

Study in mobility: Tian Dewang and his experience at the University of Florence (1935–1937)

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Abstract: It is commonly known that Italian departments, or at least Italian literature courses, were inaugurated in Chinese universities in the 1980s. Less known is the period of the 1930s, in which a Chinese student who specialized in Foreign Literature at Tsinghua University obtained a scholarship by the Italian government to study in Italy for two years: Tian Dewang 田德望 (1909–2000) was the first Chinese student to study Italian literature in Italy. In the 1980s he became a famous professor and translator of Italian literature, and was the first to complete an entire translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* into Chinese. This paper is aimed at reconstructing the relation between the Chinese student and his Italian professor, Attilio Momigliano, and how the 'mobility experience' of Tian Dewang in Italy inspired and influenced his future academic career.

Keywords: Tian Dewang, Attilio Momigliano, Vittore Branca, Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Mobility experience.

1. Introduction

Throughout such a long period of study, I have always had a strong desire to translate *The Divine Comedy*, an heirloom work, from the Italian language after I have completed my studies. *The Divine Comedy* was like a bright light that inspired me to study and inspired my growing desire to translate it and introduce it to China. For this reason, during my studies in Italy, I paid attention to collecting those editions of *The Divine Comedy* that had been proofread by experts and had incisive commentaries (Tian 2005, 4).¹

Tian Dewang 田德望 (1909–2000), the well-known Chinese translator and scholar, was the first to accomplish a complete translation of *The Divine Comedy* from Italian directly into Chinese.² In the history of Chinese literature in trans-

¹ Originally written in Chinese, translated here into English by the author. The citations following this article, in which the original text is in Chinese, have also been translated into English by the author.

² Until October 2021, this was the state of our knowledge. In 2021, several private documents of Agostino Biagi (1882–1957) were unearthed, which include three different translations of the *Divine Comedy* in verse (quadrisyllables, pentasyllables and septenaries) from Italian into Chi-

lation and in Sino-Italian literary relations, some studies have examined Tian Dewang's translation of *The Divine Comedy* (Brezzi 2011; Li Bingkui 2016). These studies provide the basis for this study, which also examines their limitations. Among the existing research, some scholars have only analyzed Tian Dewang's translation of *The Divine Comedy* in comparison with other Chinese translators. There is also a lack of research on Tian's early study of Italian language and Italian literature. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of this translator, it is necessary to conduct a more targeted study of Tian.

As Tian Dewang informs us, he studied in Italy and was an avid reader of Italian literature. No study to date, however, has been conducted on Tian Dewang's mobility. This chapter is aimed at reconstructing the relation between the Chinese student and his Italian professor, Attilio Momigliano (1883–1952). It also explores the cultural atmosphere of the time, and how the 'mobility experience' of Tian Dewang in Italy inspired and influenced his future academic career. This includes the encounter in China in 1981 with Vittore Branca (1913–2004), an expert of Italian literature who also studied with Momigliano.

By analyzing the courses Tian took at the University of Florence, we will try to answer the following questions: how did Momigliano exert an influence on his Chinese student? What 'cultural luggage' did Tian Dewang bring back to China? Which Italian literary works or authors did he present to Chinese readers in the following years?

2. Study in mobility: from Tsinghua University to the University of Florence

Born in Wanxian 完县, Hebei province—a small city 162 kilometers from Beijing—Tian Dewang was admitted to Baoding Yude Middle School (Baoding Yude zhongxue 保定育德中学) at the age of 12, where he studied English and started falling in love with reading masterpieces of foreign literature. Baoding Yude Middle School was a modern high school where Chinese intellectuals attended classes in preparation for studying and working abroad during the New Culture Movement, such as the politicians Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898–1969) and Li Fuchun 李富春 (1900–1975) (Chen and Wu 1990, 261). From August 1918 to July 1921, Liu Xianzhou 刘仙洲 (1890–1975), a famous scientist and later vice president of Tsinghua University, taught at this high school (Zhou 2012; Feng 2018). There is a connection between Liu Xianzhou and Tian Dewang because both came from Wanxian. Liu Yujuan 刘玉娟, the daughter of Liu Xianzhou, married Tian Dewang in the 1930s (Feng 2018, 238). Tian Dewang read Qian Daosun's 钱稻孙 (1887–1966) *Shenqu yiluan* 神曲一齣, a translation of the first three cantos of *The Divine Comedy*, when he was studying in Baoding Yude Middle School in the 1920s. He recalled this episode in his "Wo yu Shen Qu 我与《神曲》" ("The Divine Comedy and I"):

