

---

Stefano Piastra

## Italians in the 'Old Shanghai': a Preliminary Contribution



LA "LITTLE ITALY" DI SHANGHAI

---

Occasional Paper  
October 2013

---

The paper was developed in cooperation with the Italian Institute of Culture based in Shanghai and the Institute of Historical Geography, Fudan University, Shanghai, in the framework of a joint research project focused on the Italian community in the 'Old Shanghai'.

**Abstract:** Besides other Western nationalities, ‘Old Shanghai’ also hosted an Italian community, which experienced, throughout the years, a slight development, particularly after the establishment there of the consulate of the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1860 (later kept by the new Kingdom of Italy), and the signing, in 1866, of a Sino-Italian Treaty (ratified in Shanghai in 1867). It was a small group, if compared with the English, the Americans or the French (from some dozens to some hundreds between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), but it had distinctive spatial and socio-economic urban patterns: in ‘Old Shanghai’, there were specific areas with a high concentration of Italian economic activities (in the International Settlement: Kiukiang Road; Kiangse Road; crossroads between Nanking Road and Szechuen Road; Bubbling Well Road), areas with Italian residences (French Concession), other suburban areas with Italians (Zikawei; in this case, they were priests). Moreover, Italians were involved in specific economic sectors (primarily, silk): as the textile sector was developed mainly in Lombardy at that time, most of the expatriate Italian managers and supervisors in Shanghai mills came from this Italian region. The migration flow from Italy to ‘Old Shanghai’, involving highly educated or highly skilled people mainly from Northern Italy, represented an exception in the general context of the migrations from Italy between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was mostly based, as in the case of the flow of people directed to the USA in that period, on poor and poorly educated people, originally involved in the primary sector, from the Southern regions of Italy.

**Key-words:** ‘Old Shanghai’; Migrations; Italian Community; Spatial, Identity and Socio-economic Issues in an Expatriate Community.

The cosmopolitan urban environment of the so-called ‘Old Shanghai’, that is the period encompassed between the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) and the Japanese occupation (1941, abolition of the foreign concessions in the city), currently represents a key-topic for research in the framework of the history of Sino-Western cultural and economic relations. Even though the mainstream of these flows (and, presently, as a consequence, the mainstream of the scientific literature) was centered on the interactions among the Chinese, English, Americans and French, other foreign communities, without formal concessions, were also present in the city.

It is the case of the Italians, whose presence, in that which was significantly renamed, in those years, the ‘Paris of the East’ or the ‘New York of the West’, has been in large part neglected until now. It was a small community of expatriates from the point of view of the total population, but, at the same time, it was characterized by distinctive migration flows (specific Italian regions of origin), urban spatial dynamics (‘Old Shanghai’ areas with a high concentration of Italian companies/offices/residences) and socio-economic issues (sectors and activities where Italians played a key-role).

This paper, developed by intercrossing Italian, International and Chinese scientific bibliography and focused mainly on the ‘Golden Age’ of the ‘Old Shanghai’ (1920s-1930s), should be considered a first, preliminary contribution to the theme.

---

## 1. The Historical and Geopolitical Context

The First Opium War (1839-1842) and the subsequent Treaty of Nanjing implied the opening of the Chinese ports of Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai to international trade. In particular, England, the USA and France immediately settled their concessions in Shanghai (the British and the American ones, from 1863, were unified in the so-called 'International Settlement'), under the umbrella of the principle of 'Extraterritoriality'.

In the initial decades after the First Opium War, Italy was politically weak and substantially absent from the political scene in Asia: in fact, at that time, Italy was still divided in a plenty of regional, independent states, without a joint perspective in foreign affairs or any colonies outside of Europe. Only in the late 1840s/1850s did one of these Italian states start to play a prominent role among the others: it was the Kingdom of Sardinia, with Turin (Piedmont) as the capital city and the House of Savoy as the Dynasty, which, after the so-called 'Wars of Italian Independence', finally led Italy to Unification and the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy (1861).

The Kingdom of Sardinia was a liberal and liberist Monarchy, which, more than others in the Italian context, put emphasis on trade; its Prime Minister, Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (1810-1861), became famous for supporting any efforts in the modernization of the country. That is why, in the attempt at following in England's and France's steps in the Far East and to improve international trade (at that time, in fact, some pioneering Italian businessmen had already settled in East China), in the last years right before the formal Unification of Italy, the Kingdom of Sardinia officially opened (1860) a consulate in Shanghai (Corradini 1991; Bertuccioli & Masini 1996, pp. 250-251). Surprisingly enough, the first consul of the Kingdom of Sardinia in Shanghai, James Hogg, was not Italian, but English: this choice has to be explained through the fact that the Kingdom of Sardinia put itself implicitly under the umbrella of the leading power in the region (the British Empire). Moreover, James Hogg was also a silk trader, and silk, as we will see later, was a key-sector also for the Kingdom of Sardinia. Finally, the Hogg family had a long experience in politics: William Hogg, James' older brother, in the 1850s was the consul, in Shanghai and Fuzhou, of the Hanseatic city of Hamburg; Edward Jenner Hogg, James' younger brother, became, since 1864, Italian vice-consul.

In 1861, after the Italian Unification, the Kingdom of Sardinia turned into the Kingdom of Italy. As a confirmation of the strategic role given to the city, the Italian consulate in Shanghai was kept, and it continued to exist until the second world war (after Hogg, starting from 1868, with native Italian consuls).

But these attempts to make the Italian business and influence grow in Shanghai were often frustrated by the absence of a formal commercial treaty between the Chinese Empire and the Kingdom of Italy. Italian diplomacy pressured the Chinese counterpart and finally, in 1866, the first Sino-Italian Treaty was signed in Beijing between the Italian captain Arminjon and the Chinese plenipotentiaries Tan Tingxiang (譚廷襄) and Chonghou (崇厚) (Arminjon 1885; Francioni 2003; Francioni 2004). This Treaty was mainly inspired by the Sino-Danish Treaty (1863). One year after the signing (1867), the treaty was ratified in Shanghai: the choice of this city as the location for the ratification reflects the emerging importance given to Shanghai in the framework of the Sino-Italian dynamics of that period.

Notwithstanding these efforts, through the years the Italian penetration, in Shanghai as in the rest of China, did not experience any take-off or boom, mainly because of some chronic and unsolved problems of the Kingdom of Italy, such as the North-South gap, the underdevelopment of the secondary sector, the lack of a long-term perspective in foreign affairs or the absence of a profitable and efficient Italian colonial system.

