since its foundation in 1928, and chief editor of *Yishu* 艺术 (“Art”). After the foundation of the PRC and until the 1960s, Huang served as a professor at Suzhou College, a

¹² In French sources, his name is Romanized in Wong Kio Szu. See Cinquini (2017: II, 12).

¹³ Yan Wenliang is considered one of the greatest artists and educators of the period. Yan spent three years in Paris studying painting at l'Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts between 1929 and 1931 and was significantly influenced by the Impressionists. Together with other young artists of the time, like Liu Haisu 刘海粟 (1896-1994), Huang Juesi, and the famous Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿 (1895-1953), he was one of the first Chinese to go abroad to study art. See Andrew (1994) and Cinquini (2017).

¹⁴ Originated with the title *Canlang mei* 沧浪美, Huang was appointed editor-in-chief from the beginning, while the magazine changed its name in March 1930. For the magazine's origin, development, and importance, see Zhang J. (2018: 58-62). On the role of Huang in the magazine, see Zhang X. (2016: 38-40).

committee member of the Cultural Relics Association (*Wenwu xiehui* 文物协会), director of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (*Zhongguo Wenxue Yishujie Lianhehui* 中国文学艺术界联合会), and director of China Artists Association (*Zhongguo meishujia xiehui* 中国美术家协会). During the Cultural Revolution, he was persecuted and imprisoned in a cowshed (*niupeng* 牛棚).¹⁵ Unfortunately, many of his written works, such as the “Animal Anatomy for Artists” (*Yiyong dongwu jiepouxue* 艺用动物解剖学)—along with photos, albums, and manuscripts—were confiscated and irreparably lost, together with a complete set of *Art Waves*. Huang retired in 1978 and spent the rest of his life writing articles and essays on Chinese paintings until his death in 1988.

4.1 The travel and text of Huang Juesi

As for his travels abroad, we do not know much about Huang’s European sojourn. In his account, he does not provide any precise data to help us understand the span of time of his travels or the itinerary he followed. The text, in fact, is not in the form of a diary but of a recollection of memories. Likely, more information about his tour had already been given in the magazine *Yilang* since the author seems to address a readership already familiar with his overseas adventures.

It is also possible that Huang made several trips, as the last chapter suggests. Here we find the only annotation of a date (January 26, 1936) written on the occasion of a trip to London organized by the Chinese Art Association in France (Huang 1944: 69). Interestingly, the *Preface* by Xu Zhongnian 徐仲年 is dated April 16, 1937. This is important information from which it can be inferred that Huang had completed the book that year but had to wait until 1944 to publish it. This delayed publishing was likely caused by the turmoil and destruction of the civil war. Another element, however, seems to contradict the thesis that Huang finished the book in 1937. In the travel account, Huang lamented the fact that in a previous book he did not give enough space to Italian artists and works of art (Huang 1944: 64). He is clearly referring to his *Collection of European Famous Paintings*, published in 1939. It is, therefore, possible that the account was compiled in several stages. Despite the lack of specific dates, Huang's Italian travel or travels certainly occurred during his sojourn in France. It is however currently impossible to establish if the year was 1935 or 1936, and to calculate how long each trip (if several)

¹⁵ As Li writes (1995: 292-293): “It did not have to be a genuine cowshed; it could be a classroom, storehouse, dark room, temple, or stable. Because the people who were kept there were given the degraded title, ‘cow monsters and snake demons [*niugui-sheshen* 牛鬼蛇神],’ the place where they were imprisoned became a ‘cowshed.’”

lasted. In addition, from a few passages in the text and a picture taken in Piazza della Signoria (Florence) inserted in the first pages of the book, we apprehend that Huang was with two friends, Mr. Zhang (Zhang jun 张君) and Mr. Ye (Ye jun 叶君).¹⁶

The book is in 15 chapters, with an Introduction written by Xu Zhongni and a Postscript by the author himself, for a total of 80 pages. Published almost eight years after his sojourn in Europe, the account does not follow a chronological order or a linear itinerary, as evidenced by the contents:

Preface by Xu Zhongnian

1. Missing Rome
2. A Venetian night
3. Paris in my eyes
4. In Milan
5. A Chinese art exhibition in London
6. The Vatican frescoes
7. Archaeological visit to Pompeii
8. Impressions of Geneva
9. The girl outside the Uffizi Gallery
10. The theatres of Paris
11. [Paris] literary cafés
12. Night in a Dutch hotel
13. An introduction to “Italian famous paintings”
14. Florence, the flower capital of Europe
15. Trip to London

Postscript

The author probably organized the contents following his own memories. However, it is immediately evident that, despite the title, 8 out of 15 chapters are dedicated to Italy. Italy is, quite textually, at the

¹⁶ Most likely, the first one is his old friend, the painter Zhang Ziyu mentioned above; the latter is also indicated as Monsieur An Ye (*moxi An Ye* 墨歇安叶) in the book, which I have not been able to identify. As mentioned later in the account, he studied—probably architecture—in London (Huang 1944: 17). The term ‘Monsieur’ could perhaps have been used as a joke. There is also a possibility that this third traveler is of a different nationality, and An Ye or Anye should be interpreted as transcriptions. Unfortunately, the quality of the picture attached in the book does not allow us to clearly visualize the facial features of this little companionship.

center of Huang's narration. Without going into details, although a close reading would prove very interesting, it is worth noting the deep passion the artist developed for Italian art. In Rome, the travel group visited many places like the Colosseum, the Pantheon, Vatican City, St. Peter's Basilica, and others. Recollecting the memory of the city, Huang compares Rome to Beiping (Beijing) as they both are very ancient, with the difference that Rome preserved all its antiques while Beiping did not:

What Rome possesses is primitive, grand, magnificent, and splendid; all this can also be found in every corner of Beiping. However, what Beiping shows us has already been modified and cannot fully preserve the traces of "ancient." In Rome, on the contrary, not only did all the monuments fully preserve their original state but [the Romans] also avoided putting them together with modern buildings. Therefore, in Rome, you can see a civilization of three thousand years ago, while in Beiping, even the Old Summer Palace refuses to preserve its remnants [...] (Huang 1944: 1).