nese. Luca Pisano states that Biagi could have started translating from 1920 onward, yet we have scant information about Biagi's translation work (Ferretti 2021). Due to the lack of information on these versions, I have chosen not to examine and treat this translation. The detailed analyses of Biagi's three versions may allow us to rewrite the history of Chinese translations of the Comedy.

I got to know this magnificent epic [i.e., *The Divine Comedy*] as early as I was in middle school. At that time, the translation *Shenqu yiluan* by Qian Daosun was popular. Although it was merely a ‘small slice,’³ I was deeply impressed by Dante and began to pay attention to the progress of the translation of *The Divine Comedy* in China (Tian 2005, 3).

Tian Dewang showed high appreciation for Qian’s work and for Dante’s poem.

In 1927, Tian enrolled in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Tsinghua University, which was at that time one of the most “modern” and innovative Chinese universities. His four years as an undergraduate student (until 1931) were spent diligently studying. In the following table, we show the courses that Tian took during his undergraduate studies.

Table 1 – Undergraduate Programs at Tsinghua University⁴

Year	1927–28	1928–29	1929–30	1930–31
Course	Chinese	2nd year English language	1st year German language	2nd year French language
	1st year English language	General study of the history of Western literature	Classical Chinese Literature	Dante. ⁵
	Economy	English Romantic poets	Western literature of the 18th century	Medieval literature
	1st year German language	2nd year German language	Western literature of the 19th century	Renaissance
	Method to study history	Logic	Western drama	Introduction to English philology
	High school physics	History of Western Philosophy	Literary criticism	4th year of German language
	Physical education	Military training	History of the Western Novel	Contemporary Western Literature
			1st year French language	Shakespeare
			Physical education	Principles of the Chinese National Party
				Physical education

³ “Small slice” because the title which Qian chose to present his translation was “Shenqu yiluan 神曲一齋”, where *luan* 齋 means a slice of meat.

⁴ In the archives of the University of Florence, I found this material in the file of Tian Tewang [In the 1930s, Tian’s name was spelled using Wade-Giles romanization]. See Tian (1937), Appendix page.

⁵ The course content was: “A major component of the course is the reading of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the *Hell*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise* being read over the course of a year. The professor reads them verbatim along with commentary and criticism, and each student discusses them individually with the professor once a week.” See Li Sen (2017, 329).

Tian Dewang's undergraduate studies were completed in 1931. He then enrolled in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Tsinghua to specialize in Western literature and to pursue his master's degree. Tian's master's courses are listed in the table below.

Table 2 – Master's Program at Tsinghua University⁶

Year	1931–32	1932–33	1933–34
	Selected Readings of Chinese Poetry	Comparative Study of Western Poetry and Chinese Poetry	Chinese legends of Indian origin (first semester)
	Chinese Phonetics (1st semester)	Art of Translation	German lyrics
	German Symbolic Poets	Elizabethan Poetry	French literature (mainly focused on Baudelaire)
	Aesthetics	Goethe's <i>Faust</i>	

In 1934, under the guidance of the American professor Rupert D. Jameson (1895–1959), who taught at Tsinghua University during that period, Tian Dewang completed his master's thesis, *A Comparative Study of the Metaphors of Milton and Dante* (Qinghua daxue xiaoshi yanjiushi 清华大学校史研究室 1991, 660–61). This was the earliest master's thesis with Dante as the theme in China. Furthermore, while conducting research on the teaching of Italian literature in China in the 1930s, I discovered that from 1932 to 1934, a colleague of R. D. Jameson at Tsinghua University, Pollard Urquhart (1894–1940), gave a course on Dante and the history of Western literature; Tian was one of his students.⁷ We can suppose that Tian was fascinated by this course, and therefore decided to dedicate his thesis to the father of Italian literature and one of the greatest British poets. Tian Dewang also attended the course offered by Pollard Urquhart together with Zhao Luorui 赵萝蕤 (1912–1998), who in her biographical essay wrote: “I learned Dante's *Divine Comedy* in both English and Italian with teacher Pollard Urquhart together with my senior [colleague] Tian Dewang, my only classmate. I gained most while studying with him in the three years at Tsinghua” (Zhao 1996, 2).

