Beyond

The ISI Florence & Umbra Institute
Studies in International Education

n.8

Beyond n.8

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Beyond the Future and Back to the Past

In previous introductions to the journal *Beyond*, study abroad students have been analyzed as "immigrants" (*Beyond* 2), compared with "the other" (*Beyond* 3), and placed at the center of discussion as individuals beyond differences of gender, race, and religion (*Beyond* 5). But today, exactly which students are we talking about? Who is the international student who comes to Italy to study in a Study Abroad Program? Regardless of the country they come from, their gender, religion, or background, today's students have undoubtedly experienced the pandemic during adolescence and have learned to take care of themselves and their inner world. They have reshaped their social interactions, relying more on digital communication, with a common perception that limiting social interactions would keep them safer. And that's exactly what happened.

This new generation sometimes struggles to interact with others – not out of fear of the unknown, but often due to a simple lack of habit. Students rarely explore new places or try new things during their time abroad. In most cases, they follow the same paths laid out by students before them. They tend to stick to the group they traveled with from their home country; when in class, they prefer not to interact with the faculty or their peers, immersed in a silence that often betrays anxiety. It is precisely up to us, the teachers, to encourage students to discover themselves; it is up to us to foster cooperation in the classroom; it is up to us to propose activities that allow students to be creative and to suggest unexplored paths.

This applies not only to me, as a teacher of Italian Language and Culture at ISI Florence, but to all my fellow professors. We must (re)discover collaboration and exchange. And it was out of this very need that we launched the *IN-Formiamoci* training day on November 29th, 2024. This event was conceived as an opportunity for professional development and reflection among teachers of Italian language and culture, especially those working for study abroad programs in Italy. This issue of *Beyond* collects – in English translation –the papers given that day at Palazzo Bargagli (one of the two ISI Florence facilities). It was a valuable opportunity for reflec-

tion and dialogue on teaching practices, involving teachers not only from Florence but also from other nearby cities, mostly serving schools that are affiliated with AACUPI (Association of American College and University Programs in Italy).

During that training session, which involved – in various ways – all the professors of the Italian language department at ISI Florence, we realized how our current textbook (though still valuable and useful) remains rooted in a pre-Covid world. The need for a different approach to language learning led us to consider creating a new textbook, stripped of those activities that may now be perceived as somewhat obsolete, although only ten years have passed since its first publication. As professors, we feel the need for a teaching aid that can immediately prove functional and comprehensive in the classroom. Believing this to be the right time to start studying Italian language and culture with a fresh, different approach, my colleague Professor Serena Baldini and I are currently working on this editorial project.

The issue of *Beyond* I am introducing thus looks to the future, but it does not forget its past or its history. The conference *Europa ed Estremo Oriente: relazioni, incontri e conflitti nella prima età moderna* (*Europe and the Far East: Relations, Encounters, and Conflicts in the Early Modern Era*, hosted by ISI Florence on March 6th-7th, 2024) takes us once again into history, putting China and Japan at the forefront through a series of essays by esteemed international scholars. Once again, past and future, yesterday and tomorrow mingle in these pages. Finally, in the journal's last section, several texts by former ISI Florence students sharing their experiences and projects complete this issue of *Beyond*, looking back at recent semesters and ahead to new initiatives.

It has been over 25 years since I first stepped into a classroom to teach Italian to North American students. Today I realize how much the prevailing approach has changed. New methodologies and techniques have emerged. Yet, teaching must always remain flexible, adaptable, and open to what is – inevitably – a continuous *work in progress*.

Prof. Catia Santi, *Italian Language Coordinator, ISI Florence*


academics

Introduction to "IN-formiamoci"

Workshop on Teaching Practices for Italian Language Instruction to Foreign Students in Study Abroad Programs in Italy

Serena Baldini

Abstract

This preliminary text provides a brief introduction to the proceedings of the conference on teaching Italian as a Second Language that ISI Florence organized last fall semester. The event was hosted on the institute's premises at Palazzo Bargagli on November 29th, 2024. As the title of the conference suggests, the participants discussed new methods and best practices to teach Italian in study abroad programs mostly affiliated with AACUPI (Association of American College and University Programs in Italy).

Keywords: Teaching Italian Language and Culture, Language Teacher Training, Sharing Best Practices in International Education, Study Abroad Programs in Italy.

This section of *Beyond* features some of the papers given last year at the *IN-formiamoci* language workshop organized by the ISI Florence Italian Department. More precisely, the event took place at Palazzo Bargagli (one of the two ISI Florence facilities, the other being Palazzo Rucellai) on 29 November 2024. The event was meant to serve as an opportunity to assess and share practices used by Italian language teachers who work for study abroad programs in Italy. The underlying idea was, therefore, to foster dialogue among colleagues, thus mutually enriching their experience. The organizers were confident that this would lead to sharing observations, impressions, proposals, doubts, and suggestions on our daily commitment to teach Italian language and culture, especially to international university students.

All the articles that we selected for publication share a practical approach. Our colleagues from both ISI Florence and other AACUPI programs chose to illustrate and comment on activities and techniques they use in class. In doing so, they describe how those activities are implemented, their contexts, how often they take place and what changes have been introduced over time.