A slight increase in the Italian presence in China became factual after the ‘Boxer Rebellion’ (1899-1901), during which Italy had joined the ‘Eight-Nation Alliance’: at the end of the war, Italy finally obtained from the Chinese Empire a formal concession in Tianjin and compensation in money for its military support.

It was probably during the Fascist Age (1922-1943) that the ‘depth’ of the Italian penetration in the ‘Old Shanghai’, at that time under the Republic of China, reached its peak (Borsa 1994; Samarani & De Giorgi 2011, pp. 60-69; Samarani 2013): this trend has to be explained through the filter of the fact that Italian Fascism aimed to represent itself as the ‘natural’ partner in Europe for a nationalistic regime like that led by Chiang Kai-shek (Masi 1936, p. 210). Fascism strengthened and funded the Italian presence in the city, also developing political offices and structures (e.g. Fascist Clubs), cultural activities (an Italian cultural journal, ‘Il Marco Polo’, was founded in the late 1930s) and supporting the presence of the Italian Navy along the Huangpu and Yangtze Rivers (see par. 2). Moreover, prominent figures of Fascism were appointed to the Italian consulate in Shanghai, like in the case of Galeazzo Ciano (1903-1944), the son-in-law of the founder of Fascism, Benito Mussolini, consul from 1930 to 1933.

The situation changed completely after the Italian adhesion to the Tripartite Pact (1940) with Germany and Japan: this led Italy to support Japanese operations in Asia until September 8<sup>th</sup> 1943, when, as a consequence of the Armistice between Italy and Allied armed forces, the Italian soldiers and diplomats based in Shanghai who had declared to be loyal to the King of Italy (e.g. the diplomat Francesco Maria Taliani) started, in turn, to be persecuted by Japan.

Striking a rough balance in a long term perspective, the evolution of the Italian presence in the ‘Old Shanghai’ shows a gap between political expectations and practical results: the figures of the Italian community were always negligible if compared not only with the British, American and French ones, but also with those of other nations without formal concessions in the city like Italy, e.g. Germany. Moreover, the success of specific Italian sectors or companies in the city seemed to be based more on personal initiative and skills, than on the real effectiveness or influence of the Italian diplomacy in Shanghai.

## **2. Italians in the ‘Old Shanghai’: How Many and Where?**

According to the official data (Denison & Guang Yu Ren 2006) (tab. 1), the number of the Italians in the ‘Old Shanghai’ experienced a slight increase through the years, passing from some dozens in the 1880s to 200 ca. in the early 1930s. On the basis of these figures, it was a community significantly smaller than the English (6,000 ca. between 1920s and 1930s: Denison & Guang Yu Ren 2006) and the American (2,000 ca. in the same period: Denison & Guang Yu Ren 2006). It is probably true, as attested in all the expatriate communities, that the real number of Italian residents should have been higher than the official one (such a situation can be explained by aiming to maintain benefits in the homeland), but, in any case, the Italian group had to be considered a minority group in the city.

We have very little informations about the Italians in the ‘Old Shanghai’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also because of the loss of the Italian Consulate Archive (see below, par. 6).

A medium-resolution reconstruction about the Italian presence in the city is possible mainly for the ‘Golden Age’ of the ‘Old Shanghai’, between 1920s and 1930s.

In this period, a first Shanghainese agglomeration related to Italy was the Jesuit settlement of Zikawei (Xujiahui). Founded in 1847 under the umbrella of France and located just out the French Concession in the former property of the family of Xu Guangqi (徐光启), follower of Matteo Ricci (Chinese name Li Madou, 利玛窦), this structure hosted, besides French, Belgian and Chinese, also Italian Catholic Priests. The most important, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, were Angelo Zottoli (1826-1902; Chinese name Chao Deli, 晁德莅), Director of the Library; Nicola Massa (1815-1876; Chinese name Ma Yigu, 马义谷), teacher of painting in the Xujiahui orphanage; Ernesto Gherzi (1886-1973; Chinese name Long Xiangqi, 龙相齐), Director of the Meteorological Observatory; Pasquale Maria d'Elia (1890-1963; Chinese name De Lixian, 德礼贤), sinologist, Professor at 'L'Aurore' University in Shanghai.

In the same years, most of the shops, offices and financial centers directly or indirectly linked to Italy were located in the International Settlement, where some specific areas of concentration of Italian activities are identifiable (Piastra 2013).

The first was along Kiukiang Road (present-day Jiujiang Road): several import/export companies (CIDEO and Calatroni, Hsieh & Co: Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, nos. 26, 67); the 'Sino-Italian Bank', also called 'Chinese-Italian Banking Corporation' (in Italian: 'Banca Italo-cinese'; in Chinese: Zhenyi yinhang, 震义银行), which since 1924 turned into the 'Italian Bank for China' (in Italian: 'Banca Italiana per la Cina'; in Chinese: Huayi yinhang, 华意银行) (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 25); the original headquarters of Lloyd Triestino (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 68), a leading navigation company based in Trieste (North-Eastern Italy), whose ships, initially monthly and later every 15 days, navigated along the Trieste-Venice-Brindisi-Shanghai route and played a key-role in the Jewish migration from Nazi Germany and Austria to Shanghai between the late 1930s and the early 1940s (Ross 1994, pp. 42-50).

A second focus of the Italian presence in the International Settlement of Shanghai was along Kiangse Road (present-day Jiangxi Road), which hosted the office of the Italian lawyer Giuseppe Domenico Musso (for a long period, the only Italian lawyer in the city: Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 17); between 1920s and 1930s, the Italian Chamber of Commerce in the Far East (in Italian: 'Camera di Commercio Italiana per l'Estremo Oriente'; in Chinese: Dayiguo shanghui, 大义国商会) (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 31); in the mid-1930s, the new headquarters where Lloyd Triestino had moved to (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 68).

With regard to the retail market and Italian food, most of the shops were located at the crossroads between Nanking Road (present-day East Nanjing Road) and Szechuen Road (present-day Sichuan Road): it was the block that the Italian scholar Giuseppe Ros, Professional Interpreter of Chinese at the Italian Consulate, mentioned in his works as the 'Little Italy' of Shanghai (fig. 1) (Ros 1911, p. 24; Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, cover and no. 47).

A fourth concentration of Italian 'places' in the International Settlement was along Bubbling Well Road (present-day West Nanjing Road), and consisted of the Italian consulate (built in 1904 at the crossroads between Bubbling Well Road and Chengdu Road; see below, par. 5) and tertiary sector activities mainly for the Italian community: the 'Nuovo Albergo Reale' (official English name: 'New Royal Hotel'; it included also a luxury Italian restaurant) (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 44); the beauty salon 'La Donna Bella' (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 45); since 1941, the new Italian Cultural Center, including an Italian radio station named XIRS (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 62).