Stronger evidence on the existence of Italian studies in the 1930s in China can be found in the memoirs that Li Funing 李赋宁 (1917–2004), an expert of Western literature who was Tian Dewang's classmate and Pollard Urquhart's student, wrote in 1980. He spoke highly of Urquhart and recalled the early school experience of Tian Dewang, who was his schoolmate at Tsinghua. In the chapter “Jinru daxue xuexi 进入大学学习” (Entering University Studies), he recalls the years of his studying at Tsinghua:

⁶ See Tian (1937), Appendix page.

⁷ For more details, see Gao (2022, 121–36).

Tsinghua also selected some graduate students to study abroad. Mr. Tian Dewang, majoring in Italian literature, was one of them. Mr. Tian studied under the British Professor Pollard Urquhart when he was a graduate at Tsinghua University. Pollard Urquhart had taught English to an Italian aristocrat in Florence, so he learned Italian and began to study Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. After graduation, Mr. Tian Dewang was sent to Florence for further study. A year later, he transferred to Heidelberg University in Germany to listen to Dante-related lectures, so he had an in-depth study of *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's masterpiece. He also studied German literature there and was proficient in it as well (Li Funing 2005, 26).

What is remarkable is that in the same year Tian Master's thesis was approved, he also had the opportunity to study abroad. On September 17th, 1934, the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (i.e. "IsMEO": Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente), through the Consulate of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Shanghai, invited the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to commission the Chinese Ministry of Education to select two outstanding students to study in Italy. The Chinese Ministry of Education then asked the National Central University in Nanjing (Guoli Zhongyang daxue 国立中央大学), Tsinghua University (Qinghua daxue 清华大学), Peking University (Beijing daxue 北京大学) and Wuhan University (Wuhan daxue 武汉大学) to select one or two qualified and interested students to study in Italy by October 15 (Jin 2020).

Research into the archives of Taiwan's Academia Sinica shows the four schools had a total of more than 100 students interested in applying to study abroad in Italy. Tsinghua University submitted 11 applicants, including Sun Yutang 孙毓棠 (1911–1985), the first translator of a part of *The Divine Comedy* into modern poetry (Alighieri 1933), and Wan Jiabao 万家宝 (i.e. Cao Yu 曹禺, 1910–1996), later a famous modern playwright (Jin 2020). After an internal selection process at Tsinghua University, Tian Dewang from the department of Foreign Languages and Literature and Wang Shide 王世德 (1910-2005) from the department of Political Science were selected and recommended by Tsinghua University as two outstanding students. Finally, after the selection by the Chinese Ministry of Education, Tian Dewang from Tsinghua University and Gao Jian 高睿 (1910-1949) from National Central University were awarded scholarships to study in Italy.

In 2020, Jin Fujun 金富军, the deputy director of the Tsinghua University History Museum, and a researcher of the history of Tsinghua University, published an article that discusses the study of Chinese students sponsored by the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, specifically mentioning Tian Dewang. According to Jin Fujun's findings, in the archives of Tsinghua University, there is a collection of Tian Dewang's research plans that were prepared for the IsMEO scholarship application for studying in Italy. Two crucial pieces of information are contained in this collection. Tian Dewang wrote that he would have liked to go to Italy to study Dante, saying: "The student's ambition is to go to Italy and study the literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with par-

particular emphasis on Dante's writings" (Jin 2020). Additionally, Tian explained why he chose the University of Florence: "The city was the political and literary center of Renaissance Italy, and it was also Dante's hometown" (Jin 2020).