The workshop started with an introductory speech by Prof. Catia Santi (Coordinator of the Italian Language Department at ISI Florence) titled *The Obvious is Not Obvious. Practical Observations from a Teacher.* After her, Prof. Piero Ianniello (University of New Haven in Prato) took the floor. In his talk (*Italian as a Second Language in Study Abroad Programs: Working with the Territory*) Prof. Ianniello emphasized the importance of capitalizing on local resources to help students learn Italian in a real-life context.

Two papers concentrated on the use of games as efficient tools for learning languages. I refer to the article in this issue of *Beyond* by Prof. Tatiana Speri (both a teacher and a teacher trainer) titled *The Learning Mission: Gamification and L2 Italian in Action!* and the one by our ISI Florence colleague Carlo Lorini (*L2 at Play: Game Learning as a New Approach to Reviewing Language Lessons*).

As the title of her article suggests (*Technology in the Class: Figma and Wordwall for Online and In-person Teaching/Learning*) Elisabetta Blini (also from ISI Florence) spoke about two technological devices she often uses in her Italian language courses. Another important contribution to *IN-formiamoci*, although he did not turn in a paper for this edition of our journal, was the talk by Carlo Manella (publisher, teacher, writer, and editor-in-chief of Progetto Lingua Edizioni) titled *Why Write and for Whom? Some Remarks on Today's Publications on Teaching Italian to Foreign Students*. Prof. Manella not only talked about this business sector today but also shared some insightful reflections on the most common kinds of foreign students who wish to learn Italian today. Finally, ISI Florence professor Emanuela Agostini summed up and commented on all the papers given at the workshop.

As is customary, each talk was followed by questions and observations from the floor. The good number of attendees and their professional expertise made that part of the workshop particularly engaging, lively, and informative. We thus take this opportunity to thank them for contributing to such a rich, gratifying, and productive event.

The Obvious is Not Obvious.

Practical Observations from a Teacher

Catia Santi

Abstract

The article highlights the need for an educational approach to support the more strictly didactic aspects of teaching Italian to U.S. students in Study Abroad programs. More specifically, it reviews a number of best practices that an Italian teacher, when working with university students, might assume to be already acquired but which, in reality, must be reinforced and actively encouraged.

Keywords: Language Teaching, Italian Culture, Educational Approach, Best Practices

Most North American students we encounter in Study Abroad programs are beginners and therefore new to learning the Italian language. When approaching them, we must start with the assumption that our job as teachers is not only educational but also, I would say, educative. Studying Italian means coming into more direct contact with Italian culture through the language. As Italian language professors, we often spend more time in class with these students than our colleagues who teach other disciplines. We see them almost daily and allow them to experience Italian culture, traditions, and customs firsthand by using the language to express their needs. This is why it is essential to emphasize the educative aspect of our work; because through it, we can break down stereotypes and promote genuine Italian identity.

From my own experience, I have noticed that there are practices and habits related to learning that Italian teachers, knowing they are dealing with university students, might take for granted as they might seem obvious. However, in practice, these must be reiterated and encouraged. What are those practices? Here are a few examples:

- Bringing a notebook and pen to class
- Using a pen instead of a pencil for tests
- Taking notes and copying what the teacher writes on the board
- Copying, not photographing, everything
- Memorizing the words studied or discussed in class
- Developing one's own study method.

It is important to write, to use a pen and notebook (even a digital one) – in fact, we retain 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 50% of what we see, 70% of what we write, and 90% of what we do. Forcing students to write is also a way to stimulate them to do. Learning a foreign language is about *doing* with the language, and this doing is fundamental, but it is not obvious. It's also necessary to explain to students that learning Italian in Italy means studying it as a second language rather than a foreign language, as they might have done in their home country. As such, the techniques and methodologies applied are different. Sharing this aspect of teaching with students is important: we ask students to trust us as teachers, but that doesn't always work – so sharing techniques and methodologies is an important step in motivating them.

Another seemingly obvious point is the memorization of vocabulary, where this is not based on teacher-provided word lists, but on lists that the students create themselves: in fact, creating something to support their own study efforts is much more effective. The well-known flashcards also are a useful and important tool for students. We can refer to the work of German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus[1] who, in the second half of the 19th century, theorized the *forgetting curve*. He essentially determined how quickly we forget what we learn. The speed with which we forget things we've just read/heard/seen is surprising: after one day we remember 80% of what we studied, and after three days we're down to

1. On Hermann Ebbinghaus, see Giuseppe Vargiu, *La curva dell'oblio e la ripetizione dilazionata*, in «*Sinapsicoaching*», May 28, 2023 https://sinapsicoaching.com/curva-dell-oblio/.

60%. Fortunately, the curve follows a predictable pattern, and Ebbinghaus also figured out how to work around it. How do we retain what we've learned? Simple: review it at regular intervals, study it multiple times using effective tools.

Using flashcards is a simple and effective method for memorizing vocabulary. They can be self-made or downloaded/printed in different colors from online sources. But what's the difference between the two types? Simple (and consistent with everything discussed so far): the creative process of making the flashcards itself aids in memorizing the vocabulary. Once again, *doing* helps us learn.

Decades ago, cognitive psychology discovered that deeper processing of material leads to more secure and lasting memory. This means that any personalization of the task is beneficial and helps students learn more effectively.

Phones, computers, or tablets should not be demonized or excluded from language learning, but they also should not be considered the central tool of learning. There are many useful and fun activities one can do online, but the key message must be: students will only remember what they produce in a personal and constructive way. We could therefore conclude with a quote attributed to Aristotle: "We learn by doing."