On the contrary, with regard to the private residences, a great part of the Italians in Shanghai lived in the French Concession: this can be linked to the fact that, traditionally, since the years of the Unification, Italy had good diplomatic relations with France. Moreover, it has to be underlined that the Royal Dynasty of the Kingdom of Italy, the House of Savoy, had French origins, and the French language was widely spoken, more than English in those years, by the Italian leading classes. The fact that several road names in the French Concession were, directly or indirectly, related to Italy (tab. 2) has to be encompassed in this context. A further piece of evidence supporting the assumption about the good relations between the French and the Italians in the ‘Old Shanghai’, consists in the fact that, from the 1890s, the French Council of the French Concession had an Italian among its members (Ros 1911, p. 3, footnote without number): between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, for a long period, Ernesto Ghisi (see below, par. 3); later, from the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was Luigi Camera, a buyer for Jardine, Matheson and Co. (Osborn Springfield 1966), a British-based leading company involved in textile as in many other economic sectors.

Besides the permanent Italian residents, in the city there was a significant Italian ‘floating-population’, linked to the temporary presence of an impressive number of Royal Italian Navy war units along the Huangpu River (tab. 3) (Rastelli 2011): this meant waves of hundreds, but in some cases even thousands, of sailors, working and sleeping on board, but, in the night, off-duty in ‘Old Shanghai’ bars and brothels. Moreover, two Italian riverine gunboats were permanently based in the city: the ‘Ermanno Carlotto’ and the ‘Lepanto’.

In striking a balance regarding the Italian presence in the ‘Old Shanghai’, a paradoxical situation arises for some periods between 1920s-1930s: a ratio from 1:5 to 1:10 ca. between the ‘permanent’ residents in ‘mainland’ Shanghai and the ‘temporary’ sailors on board of ships moored on the Huangpu.

### **3. The Linkage between Economic Sector/Role in the ‘Old Shanghai’ and Italian Regional Origin**

In the ‘Old Shanghai’, Italians held a primary role in specific economic sectors.

If the international commerce of tea and opium was in large part under the British monopoly, and tobacco commerce under British and American control, Italy had an important role in other secondary trade sectors.

Besides Italian food and Italian restaurants (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, nos. 44, 60, 66, 69-70), luxury building materials and ornamental stones (e.g. Carrara marble) (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, nos. 46, 65) and cars (FIAT brand) (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 61), Italians were involved in particular in the textile sector (silk mainly) (Gravina di Ramacca 1907, p. 411; Piastra 2013).

This is significant: in fact, Northern Italy, and Lombardy in particular, besides being the most developed region of the nation, held a long tradition in textile production and, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had factories characterized by advanced technology, highly skilled workers (mainly women) and efficient management. But, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the silk sector of Lombardy faced a huge crisis because of the Pébrine, a disease of silkworms caused by microsporidian parasites: in the attempt to defeat this disease, a new (and profitable) trade of ‘healthy silkworms’ and silkworm eggs from the Far East grew quickly; these silkworm traders were called, in Italian, ‘*Semai*’ (literally, ‘Seed Traders’) (Zanier 1993; Zanier 2006). If these dynamics, from one side, helped to solve the Pébrine-crisis in Southern

Europe, from the other, in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they strengthened, in the textile sector, new forms of cooperation and networks of reliable contacts between East and West: this active and receptive environment made now possible, for several Lombard silk businessmen, managers and even highly skilled workers in search of new perspectives, to migrate from Lombardy to Shanghai (an emerging textile district on a world scale in those years: Honig 1986), transplanting their business and/or know-how there (De Luca 1911, p. 36; Magrini 1925, p. 147; Imperatori 1929, p. 114). In most of the cases, they were not the owners of new factories; they were mainly recruited as general managers and supervisors on the behalf of British or Chinese owners, or they opened import/export companies.

Through the years, Lombard textile businessmen and managers became a sort of subgroup of the Italian community in the ‘Old Shanghai’, holding a leading role with regard to finance: a preliminary list of them includes Ernesto Ghisi (from Milan; at first, he served as manager for an import/export silk company based in Shanghai, the Dufour Bros. & Co. Besides business, he dedicated himself to the political and diplomatic career in Shanghai: Member of the French Council in Shanghai; Director of the office of the Italian Consulate from 1889 to 1900; Honorary Italian consul from 1900 to 1901; even a road of the French Concession, Route Ghisi, was named after him: see tab. 2); Pietro Frigerio (from Bergamo); Achille Riva (from Gorgonzola, Milan; at first, vice-director of the Russell & Co., then director of the Sin-Chong Silk Filature Company Ltd. He was the father of Antonio Riva, in 1951 sentenced to death in Beijing as judged guilty of the attempted murder of Mao Zedong).

In the ‘Old Shanghai’ there was even an Italian club, the ‘Club del Balin’ (‘Bowling Club’), founded in 1895 by Lombard expatriates, whose name was in Lombard dialect (Ros 1911, p. 27): in fact, in Lombard dialect the word ‘Balin’ stands for the Italian word ‘Boccia’ (‘Bowl’).

Also, highly skilled textile workers moved in those years from Lombardy to Shanghai: this is the case of Giuseppina Croci, a poorly educated young woman from Castano Primo (Milan), who spent five years in the city (1890-1895) working as a worker supervisor in a mill managed by the Lombard Daniele Beretta, but owned by the Jardine, Matheson and Co. (a photo of this mill has to be probably identified in an image published in the travel book by Mazzolani 1915, tav. VII, no. 13. Here, the surname Beretta is misspelled as ‘Berretta’). G. Croci wrote a short memoir about her Shanghainese stay: just published (Croci 2011), it offers an unusual insight on ‘Old Shanghai’ from the point of view of an Italian woman, belonging to the working class, suddenly ‘transplanted’ from Northern Italy to Shanghai at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who was used to speaking in Lombard dialect and was ignorant of English, French and Chinese languages.

Silk sector needed funds: the ‘Sino-Italian Bank’/‘Italian Bank for China’ was settled in Shanghai mainly with the aim of giving financial support to these activities, and its capital stock came in large part from Lombard Banks, such as the ‘Credito Italiano’ (based in Milan) and the ‘Credito Varesino’ (based in Varese) (Bettini 1967, p. 35; De Antonellis 1996).