Next, I will provide an overview of the procedure through which Tian Dewang was granted the scholarship by the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East. On the Bulletin of the *Tsinghua fukan* 清华副刊 (*Tsinghua Supplement*), I was able to find an announcement stating:

In 1934, the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East of the Italian Prime Minister Mussolini informed us through his Minister in China that he intended to grant two Chinese students the opportunity to study in Italy in the next semester. The scholarship will be 5,000 lire for each student for one year. One of them will be designated for philosophy and literature, and the other for political economy or chemistry or engineering or mathematics and physics. [...] They have selected Mr. Tian Dewang, a third-year student in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, and another student from the Department of Political Science Studies. The curriculum vitae and transcripts of these two students will be submitted to the Ministry of Education along with supporting documents for approval. After examining the results of the students sponsored by the four universities, the Ministry of Education found Mr. Tian's grades were the most satisfactory and he was granted permission to study philosophy and literature in Italy. It is a great honor for our university to have been the first to do this, as only two students from the whole country will be sent to Italy (Jizhe 1934, 22–3).

We can see in *Qinghua daxue xiaoyou tongxun* 清华大学校友通讯 (*Tsinghua University Alumni Newsletter*) that in 1935 Tian Dewang recorded his arrival in Italy:

I arrived in Venice on the morning of August 31, stayed for three days, and then moved to Rome on September 3. I intended to study Italian at the "Real University for Foreigners" in Perugia, and then enter Florence University next spring, but the beginner's course at the university in Perugia has already ended, which means I have to change the plan, so I am planning to study Italian in Rome and go through the admission procedures. I will go to Florence at the beginning of October to study at that university and find a host family to live with and talk to. I hope to be able to perform well in the three aspects of "writing", "reading" and "speaking" in the three years (Tian 1935).

From the Archive of University of Florence we learn that in 1936, Tian Dewang completed his registration in the School of Literature and Philosophy of that Institution. Tian had previously obtained his undergraduate and master's degree in China; he was, therefore, admitted to study directly from the third year. The following table shows all the courses that Tian attended during two years in Florence.

Table 3 – Courses at the University of Florence⁸

1935–1936		
Course	Professor	Course content
Italian Literature	Attilio Momigliano	The Carducciano period. Commentary by contemporary poets. Summary of the literature of the first half of the sixteenth century. Reading of <i>Gerusalemme Liberata</i> and a critical essay on Tasso.
German Literature	Guido Manacorda	The Edda (continuation and terms of the previous course). Frederick Nietzsche. Contemporary writers (continuation of previous course). Exercises.
English Literature	Gian Napoleone Giordano Orsini	Italian influence on English Renaissance literature. Reading of poets.
History of Philosophy	Paolo Lamanna	The aesthetic problem and Kant's Critique of Judgment. The philosophy of the Presocratics. Exercises on the two topics of the course.
Modern History	Niccolò Rodolico	(a) The reign of Charles Albert from 1831 to 1843. (b) General history of Europe in the 17th century.
Medieval History	Nicola Ottokar	The Tuscan municipalities (Florence, Lucca, Pistoia, Pisa). The Republic of St. Mark's.
Art History	Mario Salmi	General course: Sienese Gothic painting. Monographic course: Luca Signorelli. Exercises and visits to the Florentine Galleries, Siena and Monteliveto maggiore.
History of Italian languages	Francesco Maggini	Reading and commentary on Dante's <i>Rime</i> . The question of language from Cesarotti to Manzoni.
1936–1937		
Course	Professor	Course content
Italian Literature	Attilio Momigliano	Narrative literature from 1880 to 1920. Commentary on poets of the 15th century. Student's personal preparation: exposition of De Santis' <i>Critical Essays</i> , analysis of three tragedies by Alfieri.
English Literature	Gian N. G. Orsini	1st Preparatory Lessons. 2nd Course on W.Shakespeare's <i>As You Like It</i> .

⁸ See Tian (1937, 1–6).