Italian as a Second Language in SAPs
A Matter of Cooperation

Piero Ianniello

Abstract

This article aims to share several teaching practices developed over years of experience to counter the increasingly common phenomenon of disengagement among American students in Study Abroad Programs (SAPs) in Italy. Specifically, the article reviews some of the causes of disengagement, examines commonly adopted solutions, and focuses on those that have been developed and refined through years of experience. These solutions emphasize cooperation with the environment surrounding the students in Italy, involving carefully planned activities and specially designed educational tools. Chief among these tools is a textbook specifically tailored to the students in the class, serving as the primary support for all teaching activities, both in and out of the classroom. Finally, the article highlights how best practices must be supported by the Study Abroad Program itself, with which strategic goals should be shared.

Keywords: Study Abroad Programs, Italian as a Second Language, Disengagement, Local Environment.

Introduction

More than 40,000 American students choose Italy each year as the destination for their study abroad experience (about 15% of all global destinations for study abroad students, according to *Opendoors*, 2024). These students are hosted by approximately 160 Study Abroad Programs (hereafter abbreviated as SAPs — Study Abroad Programs. Data from the Institute of International Education, 2024).

According to the classification of Engle & Engle (2003), the effectiveness of the study abroad experience, in terms of both learning and intercultural engagement, depends on several variables. One of these

variables is inevitably the study and use of the host country's language. Language is thus seen as a "vehicle for a people's culture" (Urbinati 1992: VII), whose acquisition "often goes along simultaneously with the acquisition of knowledge and cultural competency" (Schneider 2013: 31).

One of the most heated debates among language teachers (and not only them) within the programs concerns the level of student engagement. This level seems to be lacking, as demonstrated by a 2008 survey conducted among AACUPI member programs: "The level of language proficiency acquired by their students at the end of their stays is, in general, rather low" (Schneider 2013: 30). The same study reports that 54% of programs indicated that, by the end of the semester in Italy, students are only able to speak a few words in Italian.

Interestingly, however, proficiency levels increase significantly in cases where SAPs offer so-called residential programs, in which students are hosted by local families.

Methodology

This article is the result of a combination of academic studies on the subject and many years of personal observation, study, and experience in the academic field.

Results

The lack of engagement among American students in Italian language classes stems from a variety of factors.

The primary factor is curricular in nature. Starting from the premise that "neither a passion for Italian nor a desire to know our country is the reason they chose this experience" (Marangione 2012: 164), Italian is most often imposed as a mandatory requirement to participate in the study abroad experience. It is, therefore, a compulsory choice, which in itself already creates a predisposition that is not always favorable toward learning. This raises the question: how many students would study Italian if they were not required to?

These students are also not always aware of – or encouraged to un-

derstand – the extent to which language is a key to accessing local culture and thus making their experience abroad genuinely educational. They see no reason to learn the language, and can easily get by without speaking it – or, by extension, without meaningfully engaging with the host country's culture.

> A significant challenge faced by American students studying Italian abroad is their limited interaction with the language outside the classroom. While classroom learning focuses on grammar and vocabulary, students often fail to transfer this knowledge to real-life contexts, leading to a shallow engagement with the language and culture (Kinginger, 2013).

Another factor not to be underestimated is the personal dimension. These are students who, for the first time, are abroad and on their own, and this sense of freedom perfectly combines with the multitude of distractions they face. They are in a foreign country, but within the safe environment of the hosting program, with the opportunity to travel across Europe, to places that seem exotic from an American perspective. Suddenly, from Italy, they can visit these places all at once, thanks to extremely low-cost airfare and quick, affordable weekend trips.

In such a context, studying Italian can even become a perceived obstacle to academic progress, potentially threatening their GPA (*Grade Point Average*), which in turn affects eligibility for scholarships.

Faced with student pressure, SAPs are therefore obliged to find solutions so that the study abroad experience is not undermined by a potentially negative experience in the Italian course. This must be done while trying, on one hand, not to reduce the educational value of the program – which would be clearly diminished without the language component – and, on the other hand, avoiding the risk of losing enrollment, which is the financial backbone of the SAPs.

Among the most common solutions adopted by SAPs, some are extreme, such as removing the requirement to take Italian courses alto-

gether. These are often replaced with coursework more closely tied to the students' majors (Schneider 2013), and are typically limited to short "survival Italian" courses, usually taught in a single session.

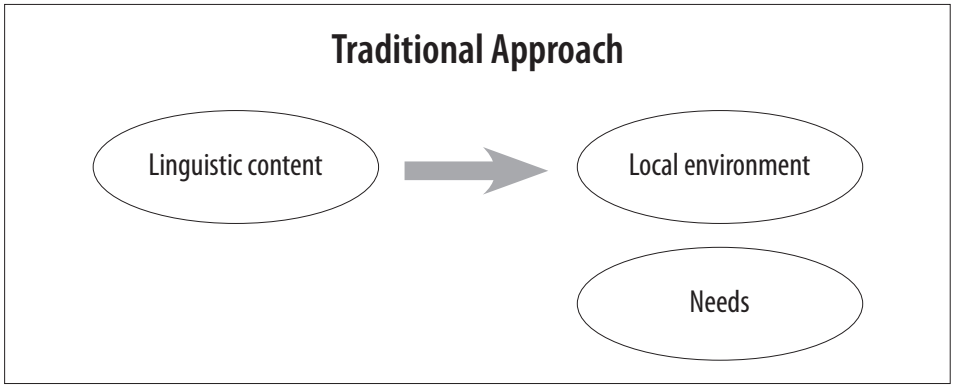
For the student, the semester in Italy thus becomes a study experience *in Italy*, but significantly loses its value of *Italian* experience. As a result, the entire SAP context becomes less and less Italian in nature, adopting characteristics nearly identical to those of the home campus. While this approach significantly reduces the risk of cultural shock, it also limits the experience to superficial aspects of Italian culture.