As analyzed above, besides business, several Italian priests were present in the ‘Old Shanghai’. Most of the Italian Jesuits in Zikawei came from the Campania region (Naples area in particular): this is the case of Angelo Zottoli and Nicola Massa mentioned above, but also of Luigi Massa (1827-1860; Nicola’s brother) and Francesco Adinolfi (1831-1874; Director of St. Ignatius’ College). This fact is not a fortuity, and can be explained through the fact that, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Naples hosted the ‘Collegio dei Cinesi’ (‘Chinese College’), a college founded in 1732 by Matteo Ripa (Chinese name: 馬國賢), whose mission was to give Christian missionaries appointed to China an education both in theology and Chinese language. For a long period, between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ‘Collegio dei Cinesi’ was one of the most important cultural institutions focused on Oriental studies in Europe.



In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the ‘Old Shanghai’, other Italian priests belonging to the Salesian Society were also present (Anon. 1937, p. 74): on the basis of the onomastics of a list of them from 1920s-1930s (<http://italianiashanghai.blogspot.com>), it seems to be that most were from Piedmont and Lombardy. Also in this case, such a situation is significant, because it depends on the fact that the Salesian Society, founded in 1859 by John Bosco, had its roots in these two Italian regions.

#### 4. Social and Identity Issues

The Italian community in the ‘Old Shanghai’ presented aspects and dynamics which were significantly different from other Italian expatriate communities in the world in those years.

In fact, the migration flow from Italy to the ‘Old Shanghai’ was mainly based on commercial, diplomatic and military sectors, and involved rich and/or educated people, searching for new perspectives in investments or career: a situation completely outside of the standards of the Italian migrations in this period (e.g. the mainstream directed to the USA), whose core was constituted by poorly educated people, mainly employed in the primary sector, escaping from underdevelopment, poverty and social decay.

Being based on rich and highly skilled people, the Italian migration to the ‘Old Shanghai’ presented a further ‘eccentricity’, that is the fact that the Italian regions of origin of the immigrants were the Northern ones, Lombardy primarily (the most developed of all), while all the other international migration of those years were centered on the underdeveloped regions of the South (Sicily, Calabria, Apulia, Campania, etc.). The only one specific flow from Southern Italy to Shanghai regarded, as discussed above (par. 3), Jesuit missionaries from the Campania region to Xujiahui.

The Italian community in Shanghai was significantly smaller and politically weaker than others; as a response, social cohesion and solidarity among expatriate Italians seemed to be deeply present: the city hosted several Italian clubs (Djordjevic 2009; Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, nos. 21, 23-24, 34, 38, 48-49, 62), and even humanitarian associations like the Italian Red Cross (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, no. 32) (during the Fascist period, all these clubs were put under the political umbrella of Fascism). Being a small group, it was not unusual, with regard to clubs or associations, that the same person was in charge of more than one position, in different clubs, at the same time. Moreover, house transfers among Italians are attested, as in the case of Cav. Bedoni, whose house in Route Ferguson (present-day Wukang Road), passed to Dino Tirinnanzi in the early 1940s (Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012, nos. 43, 78).

On the basis of random and incidental data from memoirs (unfortunately, general and official data are not available in this case), it seems also that, in the ‘Old Shanghai’, marriages were taken mainly among Italian people, and in particular among the Italian residents in Shanghai or in Beijing (e.g., Matilde Chieri and Justo Giusti del Giardino: Giusti del Giardino 2010; Itala Chieri and Commander Maraschin: Paci Zaharoff 2005, p. 272; Fiamma del Greco and Antonio Venturini: <http://italianiashanghai.blogspot.com>), while international or interracial marriages involving an Italian man or woman should be probably a minority. This could be considered a further proof regarding the fact that the Italian group in the city had a poorer level of international integration if compared with other Western expatriate communities.

From the point of view of identity, the Italian expatriate community in Shanghai, smaller than the Anglo-Saxon and French ones, and generally characterized by a short-term, and not a life-long,

expectancy of stay in the city, shows no traces, at least on the basis of the official reports and private memoirs published, of any 'Italian-Shanghai' awareness or self-consciousness, comparable to the Anglo-Saxon concept of 'Shanghai' (Bickers 1998).

## 5. Spatial Evolution of the Block of the Italian Consulate through the Years

The 'historical' Italian Consulate, planned by architects Brenan Atkinson and Arthur Dallas (Denison & Guang Yu Ren 2006, p. 88) and located at the crossroads between Bubbling Well Road and Chengdu Road, was inaugurated in 1904 in substitution of the previous one, whose location in Shanghai is uncertain (probably, from 1860 to 1904, several 'temporary' buildings on rent, hosting the Consulate of the Kingdom of Sardinia and, later, the Kingdom of Italy, followed one another).

A Chinese plan of the city published in 1932, but updated only to the 1920s (fig. 2), constitutes an important tool in analyzing the block of that building. On the map, the Italian Consulate is represented with a bilingual caption, «伊大利领事馆» in Chinese ('Italian Consulate', using an old grapheme for the first syllable of the word 'Italy') and «Consul ath» (with a wrong spelling) in English; «Cheng Road» (misspelling for present-day Chengdu Road) ends in a blind alley.

In the subsequent years, probably due to the increase in the importance of the consulate and consequent traffic in the area, this urban block experienced huge changes: the former blind alley of Chengdu Road was prolonged North as far as Bubbling Well Road. Now, the Italian Consulate had double access from both the roads and, as a reflection of the increase in its diplomatic importance, was surrounded, South and South-East, by two police stations. This situation is mapped in an American plan of Shanghai published in 1945, but updated only to 1933 (fig. 3). The same situation is also outlined by a Chinese cadastral map dated to the 1940s (fig. 4): the Italian Consulate, in those years upgraded to the rank of Embassy, is mapped directly in the Italian language with the toponym «Ambasciata d'Italia» (literally, 'Embassy of Italy'). The cartographer probably derived this toponym directly from Italian documents and/or Italian oral sources.

These cartographical sources play a special role in the study of the area, because the 'historical' Italian consulate in Shanghai does not exist anymore, having being demolished in the early 1980s in the framework of the construction of an urban highway.

## 6. A Problem in Research: The Destruction of the Historical Archive of the Italian Consulate in Shanghai (1949)

If the recent loss of the historical building of the Italian Consulate represents a problem from the point of view of architectural and cultural heritage studies, the complete loss of the historical archive of the same institution is even worse.