English Language	Arturo Sleigh	1st Course Pronunciation: Elementary grammar: reading and translation of easy texts. 2nd Syntax: Translation: reading and commentary of modern English texts.
German Literature	Guido Manacorda	1st Frederick Nietzsche. 2nd The speculative problems of Goethe's <i>Faust</i> . 3rd Exercises.
German Language	Hans Wildt	1st course a) Otto-Sauer's Elementary Grammar of the German Language. b) Reading: C. Brentano: <i>Vom braven Kasperl und den schönen Annerl</i> . 2nd course a) W. v. Humboldt: <i>Über Schiller und den Gang seiner geistesentwicklung</i> . b) Schiller: <i>Wallensteins Tod</i> .
Art History	Mario Salmi	General course: The artistic environment in the centers where Giotto worked (Florence, Rome, Assisi, Padua, Naples, Milan). Monograph course: Giotto painter, sculptor and architect. Various exercises, views at the Uffizi Gallery, Accademia Gallery.

According to the recollection of Tian's student, Xu Dumei 许杜美 (1932–2014) (Xu 2011, 11), Tian's supervisor (Prof. Attilio Momigliano) originally wanted him to write about Marco Polo in relation to China. To test Tian's writing skills, he was asked first to write a report on the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). At the same time, Tian rented a room in the Via dei Servi, No. 6, near the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower. He heard from his landlord that Italians read *The Divine Comedy* as early as high school and this made him realize he had to improve his Italian language skills (Xu 2011, 11). In order to write his thesis, he hired a tutor for two hours a day to improve his reading and writing skills and to learn conversational skills. In the meantime, he worked on an academic paper about Croce, which was soon appreciated by his supervisor.

From then on, Tian was able to follow Momigliano's lessons and to improve his academic and research abilities. He began to concentrate on the life and work of Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494) and researched writings and literary historians' commentaries on Poliziano (Xu 2011, 11). Poliziano, a poet and famous Italian humanist, was first introduced among Chinese intellectuals in the diary of Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962) in 1917, although he did not gain much attention at that time (Xie and Zhong 1994, 385–86). Tian received his degree after two years of study, with a thesis titled *A Study of the Comments of Angelo Poliziano*. In 1940, after returning from Europe, Wu Mi 吴宓 (1894–1978), Tian Dewang's teacher during his Tsinghua period, helped him not only by recommending him for a position at the University of Zhejiang (Wu Mi and Wu Xuezhao 1998, 22), but also by suggesting he research

and study Dante. In his diary, Wu Mi wrote: “On November 11st 1940, I wrote to the British Consulate to order a copy of the *Divine Comedy* in Italian recommended by Pollard Urquhart readability for Tian Dewang” (Wu Mi and Wu Xuezhao 1998, 22).

Unfortunately, we do not have any diaries or memories on Tian’s life in Florence or cities he may have visited. We can get only a little information from the travelogue of a Chinese writer, Qian Gechuan 钱歌川 (1903–1990). Qian wrote in “Feilengcui de yiri 翡冷翠的一日” (A day in Florence) in September of 1936:

Florence, what a poetic name for a place! This is the home of the great poet Dante.

Ever since I read Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and the *New Life*, and saw the famous painting of his meeting with Beatrice, I have wanted to visit Florence, to visit the monuments, and to pay homage to the spirit of poetry.

It took at least thirteen or fourteen years for this desire to come true, until this trip to England, when I first visited Italy on my way. In Rome, we met Tian Dewang, who, after graduating from Tsinghua, had come to Europe to specialize in Italian literature and was now living in Florence. We talked with him about the tour and decided to take the 6:30 p.m. train to Florence the next day (Qian 1995, 328).

What we know for sure is that Tian Dewang studied very hard and was able to read Italian very well. Either he did not leave a diary, or he had written one which was lost or destroyed during the later turbulent years. A similar fate happened to his thesis, which unfortunately we cannot read, because it was destroyed by the flood in Florence in 1966, along with many other important materials.⁹