Another solution is to simplify the courses, either by reducing their content or by lowering the bar in terms of skill assessment – while still maintaining the full academic credit the course carries.

Discussion

As a long-time teacher in SAPs, I have faced the same pressures from students, and felt the need to adopt strategies that give meaning to my work, maintaining an essential standard of professional ethics while also addressing the needs of American students.

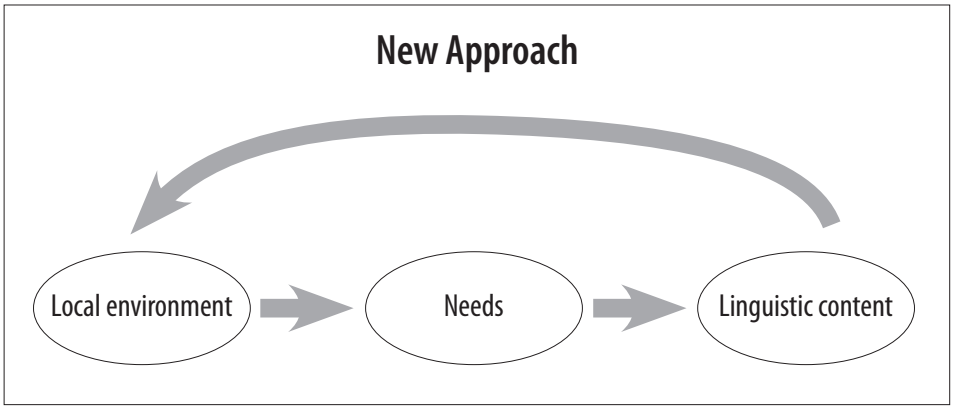
My solution has always been tailoring to their effective needs: shaping courses around the actual needs of the students. And when we speak of needs, we're not referring only to those expressed by the students, but also to those that I, in my role as a teacher, actively cultivate in them. Essentially, this means creating "everyday life" needs through cooperation



with and involvement in the local environment.

It's a shift in approach: the students' needs are not necessarily the language content itself. Rather, it is the language, necessary for interacting with the surrounding environment, that becomes what students feel they need.

It is from the connection with the local environment that needs arise, and therefore, so does content. When encouraged to engage with the local environment, students will develop new linguistic needs, which the language course can then effectively address.



It's not the conjugation of the present tense that students need per se, but rather the ability to use verbs to communicate in specific contexts.

In various departments of Italian Studies, as well as those focused on Italian as a Second Language, I have not always observed a willingness to embrace a teaching approach that is not centered on responding to (supposedly) pre-determined needs. And yet, if we think about it, this approach leads to a shift in the role of the surrounding environment. Historically viewed as a source of distraction, even as a factor enabling students' excessive behavior while abroad, the local environment instead becomes a valuable teaching asset. It stops being an adversary and becomes a cooperative partner.

Collaboration with the Local Environment

Starting from the premise that "students who leverage social capital through bridging relationships feel they achieve higher levels of language improvement" (Smith et al. 2011: 203), collaboration with the local community primarily occurs through activities outside the classroom. Among those I've implemented over the years, particularly in my role as an Italian language teacher at the University of New Haven – Tuscany Campus, are:

> **Conversation Exchange**. This activity is the quintessential way to connect American students with their local peers. It should not be seen merely as a language activity, but rather as a cultural one. Students don't just practice the foreign language they are studying; they also get the chance to immerse themselves in a cultural dimension different from their own – yet relatable due to shared age.
>
> To ensure this activity is genuinely effective, several key elements must be in place. First, the meetings should not be occasional, but frequent enough to allow relationships to move beyond surface-level interaction and develop deeper connections. The activity must also be carefully prepared and supported throughout. The initial barrier, the fear of the unknown, is a natural psychological response, especially for students abroad.
>
> A good practice is to prepare students with a dedicated class on how to break the ice. Students often possess stronger language skills than they believe—they are capable of expressing themselves based on what they've already learned, and basic phrases are easily adaptable across different contexts. Gaining confidence with a set of conversational phrases helps them approach their first interaction more comfortably; once that hurdle is overcome, conversations typically flow smoothly.
>
> Another key factor is ensuring that conversation partners are of the same age group. Shared interests naturally motivate and facilitate interaction.
>
> Finally, the meetings should be supervised to help restart stalled

conversations, and to encourage the use of Italian – especially since Italian students often have a higher proficiency in English.

Interactive Field Trips. The goal of a field trip should never be simply to visit a place, but to interact with it. In my classes, field trips have included visits to the city library, the local university, and the weekly market. In every case, students are encouraged to actively gather information about the location and talk to people, supported by a worksheet introduced in advance.