The total destruction of the Italian documents regarding 'Old Shanghai' and East China in general, since the establishment of the consulate of the Kingdom of Sardinia in the city (1860), dates back to 1949 and it has to be encompassed in the context of the international politics of that time. In fact, after the Second World War, from 1946 Italy had become a Republic under a strong American

influence, which supported the Italian Christian Party ('Democrazia Cristiana'; DC); the Italian Republic was now fully involved in the 'Cold War'; moreover, in 1949 Italy joined the NATO.

Facing the rise of Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China and probably in the attempt to cover Fascist politics in the region, the Italian Republican government of those years decided to burn all the Italian consular and diplomatic archives in China dating back to the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Kingdom of Italy and the Fascist Age.

Italian sinologist and diplomat Giuliano Bertuccioli (1923-2001; Chinese name: 白佐良) described in a detailed (and emotive) paper (Bertuccioli 1991, p. 9), in first person, the fire of the Italian consular archive in Shanghai, underlining the fact that most of the documents kept there were single copies, without any duplicates in other Italian archives.

Currently, this specific event represents the main (and in some cases insurmountable) obstacle for a high-resolution reconstruction of the Italian community in the 'Old Shanghai'.



LA "LITTLE ITALY" DI SHANGHAI

Fig. 1 – The so-called 'Little Italy' of the 'Old Shanghai', located at the crossroads between Nanking Road (present-day East Nanjing Road) and Szechuen Road (present-day Sichuan Road). It was a concentration of Italian food and retail shops. (Source: Ros 1911).

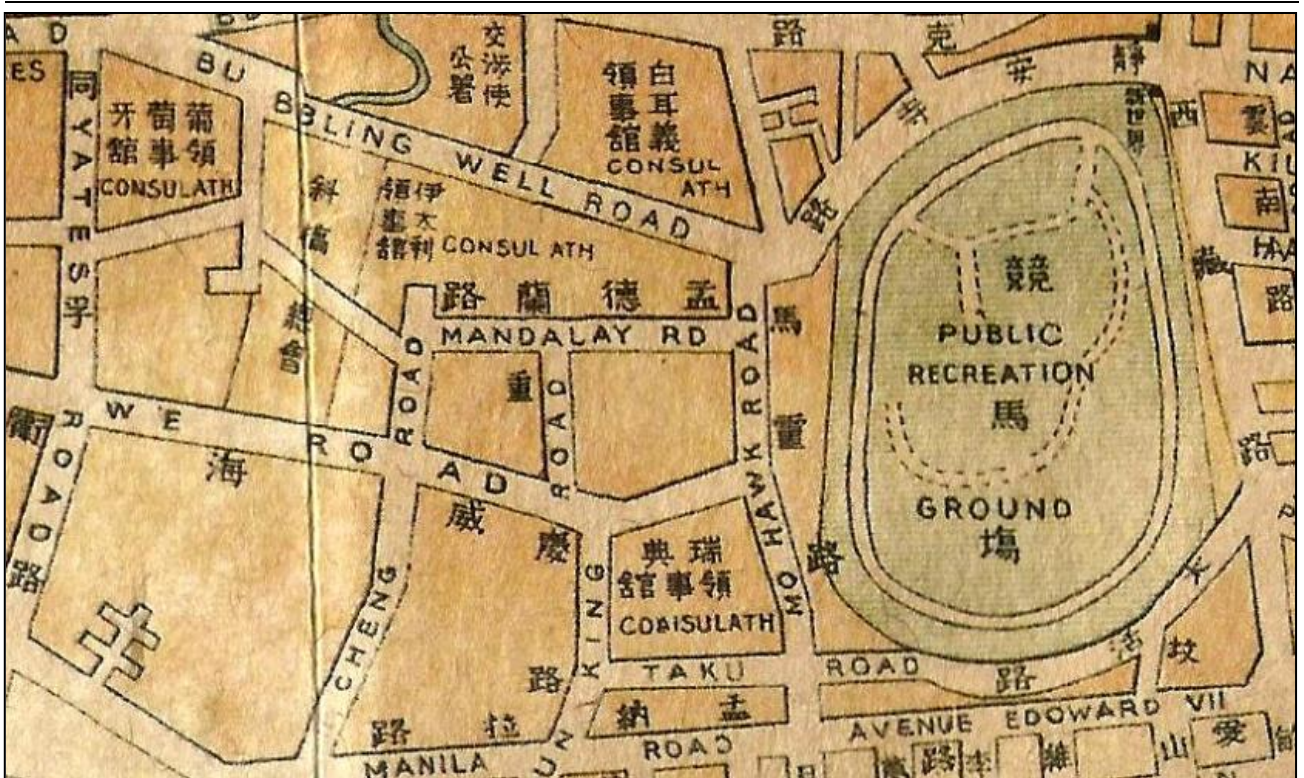


Fig. 2 – Section of a Chinese plan of Shanghai published in 1932, but updated only to the 1920s: the Italian Consulate is represented with a bilingual caption, «伊大利領事館» in Chinese ('Italian Consulate', using an old grapheme for the first syllable of the word 'Italy') and «Consul ath» (with a wrong spelling) in English. «Cheng Road» (present-day Chengdu Road) ends with a blind alley. (Source: Anon. 2005).