This positive evaluation of Rome falls within a common practice which characterizes travel literature. As Pageaux notes, travel is not only a 'translation of a space' but also a form of autobiography (2010 [2008]: 60). Huang is struck by the stark contrast between the capital cities of two countries: Rome, with its grandeur, and Beiping, with its incapacity for preserving the past. To Huang, the difference between the two cities is emblematic of the vast disparity between their respective nations. Rome, with its opulence and sophistication, is a testament to the progress and development of its country, while Beiping, unmindful of its past, represents the decline of all China. Huang states: "Rome is not just a city; it is a symbol of everything. Those who have been to Rome will no longer appreciate modern beauty. The anachronism of Rome is its greatness" (Huang 1944: 3). In Rome, the author admires the splendor of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo's work, and Rafael's mastery.

Italian painting is so important to him that he devotes Chapter 13 to illustrating its history, starting with Guido da Siena and Duccio da Buoninsegna up to the Italian Renaissance masters. Venice, as if in an impressionist painting, is depicted amongst colors and lights:

As if drowsy eyes filled with a thousand feelings, thousands of lights emitted a mystical light amid the blue waves of the water city. The bright moon, hanging on the treetops amid smoke and clouds, closely chased us; countless smiling stars shimmered at each other in a twinkling light...What a view! (Huang 1944: 7).

Huang also visited Milan, where he appreciated da Vinci's "The Last Supper" the most. He traveled to Naples and Pompeii, which again aroused his admiration. "The great Italian art—he writes—is a source of human culture that will remain unchanged forever!" (Huang 1944: 64).

Among all the European cities he visited and described, however, Florence is the one he "loves the most:"

In Florence, I not only loved its art, its “beauty,” I also discovered “love;” I found the true meaning of “love.” And that is why I felt more satisfied by “beauty” and perceived more the greatness of art. Walking along the ancient streets of Florence, I met Dante and Beatrice on the bridge he fell in love with her at first sight. I then realized there was a word for “love” in life. The meeting between Beatrice and Dante took place only that one time, yet that one only time was so ordinary. Nevertheless, Dante’s yearning became deeper and, from that one encounter, lasted for all of his life. He was upside down for this lover, he was crazy for her, and even later, he did not find another lover to love so wholeheartedly. Beatrice married another man; Beatrice died, and yet Dante continued to love her. What did Dante love? What did he gain in love? I do not know. Only after reading Dante’s *La Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy* did I understand love’s greatness; only after traveling through this city steeped in perfumes, the city of flowers, permeated with love and art—Florence!—I grasped the true meaning of “love”. [...] I dived myself into this ancient city, unwilling to leave in front of the art of such great artists: Dante revealed to me the [meaning] of “love”; Raphael gave me the comfort of “beauty”; Michelangelo strengthened my courage to behave like a man and to move forward with courage on the path of life. As for da Vinci’s works, they are so powerful, so rich and vital, so praised that it seemed like I had already peeped at the entire world and dominated my entire soul. [...] I have traveled to Florence...Dante revealed to me “love”; Raphael gave me the comfort of “beauty”... (Huang 1944: 68).

Among all the excerpts illustrating Italian art history in Huang’s account, this description reveals the individual and artistic sensitivity of the author. It goes beyond simple observation and perception—telling instead of an internal reaction, an epiphany, a transformation. His encounter with the Italian genius on the Ponte Vecchio allowed Huang Juesi to fully realize what is beyond art—the secret sense of life that human beings are always searching for: beauty and love.

5. Conclusions

Due to limited space, it is not possible here to go into detail about each narrative. These two accounts have only one thing in common: the time period of their travel. They have been juxtaposed here as examples of the variety of Chinese authors who put Italy at the core of their travel experiences. As can be seen from the short excerpts of the two travel accounts and their itineraries, the narratives of Cai Tingkai and Huang Juesi differ very much in style and content. The general chooses rigid prose, full of erudite and classical expressions; the artist follows his imagination in vivid and vernacular language. Following the definitions by An Ran (2018), Cai Tingkai’s travel account can be classified as an “investigation travel account” (*kaocha youji* 考察游记). The book by Huang can be considered, both an “investigation travel” and a “humanistic account” (*renwen youji* 人文游记), since the travel seems to be a trip to investigate and study, motivated by a ‘humanistic’ approach. The interests of the authors are at opposite poles and show the readers (and the scholars) something new about China-Italy

mobilities, but also how these different accounts enact “mobility through processes of production and interpretation” (Merriman and Pearce 2017: 500).

While it is unclear what kind of diffusion Cai’s work had in China, Huang’s work likely had a circulation afterward, thanks to his editorial work and his profession as a teacher of art. It was likely Huang who introduced in China one of the first scientific and exhaustive overview of Italy’s history of art. Both of their narratives are important not only for the images and ideas they offer about Italian society; they are also valuable as means of cultural production, revealing diverse and divergent routes that expose the desires and ambitions of the traveler. No better contrast can be offered than Huang’s revelations of love through Dante and Beatrice in Firenze, while Cai delights in Mussolini’s fascist populism. Reflected back to the Chinese audience through narrative mediation, their accounts are equally accurate and flawed at the same time. Even though it is still difficult to measure how these narratives affected Chinese society, I believe the two examples presented here shed new light on a rich panorama of twentieth-century Chinese travel notes about Italy that is still in need of further investigation.

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