Volunteering. In advanced-level classes, just a few weeks into the course, I always propose a volunteer experience in authentic linguistic and cultural contexts. This is not about assisting in English classes at local middle or high schools—instead, it might involve helping in Italian L2 classrooms (for example, at CPIA adult learning centers). Whenever possible, placements are chosen to match the student's academic interests – for example, shadowing a speech therapist for a speech therapy major, or working in a migrant welcome center for students studying international relations, and so on.

The Textbook

In my very personal opinion, the textbook plays a key role in teaching within SAPs – and I'm well aware that not everyone agrees with this view. Textbooks are often seen as rigid roadmaps to be followed step by step, designed for a broad audience, where the focus is the Italian language and the setting is an Italy that is often stereotyped or, at the very least, does not accurately represent the local reality experienced by the students who will be using the book.

For the same reasons discussed in previous sections, and in order to address disengagement, I believe that customizing the textbook is a fundamental tool in supporting and motivating student learning.

Most textbooks currently in use contain a wealth of excellent activities, online expansions, and high-quality teaching aids. However, they are often directed to students assumed to have a high intrinsic motivation, similar to learners around the world studying English.

Italian, as we have seen, is not inherently motivating. Hence the need to create a textbook that specifically taps into the emotions and interests of the students in the classroom, in their particular psychological state, in their specific context, and with the particular people who serve as their points of reference during their semester abroad.

The text I use is a course packet I created myself (with the help of Laura Di Pofi, another SAP teacher), titled *Italiano a Prato* – set in the city where the SAP I work for is based.

It's a textbook developed over many years and continuously evolving, built around a variety of activities and exercises specifically designed for and based on real classroom experience. The entire approach is aimed at increasing student engagement.

The text, *tailored to their needs*, includes references centered on topics familiar to students, such as:

- Local places and street names
- Mentions of popular nightlife spots
- People from the campus
- Former students

The locations are those in the city of Prato, with references to its squares, streets, landmarks, institutions, and stations – allowing students to recognize the places that are part of their daily life.

There are also occasional nods to American nightlife spots, so students can find echoes of their own out-of-class routines as well.

Beyond that, exercises often feature well-known Italians abroad, but also familiar campus figures such as the Dean, language teachers, and even some of their extracurricular activities. This way, students recognize the very people they interact with daily.

Finally, there are references to *Prato alumni*: students who have already lived through the same experiences.

These are all elements that spark emotions and help students feel connected. They begin to see themselves as part of a shared project – limited in time, yes, but one that makes them feel like members of a commu-

2. Fill in the blanks with ESSERE or AVERE in the present tense, decide which monuments or buildings are the ones in the pictures and search the web to answer the questions!

Prato _____ una città bellissima, ricca di storia. I più importanti monumenti _____: il Duomo, la chiesa di San Francesco, la chiesa di San Domenico, la chiesa di Santa Maria delle Carceri, il Castello dell'Imperatore e anche la scultura di Henry Moore. Il Duomo _____ nel centro della città e gli affreschi _____ di Filippo Lippi.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Prato _____ la comunità cinese più grande di Europa.

❑**Quanti cinesi vivono nella provincia di Prato?**

_____

Per camminare, le colline _____ molto vicine e c'_____ una bellissima pista ciclabile lungo il fiume. Il fiume si chiama Bisenzio. Prato _____ una piazza molto grande, una delle piazze più grandi d'Europa. Questa piazza _____ uno spazio per i giovani, perché _____ tanti pub e uno anche con la musica live!

❑**Come si chiama questa piazza?**

_____

Se tu _____ in questa città, puoi vedere tante cose belle!

Esercizio 1

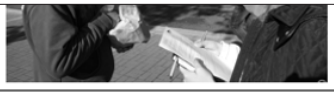
Io **sono / sei** una persona molto importante! **Abitiamo / Abito** in un piccolo stato indipendente in Italia, e spesso **viaggio / viaggi** per lavoro. Di solito si **vestono / mi vesto** con abiti lunghi e bianchi, e **indossa / indosso** anche un cappellino bianco. La gente mi **guardo / guarda** la domenica in piazza, a Roma. Tutti **aspetto / aspettano** che io mi **affacciate / affaccio** alla finestra e **iniziamo / inizio** a parlare!
Chi è? Il P.……

Io sono inglese, ma **abita / abito** in Italia! Mi **piace / piacciono** l'Italia, perché mi **piace / piacciono** l'arte. Sono sposato con una donna italiana, lei si **chiama / mi chiamo** Silvia, e anche lei **lavora / lavorano** nella mia scuola! In pratica, noi **lavoriamo / lavorate** insieme.
Il mio lavoro è molto interessante: **insegna / insegno**, **parlo / parla** con gli studenti, **parlo / parla** con i professori, **organizzo /organizza** attività. E **gioco / giochi** anche a calcio! Qualche volta **prendo / prendete** l'aereo e vado in America.
Mi puoi trovare nel mio ufficio, l'ultimo ufficio in fondo.
Chi è? K.…… M.……

Mi chiamo / Mi chiama Andrea! Io **sono / siamo** italiano! Ma io **viaggio / viaggia** molto per cantare nei concerti di tutto il mondo. Infatti io **essere / sono** un tenore, e **amiamo / amo** cantare diversi tipi di musica, opera, classica e moderna. I miei fans mi **vede / vedono** in televisione, **ascoltano / ascolti** le mie canzoni, **compro / comprano** i miei cd (Almeno io **spero / speriamo**!!!)
Chi è? A.…… B.……

Esercizio 2

Ora vi parlo di due libri italiani, due romanzi. Uno è del 1980, ed è molto famoso. Questo libro…… (vendere) milioni di copie nel mondo. La storia …… (accadere) nel XIV secolo: un giovane monaco …… (accompagnare) un monaco anziano in un monastero e …… (scrivere) un diario dove …… (raccontare) cosa succede. Nel monastero c'è un mistero: qualcuno …… (uccidere) i monaci e nessuno …… (capire) perché. Il frate …… (investigare) sul caso, e alla fine …… (risolvere) il mistero.