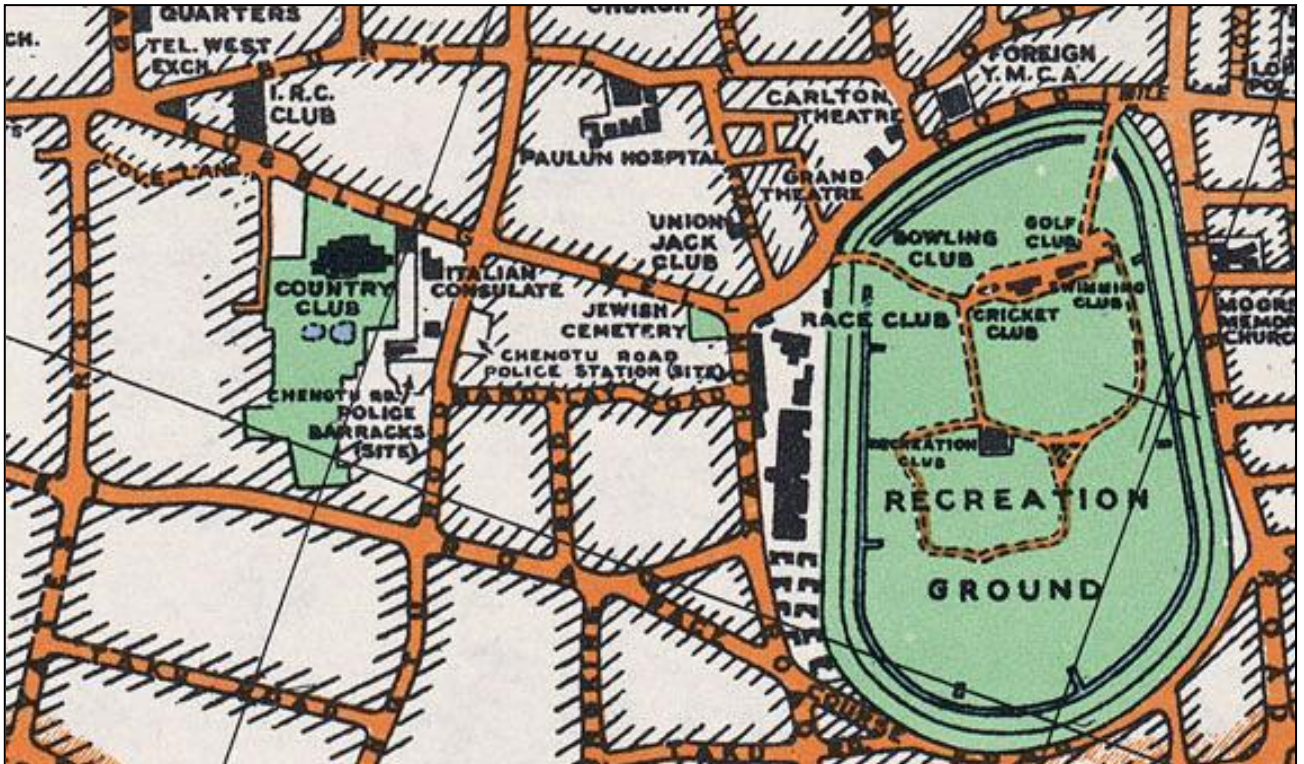


Fig. 3 – Section of an American plan of Shanghai published in 1945, but updated only to 1933. The Italian Consulate is represented; «Chengtu Road» (present-day Chengdu Road) has been prolonged as far as Bubbling Well Road (present-day West Nanjing Road) along the border of the propriety of the Italian Consulate. This change in urbanism probably aimed to speed up the traffic in the area and, indirectly, is a reflection of the growing importance of the Italian diplomacy in the 'Old Shanghai' of those years. (Source: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps>).

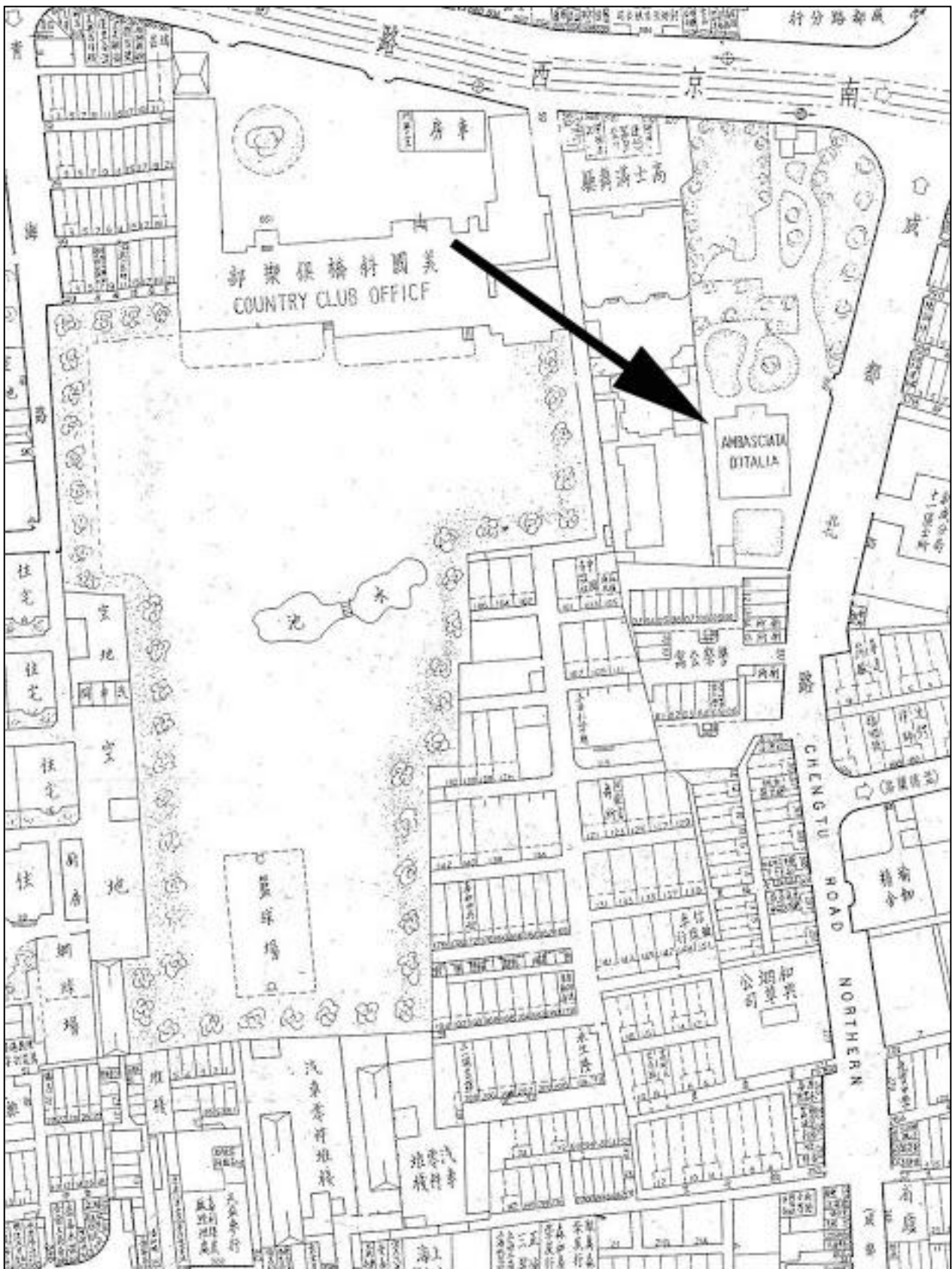


Fig. 4 – Section of a Chinese cadastral map dated to the 1940s. The Italian Consulate (indicated by the arrow), in those years upgraded to the rank of Embassy, is mapped directly in Italian language with the toponym «Ambasciata d'Italia» (literally, 'Embassy of Italy'). (Source: Zai Chen & Jianxi Wu 2008).