3. Tian Dewang’s first translations of Italian literature in the 1940s

In 1940, Tian Dewang began to teach Western literature at the Zhejiang University and also started to publish his translations and academic works. His first publications about Italian literature appeared in the periodical *Liming* 黎明 (Dawn) in early 1944. This periodical, founded by the students at Zhejiang University, spearheaded a literary association called the *Dawn Society* (*Liming she* 黎明社), whose aim was to introduce foreign literary works, especially poetic works, to Chinese readers. *Dawn Society* was intended to facilitate the exchange and discussion of literature among Zhejiang University students (He 2018, 23). In this publication, Tian Dewang published his translations of Italian poetry, such as “La voce” (“The voice,” translated as *Shengyin* 声音) by Arturo Graf (1848–1913) and two poems “Nella macchia” (*Zai congman zhong* 在丛莽中) and “La servetta di monte” (Shanzhong Shinü 山中使女) by Giovanni Pascoli (1855–1912) (Graf 1946; Pascoli 1946), which is the only literary work we can find translated by Tian during the Republican period.¹⁰

⁹ This information has been given to the author by the Librarian of the Humanities Library of the University of Florence.

¹⁰ In the process of searching for information, I checked the history of Zhejiang University and all the materials of the journal *Dawn*, and found no other translations by Tian.

Why did Tian choose the works of Arturo Graf and Giovanni Pascoli? We can only suggest some hypotheses because Tian Dewang did not leave us any comments or suggestions. Certainly, Tian had been exposed to the works of these two poets when he studied in Italy through his professor Momigliano, who was a student of Arturo Graf (Ghidetti 2011). In Momigliano's *Anthology of Italian literature*, Momigliano selected and proposed "La voce" by Graf (1937, 658–59), along with "Nella macchia" and "La servetta del monte" by Pascoli (1937, 664–65, 667–68). When Tian translated these three poems, there were not any English or German translations—two other foreign languages in which Tian was proficient—of such poems (Shields 1931; Felcini 1982). In addition, Graf and Pascoli were two writers who were very interested in Dante; they both conducted some studies and research on the Medieval poet.

Besides translating Italian poetry, Tian also taught Italian literature at Zhejiang University and Wuhan University. We learn about the teaching activities of Tian Dewang during the 1940s from the memoirs of his colleagues and students respectively. According to the memoir of his colleague, Zhang Junchuan 张君川 (1911–1999), Tian taught courses on *The Divine Comedy* in both Zhejiang University and Wuhan University. As recalled by Zhang in "Zhejiang daxue waiwen xi zai Zunyi 浙江大学外文系在遵义" (Department of Foreign Languages of Zhejiang University in Zunyi):

Zhejiang University moved from Yishan, Guangxi to Zunyi, Guizhou in 1939, where the teaching and research was developed under very tough conditions. Students of liberal arts at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature of Zhejiang University used foreign literature and languages as the tool for literary and linguistic studies all along.

[...] The Department of Foreign Languages and Literature of Zhejiang University took English as their first foreign language, and German, French, Russian, Italian, Japanese, Greek or Latin as their second foreign languages. Students studied European and American literature through learning English. Professors at the Department of Foreign Languages were all famous scholars at home. Head of the department was Mei Guangdi, who held a concurrent post as Dean of Arts and taught British literature of the 18th century. Guo Binhe taught Greek and Latin literature; Tian Dewang taught British literature and Dante; Zhang Junchuan taught Shakespeare's plays and novels; She Kunshan taught English poetry; Xie Wentong taught English prose. They also gave English and German language classes (Zhang 1990, 78).

Chi Panyuan 齐邦媛 (1924–), the Taiwanese writer and student of Tian Dewang, who was a student at Wuhan University from 1943 to 1947, wrote about Tian's course on *The Divine Comedy* at Wuhan University in her autobiographical essay *The Grand Flowing River*:

Shortly after classes resumed, a notice was pasted up outside the classroom stating that Dr. Tian Dewang, who had recently returned from Italy, was offering an elective course on Dante's *Divina Commedia* for the third- and fourth-year

students. [...] I clearly remember the class that semester in which both teacher and student played their respective parts. Professor Tian diligently guided my reading of the most important parts of the *Commedia*. Of course, the focus of the class was not unlike other literature classes. More time was allocated to the *Inferno* than to the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*, and special importance was attached to the beauty of the meter and rhyme and power of the imagery. In the second circle of hell, the story of the lovers Paolo and Francesca is heard amid the whirlwind. Dante writes: “I fainted with pity, as if I had been dying; and fell, as a dead body falls” (Chi 2018, 229–31).