B: Sì, ma le bancarelle sono coperte. Noi invece dobbiamo portare l'ombrello!
W: Uffa!
B: Qual è la tua bancarella preferita al mercato?
W: La **bancarella** dei formaggi. Adoro i formaggi puzzolenti!
B: Ma non **abbiamo bisogno** di formaggi! Il nostro frigo è pieno di formaggi puzzolenti!
W: Ok, ok. Cosa compriamo allora?
B: Frutta! Non c'è frutta a casa. Al mercato la frutta è più fresca e più **economica**!
W: Frutta… oh no… non mi piace la frutta! Io vorrei anche un paio di pantaloni corti!
B: Tu indossi solo pantaloni corti! Hai bisogno di pantaloni lunghi!!!
W: Anche tu indossi solo pantaloni, e non ti metti mai una gonna!
B: Non mi piacciono le gonne!
W: E a me non piacciono i pantaloni lunghi!
B: ok, ok! Hai sempre ragione tu! Allora andiamo al mercato solo per comprare il cibo.
W: Va bene. Voglio anche mangiare un panino al lampredotto!
B: NOOOOOOOO! Il lampredotto no!

Esercizio - Vero o Falso?	V	F
1. Brooke e Will sono al supermercato	☐	☐
2. Brooke mangia un panino al lampredotto	☐	☐
3. In casa loro non c'è la frutta	☐	☐
4. Will ama la frutta	☐	☐
5. A Brooke piace come Will si veste	☐	☐
6. Ci sono animali al mercato	☐	☐
7. Loro devono comprare i vestiti	☐	☐

nity they begin to perceive as familiar.

One more important aspect is the price of the textbook, which is significantly lower than most commercial texts – texts that are often used for just a single semester and whose full potential is rarely tapped.

Conclusion

At this point, the only question left to ask is: what are the results of the strategies discussed above when applied to Italian language courses?

Some facts: the syllabus covered is broader compared to the home campus curriculum. Topics useful for everyday communication with Italians are added – for example, reflexive verbs for daily routines, and the *passato prossimo* to talk about one's experiences.

Among students who choose to enroll in the next-level course, there is a noticeable improvement in oral fluency, encouraged by the study abroad experience and likely supported by the personalized communicative stimuli they received.

Another outcome, which should not be underestimated, is that some students (depending on their personal motivation) actually try to speak Italian. Unlike many who are only focused on passing the exam and earning credits, some begin to use the language for what it's truly meant to be: a tool for communication.

Finally, at my university, following the establishment of the Italian campus, an Italian minor was introduced. Some students have started collecting credits through Italian language and Italian culture classes. Unfortunately, the numbers are still too low to support advanced-level classes, but it is definitely a sign of growing interest in the Italian language that would likely not have emerged without the strategies outlined in the previous sections.

All efforts in a context as specific as that of SAPs are aimed at stimulating student engagement, while maintaining an acceptable academic standard and encouraging human growth, even before intellectual development, for young people in the midst of their educational journey.

However, the effort made by teachers cannot remain isolated – it

requires consistent support from the SAPs themselves. In a study specifically focused on language learning within SAPs, Kinginger (2013) wrote:

> The extent to which students become engaged in local communicative settings and can in fact be reasonably classified as 'language learners' […] depends on the ways students are received by the institution they frequent. (Kinginger 2013: 5)

The role of SAPs thus becomes crucial. For students who live the experience in a guided and aware manner, it can truly become a catalyst for growth, broadening their academic, intercultural, and relational horizons.

But on the other hand, SAPs that

> […] do not adopt a holistic approach to student learning can become little more than a glorified vacation. At best, the students report having fun or being 'satisfied' with the experience, and return home unchanged. They engage in the experience at a surface level, maintaining distance from the physical, social or intellectual tensions of the learning endeavor. (Passarelli & Kolb 2012: 3)

This is the key issue that determines whether students experience engagement or disengagement: how far we can push them beyond the surface, beyond the superficial experience, and into true cooperation with the local community. It is a challenge – a great challenge – for those responsible for equipping students with the tools they need

> […] to achieve autonomy in communication, to understand and appreciate the country they are living in and the people they meet, to cultivate the curiosity of discovery, which can become a driving force in their journey. (Marangione 2012: 164).

In conclusion, while the actions implemented and discussed in this article can certainly enhance student engagement, one essential fact re-

mains: the teacher's role in maintaining engagement cannot be isolated from that of the SAP program. The activities of both must fall within a shared strategic goal, which Passarelli and Kolb summarize as follows:

> The difference in these two scenarios is a programmatic emphasis on the student's learning and development, and a model of shared responsibility for learning. Attention must be paid to designing a learning experience that helps students fully absorb and integrate their experiences at increasing levels of complexity. (Passarelli & Kolb 2012: 3)

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The Learning Mission:
Gamification and L2 Italian in Action

Tatiana Speri

Abstract

This brief conference paper explains what gamification is about and how to use it to teach Italian, thus increasing student motivation an in-class participation.