|   | 1865 | 1870 | 1876 | 1880 | 1885 | 1890 | 1895 | 1900 | 1905 | 1910 | 1915 | 1920 | 1925 | 1930 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| ITALIAN RESIDENTS IN THE 'OLD SHANGHAI' | 15   | 5    | 3    | 9    | 31   | 22   | 83   | 60   | 148  | 124  | 114  | 171  | 196  | 197  |

Tab. 1 – Italian residents, according to official data, in the 'Old Shanghai' between 1865 and 1930. (*Source*: Denison & Guang Yu Ren 2006).

| ROADS OF THE FRENCH CONCESSION IN THE 'OLD SHANGHAI' WITH NAMES DIRECTLY RELATED TO ITALY |                      |  |
|---|----------------------|--|
| Original name   | Present-day name     | Origin of the name   |
| Route Ghisi   | Yueyang Road<br>岳阳路  | <b>Ernesto Ghisi</b><br><br>Italian silk trader.<br>Member of the French Council in Shanghai.<br>Director of the office of the Italian Consulate from 1889 to 1900.<br>Honorary Italian consul from 1900 to 1901   |
| Rue du Marco Polo   | Longmen Road<br>龙门路  | <b>Marco Polo Ship</b><br><br>Italian war ship, which supported French troops in the repression of riots in Ningbo in 1898.<br>Marco Polo ship was also involved in the Sino-Italian Crisis related to the Italian attempt (1898-1899) to settle an outpost in Sanmen Bay (Zhejiang) |
| Rue Maresca   | Wuyuan Road<br>五原路   | <b>Francesco Saverio Maresca</b><br><br>Chinese name: 趙方濟; Italian Bishop in Nanjing from 1848 to 1855   |
| Rue Victor Emmanuel III   | Shaoxing Road<br>绍兴路 | <b>Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy</b><br><br>King of Italy from 1900 to 1946   |

Tab. 2 – Roads of the French Concession in the 'Old Shanghai' with names related to Italy. (*Sources*: Gordon 1941; French 2010).

| ITALIAN ROYAL NAVY IN THE 'OLD SHANGHAI' (WAR SHIPS) |   |      |  |           |
|--|---|------|--|-----------|
| Ship's name  | Launching   | Crew | In Shanghai  | Unrigging |
| GOVERNOLO  | 1849 (until 1861, it belonged to the Navy of the Kingdom of Sardinia) | 331  | 1873   | 1882      |
| MAGENTA  | 1862  | 308  | 1866   | 1875      |
| VEDETTA  | 1866  | 85   | 1873   | 1903      |
| VETTOR PISANI  | 1869  | 238  | 1871-1872; 1880.<br><br>In 1880, Prince Thomas Albert Victor of Savoy was on board   | 1893      |
| RAPIDO   | 1876  | 128  | December 1886-January 1887   | 1912      |
| VOLTURNO   | 1880s (?)   | ?    | 1891-1892  | post-1905 |
| CRISTOFORO COLOMBO                                   | 1880s (?)   | 238  | 1884-1885; April 1895<br><br>On August 1885, J.J. Keswick, chairman of the Shanghai Municipal Council, forwarded an official letter of appreciation to Mr. Accinni, Cristoforo Colombo's captain, for the contribution in defending the International Settlement in the context of the Sino-French War (1884).<br><br>In 1895, Prince Luigi Amedeo, Duke of the Abruzzi, was on board  | 1907 (?)  |
| VESUVIO  | 1883 (?)  | ?    | 1907   | 1911      |
| CALABRIA   | 1884  | 204  | 1903; 1906; 1911-1912; 1922<br><br>In 1906, Prince Ferdinando of Savoy-Genoa was on board  | 1924      |
| PIEMONTE   | 1888  | 310  | 1900   | 1920      |
| UMBRIA   | 1891  | ?    | 1895   | 1923      |
| MARCO POLO   | 1892  | 486  | 1901-1907; 1913-1915<br><br>A road of the French Concession in Shanghai was named after this ship (see tab. 2).<br>On April 1906, a rowing race was organized, in the waters of the Huangpu River, between the crews of the Italian ship Marco Polo and American ship Cincinnati.<br>A return race took place on December 1906, involving the crews of the ships Marco Polo and Galveston (American).<br>In both cases, Italians prevailed, and the news was given with great emphasis on Italian journals and | 1922      |

|                       |   |        |  |                                 |
|-----------------------|---|--------|--|---------------------------------|
|                       |   |        | newspapers (e.g. on the magazine 'La Domenica del Corriere').<br>These races are significant of the environment of nationalistic competition among Western Navies in the 'Old Shanghai'  |                                 |
| ELBA                  | 1893  | 257    | 1902   | 1921                            |
| LIGURIA               | 1893  | 1535   | December 1904.<br>Prince Luigi Amedeo, Duke of the Abruzzi, was on board as ship's Captain   | 1923                            |
| PUGLIA                | 1898  | 201    | 1904; March-December 1909  | 1923                            |
| S. GIORGIO            | 1908  | 705    | 1925 at least  | 1941                            |
| ALESSANDRO VOLTA      | 1910s (?)   | ?      | 1927 at least  | ?                               |
| QUARTO                | 1911  | 323    | 1935 at least  | 1939                            |
| LIBIA                 | 1912  | 314    | 1921-1922; 1924-1925; March 1932   | 1937                            |
| MUGGIA                | 1912  | 104    | 1927-1929  | 1929                            |
| SEBASTIANO CABOTO     | 1913  | 123    | April 1914;<br>1926-1934 (occasionally)  | 1943                            |
| ERMANNOCARLOTTO       | 1918 (built in Shanghai by Shanghai Docks and Engineering Company).<br>Riverine gunboat permanently based in Shanghai | 60     | 1921-1943<br><br>Italian Admiral Alberto Da Zara was the captain of the 'Carlotto' in 1920s. Several pages of his personal memoir are focused on this period (Da Zara 1949).<br><br>In the early 1930s, Eugenio Ghersi (1904-1997) was appointed as doctor on board of the 'Carlotto'. During patrol missions, he took photos of upper Yangtze and even directed some documentary films on board. On the basis of this first Chinese experience, he later focused deeply on Oriental studies, becoming the official photographer of the expeditions in Tibet (1930s-1940s) organized by the Italian scholar Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984) | Unclear (between 1958 and 1976) |
| TRENTO                | 1927  | 723    | 1932   | 1942                            |
| LEPANTO               | 1927. Riverine gunboat permanently based in Shanghai  | 70 ca. | 1933-1943  | 1956                            |
| ESPERO                | 1927  | 179    | 1932 (?); 1938   | 1940                            |
| BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI   | 1930  | 507    | 1938-1939 (occasionally)   | 1940                            |
| RAIMONDO MONTECUCCOLI | 1934  | 578    | 1937-1938 (occasionally)   | 1972                            |
| ERITREA               | 1936  | 234    | 1943 at least  | 1966                            |
| CALITEA II            | 1937 (former RAMB II, Regia Azienda Monopolio Banane)   | 120    | November-December 1942   | 1945                            |

Tab. 3 – Italian Royal Navy in the 'Old Shanghai' (war ships). The order is based on the date of launching of the ship (*Sources*: Gravina di Ramacca 1907; Ros 1911; Da Zara 1949; Rastelli 2011; Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012; Wikipedia).