From this recollection we can conclude that in Chinese universities in the 1940s, Chinese teachers offered special courses on Italian literature for the first time, which is of pioneering significance. More importantly, at that time Dante and his *Divine Comedy* was not a common or popular text. In a time when the historical issues required writers to be ‘political’ and committed, few students chose to dedicate themselves to a foreign author of the Medieval era.

4. The encounter between Tian Dewang and Vittore Branca in China

Cultural mobility continued to play a role in diplomatic relations between China and Italy into the early 1980s. In that period, in fact, one of the students of Momigliano, Vittore Branca, a scholar of Italian literature, was invited to lecture in China by the vice president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Xu Dixin 许涤新 (1906–1988), and by Professor Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 (1910–1998) of the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His talk at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was about Boccaccio and *The Decameron*, as we can see in the article titled “Yidali xuezhe Bolangka zai Hua zuo xueshu baogao 意大利学者博朗卡在华作学术报告” (Italian scholar Branca gives academic lecture in China):

Professor V. Branca and his wife came to China on October 12, 1981, at the invitation of Xu Dixin, Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Professor Qian Zhongshu of the Institute of Literature. He has studied Italian language and literature, especially Boccaccio’s masterpiece *The Decameron* of the Italian Renaissance. He is currently a professor of literature at the University of Padua, Italy, and president of the International Federation for the Study of Italian Language and Literature. He is a member of the Linguistic Academy of Rome and the American Academy of Sciences, and he is also an honorary doctor of the universities of New York, Budapest, and the Sorbonne. In his academic presentation, Branca talked about the life of the outstanding Renaissance humanist writer Boccaccio and his world classical masterpiece *The Decameron* in terms of its period, characters, plot, structure and influence on modern literature and realism. Also, slides introducing Boccaccio’s handwriting and illustrations of *The Decameron* by the excellent Renaissance painter Botticelli were shown (Yang 1982, 35).

The annual report of the Venice Academy also reports and informs about Branca's visit to China, highlighting the ties and contacts between the different cultural institutions in the two countries:

The President then briefly reports on his recent trip to China where, designated to do so by both the Ministry of Culture and the Accademia dei Lincei, he had numerous contacts with the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, where he also had the satisfaction of being able to see that the Veneto Institute is among the few Academies that have maintained an uninterrupted exchange of publications with the Academy in Beijing since 1958 (Branca 1982b, 62).

While the institutions of the two countries made the trip possible, once it was made, it was the scholars from the two countries who wove and established lasting relationships. During Branca's visit to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Feng Zhi 冯至 (1905–1993), the director of the Institute of Foreign Languages, introduced him to Tian Dewang. Tian Dewang admired the work of Branca, and on that occasion he asked and obtained some information about the recent studies and research on Dante in Italy (Tian 2005, 6). After returning to Italy, Branca kindly sent the last critical edition of *The Divine Comedy*, edited by Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio to Tian Dewang, who carried out his interpretive and translation work using exactly this edition, as he stated in his introduction (Tian 2005, 5).

Another Chinese Italianist was introduced to Branca during his sojourn in China, Professor Lü Tongliu 吕同六 (1938–2005). This encounter also was very productive. Lü is considered the father of Italian literary studies in China. He went to listen to Branca's lecture and found it very stimulating for him (Branca 1982a, 33). Branca proposed to the Chinese Italianist to write a paper on *The Decameron* in China, which was later published in the Italian periodical *Studi su Boccaccio* (Branca 1982a, 33). Branca explained the reasons for his request, writing: "The urge to ask distinguished Chinese Italianist Lü Tongliu to quickly outline a review of *The Decameron* in China arose in the course of lectures and seminars on Boccaccio, given by me in October 1981, in the Institute of Literature of the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing" (Branca 1982a, 33).

If in the 1930s young Chinese students reached Italy to study, opening the field of Italian studies in China, in the 1980s cultural mobility between the two countries also involved Italian professors who traveled to China bringing knowledge and books that, once translated, began to circulate among Chinese readers. At the same time, these Italian scholars brought back new information about Italian studies in China, strengthening cultural relations between the two countries that will be further developed in the 21st century.

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