Keywords: Gamification, L2 Teaching, On-line Resources to Teach Italian as a Foreign Language.

Welcome to this short yet exciting mission. Yes, you understood correctly: it's a mission I'm talking about. The mission being, learning how gamification can change teaching, in general, and – more specifically in your case – teaching L2 Italian, thus making it engaging, pro-active, and fun!

What is *gamification*? Just imagine, for a second, to walk into a classroom not holding a book or a handout but with a challenge to overcome, a riddle to solve or a team to motivate. This is the essence of gamification: to share game features in non-playful contexts (such as a school lesson) to increase motivation, interest, and even build team spirit between us and the students. Why does it work? It works because playing is a very strong human dynamic common to all cultures and people of all ages, no matter how young or old they are. When we play, we become proactive, we get involved, we want to test ourselves, we build relations and – above all – we learn. If we only think for a moment about our professional context (that is, teaching Italian as a foreign language) we immediately understand that this can make a difference. This particularly applies to non-Italian students who may face language barriers of all sorts, happen to have high expectations, tend to be anxious or are simply still jet lagged.

Gamification turns *learning* from something imposed on students into something they experience from within. Also, they experience it to-

gether with other students by collaborating, getting to know each other, helping one another and – through that process – developing a vivid, almost tangible kind of energy inside the classroom. And if just one shy student manages to speak up because he or she wants his or her team to win, well… we – as teachers – have already won!

But let's take a look at these advantages, let's see them in action, so to speak. This is what we are talking about:

- *Improving both comprehension and memory*, as games make it easier to learn and to remember things.
- *Boosting motivation*, especially on those days when the whole class seems tired.
- *Better collaboration*, thus turning the class into a small community.
- And *fun*! Fun reminds us that laughter can be conducive to learning.

It all sounds great. But how do you do it? It's a simple process, consisting of four stages:

- **Introduction:** introduce the game and stimulate curiosity.
- **Interaction:** have students actively participate.
- **Direct use:** students use the Italian language in a practical context.
- **Discussion:** let's talk about what we've learned.

Here is an example: my beloved *Language Treasure Hunt*! Students are asked to solve riddles, walk around the classroom (or the streets of Florence, if they feel adventurous enough) always speaking Italian, to the point that they are not even aware of it anymore. Another example is role games: students pretend to be waiting on tables, travel as tourists, work as doctors or just be friends who speak "real" Italian, that is, the colloquial language Italians use in every-day life, outside the classroom.

And then we can also count on digital tools, of course. They can serve as great allies, sparking student interest from the very first "click".

I'm speaking of the following:

- **Quizizz:** it allows students to work at their own pace.
- **Quizlet:** to make flashcards, design customized games and, above all , team tournaments.
- **GooseChase:** a wonderful resource if you wish to organize digital treasure hunts. Students can make short videos, become "language detectives" or explore Italian culture.

There is one caveat, though: gamification cannot work without clear objectives, realistic challenges, immediate feedback (corrections cannot be given a week later!), incentives (points, badges, applause, candies etc.) and healthy social interaction. Learning together is more intriguing; and it is "contagious" too!

And in the end? In the end it is always we (the teachers) who are running the game. Gamification does note replace us: it assists us, it improves our performance, it gives us new tools to speak with our students, not only using Italian but also thanks to the "language" of enthusiasm and team spirit. This way we feel less like "professors" and more like "allies", learning together, reducing the generation gap, and establishing a true, sincere dialogue.

All right: my mission is over. It's your turn now, my dear friends and colleagues! Good luck with your work. I wish you plenty of laughter and memorable games… inside and outside the classroom!

L2 at Play:
Game Learning as a New Approach to Reviewing Language Lessons

Carlo Lorini

Abstract

The article discusses game learning as a means of reviewing Italian grammar and lexicon in courses for non-Italian students, especially US undergraduates. The author describes why and how, after preliminary observation, he resolved to adopt a game learning approach in his Italian language courses.

Keywords: Game Learning, Grammar and Lexicon Reviewing, Elementary Level Italian Language Courses.

In this paper I'm going to describe how I gradually realized that I should adopt game learning as a means of reviewing the Italian grammar and lexicon that I had previously discussed in class with my non-Italian students. The context I'm speaking of is that of classes consisting of US undergraduates who spend a semester in Florence and take an Italian language course for the first time in their life (ITAL 101).

A five-stage process

My analysis of this experience focuses on five distinct stages, which I'm going to address in what is both a chronological and strategic order:

- **Initial observation*:*** I first analyse how the class behaves when faced with a common, traditional kind of reviewing. I'm particularly interested in seeing how students react to what we may call "classical" exercises.
- **Planning language learning games*:*** I assess the criteria usually adopted to create game learning exercises. This includes a reflection on related practical and psychopedagogical features.

- **The theoretical context:** I reference the main essays and books on this kind of didactic approach.
- **In-class testing:** I describe how these game learning activities turned out to be in class. To this purpose, I give some practical examples and share my personal, first-hand observations.
- **Conclusions:** I share some reflections after testing this method in class and suggest potential developments or new perspectives based on my personal experience.