---

**References**

- Anon. 1937. *A Guide to Catholic Shanghai*. Shanghai, T'ou-sè-wè Press.
- Anon. 2005. 最新上海地图, 1932, (Reprint). Shanghai, 学范出版社.
- Arminjon V. 1885. *La China e la missione italiana del 1866*. Florence, Ufficio della Rassegna Nazionale.
- Bertuccioli G. 1991. "Per una storia della sinologia italiana: prime note su alcuni sinologi e interpreti di cinese". *Mondo Cinese* 74, 9-39.
- Bertuccioli G. & Masini F. 1996. *Italia e Cina*. Rome-Bari, Laterza.
- Bettini E. 1967. *I rapporti politici ed economici tra l'Italia e la Cina negli ultimi cento anni*, Rome.
- Bickers R. 1998. "Shanghaiers: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai 1843-1937". *Past & Present* 159, 1: 161-211.
- Borsa G. 1994. "Tentativi di penetrazione dell'Italia fascista in Cina, 1932-1937". In Borsa G. (ed.), *Europa e Asia tra modernità e tradizione*. Milan, FrancoAngeli: 239-290.
- Corradini P. 1991. "Italia e Cina: dalle prime relazioni consolari al trattato di pace del 1947". *Mondo Cinese* 76: 7-48.
- Croci G. 2011. *Sul bastimento per Shanghai*. Udine, Forum.
- Da Zara A. 1949. *Pelle d'Ammiraglio*. Milan, Arnoldo Mondadori.
- De Antonellis G. 1996. "Una banca per la Cina nella prima metà del secolo sostenuta dal Credito Italiano". *Mondo Cinese* 91: 55-71.
- De Luca F. 1911. "Rapporto (...) sugli Italiani in Cina". In Ros G., *Shanghai e la sua colonia italiana*. Shanghai, North China Herald: 35-36 (Reprint of the original report by F. De Luca, previously published in *Censimento degli Italiani all'Estero. Dicembre 1881*. Rome, Verdesi e C., 1884).
- Denison E. & Guang Yu Ren 2006. *Building Shanghai. The Story of China's Gateway*. Chichester, Wiley.
- Djordjevic N. 2009. *Old Shanghai Clubs and Associations*. Hong Kong, Earnshaw Books.
- Francioni A. 2003. *Il trattato italo-cinese del 1866 nelle carte dell'ammiraglio Arminjon*. Siena, University of Siena, Working Paper 46.
- Francioni A. 2004. *Il "banchetto cinese". L'Italia fra le treaty powers*. Siena, Nuova Immagine.
- French P. 2010. *The Old Shanghai A-Z*. Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press.
- Giusti del Giardino M. 2010. *Pechino Bassano del Grappa. Storia di una famiglia italiana in Cina nella prima metà del ventesimo secolo*. Turin, Allemandi.
- Gordon A.H. 1941. *The Streets of Shanghai*. Shanghai.
- Gravina di Ramacca M. 1907. *La Cina dopo il Millenovecento*. Milan, Treves.
- Honig E. 1986. *Sisters and Strangers. Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- Imperatori U.E. 1929. *Italia madre (gente nostra per il mondo)*. Rome, Sapiientia.
- Istituto Italiano di Cultura – Shanghai 2012. *Gli italiani a Sciangai, 1608-1949*. [Thematic map]. Shanghai.
- Magrini L. 1925. *La Cina d'oggi*. Milan, Corbaccio.
- Masi C. 1936. *Italia e italiani nell'Oriente vicino e lontano, 1800-1935*. Bologna, Cappelli.
- Mazzolani A. 1915. *Verso la Cina*. Tripoli, Pirota & Bresciano.
- Osborn Springfield M. 1966. *Hunting Opium and Other Scents*. Halesworth, Halesworth Press.
- Paci Zaharoff F. 2005. *The Daughter of the Maestro. Life in Surabaya, Shanghai, and Florence*. Lincoln, iUniverse.
- Piastra S. 2013. "La comunità italiana nella "Vecchia Shanghai". Temi socio-economici e di geografia urbana". In Doniselli Eramo I. & Sportelli M. (eds.), *Cina e Occidente. Incontri e incroci di pensiero, religione e scienza*. Milan, Centro di Cultura Italia-Asia: 69-92.
- Rastelli A. 2011. *Italiani a Shanghai. La Regia Marina in Estremo Oriente*. Milan, Mursia.
- Ros G. 1911. *Shanghai e la sua colonia italiana*. Shanghai, North China Herald.
- Ross J.R. 1994. *Escape to Shanghai. A Jewish Community in China*. New York, Free Press.
- Samarani G. 2013. "Italians in Nationalist China (1928-1945): some case studies". In Brady A.M. & Brown D. (eds.), *Foreigners and Foreign Institutions in Republican China*. New York, Routledge: 234-250.
- Samarani G. & De Giorgi L. 2011. *Lontane, vicine. Le relazioni fra Cina e Italia nel Novecento*. Rome, Carocci.

- 
- Shanghai Library 2001. *The Album of Shanghai during the past 150 years*. Shanghai.
- Zai Chen & Jianxi Wu (eds.) 2008. 上海百业指南:道路机构厂商住宅分布图. Shanghai.
- Zanier C. 1993. *Alla ricerca del seme perduto. Sulla via della seta tra scienza e speculazione (1858-1862)*. Milan, FrancoAngeli.
- Zanier C. 2006. *Semai. Setaioli italiani in Giappone, 1861-1880*. Padua, CLEUP.

### Websites

- <http://italianiashanghai.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps>  
<http://www.virtualshanghai.net>