Initial observation: how students react to traditional reviewing activities

Reviewing activities that were included in the course syllabus as part of regular class hours, usually done through the textbook, often left some students passive. The prevailing pattern was basically as follows: students would wait for the teacher to write the correct answers on the board or show them on the screen. At that point, each student would write down the answers in his or her own copy of the book. This way the textbook was never used as an active reference tool or as some kind of support to do the assigned work; instead, it merely became a collection of correct answers.

When I asked my students why they didn't do those reviewing exercises on their own, their answers were either elusive or revealing of some practical and psychological uneasiness on their part. For example, they would often say "I don't know" or "I don't want my notes to look messy. If I make mistakes, I have to erase them and I don't like that". I must say that this kind of behaviour did not apply to the whole class; it was usually only some students who slackened when faced with more traditional activities. That is why I started thinking of exploring new ways to get them more engaged in my lessons.

Then, a few semesters ago, on a day I had to cancel a field trip because of bad weather, I thought of replacing that outdoor activity with a "didactic treasure hunt" inside the institute facility. The building (Palazzo Bargagli, overlooking the Arno River) has several spots that can nicely

serve as a series of stops on the way to the final discovery. I thus divided the class into small groups and gave them several language assignments (grammar and vocabulary exercises). The correct answers provided the clues necessary to move on to the next stage in the game.

I was surprised by the immediate change in the students' attitude: suddenly, they started using the textbook as a natural and strategic tool, not so much in search of the answers per se but to solve the problems and, therefore, have their team win the contest. I didn't suggest that they use the Italian language book; it was the groups of students themselves that decided to rely on it and use it in an active, autonomous and collaborative way within each team. This led me to think about the potential that game learning could have to trigger behaviours different from those I had often observed during review sessions in my classes.

Planning language learning games and related parameters: from theory to practice

In this case too planning proved to be crucial to the success of the whole project. Before preparing the games to be played in class with the students, it was necessary to identify some basic parameters to design those activities.

The treasure hunt I had experimented before was as an end-of-semester activity. As such, it served as a general review of the grammar and the vocabulary that had been studied for many weeks in a row. This time, instead, I wanted to come up with a series of activities to be done at regular intervals throughout the semester, from beginning to end. For this reason, the games had to be consistent with the course syllabus. That also meant that they had to tie in with what we did in class every single week. Likewise, their difficulty had to be on par with the students' expected level of knowledge at that exact time. In other words, the games had to reflect the course topics' complexity also in terms of structure, not only content.

Time was another crucial factor. Each activity was supposed to last between 15 and 20 minutes, so as to be completed while guaranteeing

direct and active involvement on the part of the students. At the end, students would receive some kind of award to keep their motivation high. Variation happened to be important, too; I couldn't just make slight changes to the same format over and over. Repetition would spoil the surprise effect and the fun that comes with it.

Another significant element to keep in mind was when to do that game learning activity during the week. I ended up choosing Thursday, as it is usually perceived as the last day of class in a regular semester week (although students may have course-related fieldtrips on weekends). Also, it's unusual to have tests on Thursdays. For all these reasons, I consider it to be an "easy" day and, as such, the best time to have reviewing sessions. I also thought that ending my Thursday lessons (and, therefore, the whole school week) with a game learning activity would increase the students' motivation and avoid any requests to offer it again the following day, thus reducing its "extraordinary" character.

Another criterion to be considered in planning these language-learning games was their structure: they had to be easy to manage, visually stimulating, intuitive and lively. I decided to include digital tools like Kahoot! but make limited use of it, thinking that its repetitive (and, therefore, predictable) format – together with the passive role it has students play – would make it difficult to keep the class motivated and engaged. If students were expected to participate in designing those games it became a lot easier to create something fit for them, almost customized.

Another underlying principle was that the Italian language learning games would have to stimulate not only the students' mind but also engage them physically. In other words, they would not sit all the time; they would have to move inside the classroom and change positions. Basically, these dynamic activities would embrace a holistic approach to learning; in the footsteps of Plato's *Republic*, I also believe that mind and body should not be taught separately, as if they were completely different entities. On the contrary, I regard them as interconnected tools, capable of creating harmony and perfection when they work together.

I thus came to realize quite clearly the assets that this kind of game

learning could offer:

- To break up the ordinary lesson's routine, with the teacher lecturing all the time, thus catching the students' interest.
- To join studying with a pleasant, stimulating activity.
- To create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, where students learn without realizing they are in school.

The theoretical context

Here is a list of the main books I'd suggest on these topics:

- Koster, R. (2005). *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*. Scottsdale, AZ: Paraglyph Press.
  Koster considers games to be most efficient learning tools. As he puts it, "Fun is just another word for learning." In his analysis, he emphasizes the notion of cognitive challenge and the acquisition of new skills while playing.
- Ratey, J. J., & Hagerman, E. (2008). *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
  The authors explore the connection between physical exercise and cerebral functions. In doing so they highlight how aerobic activities improve learning, memory and our mood too. As they write: "Aerobic exercise physically remodels our brains for peak performance." This supports the idea that joining physical activities and learning exercises make it easier for students to learn.
- Prensky, M. (2010). *Teaching Digital Natives: Partnering for Real Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
  As the title suggests, Prensky relies on the notion of "digital natives" to illustrate how today's students, having been born and raised in a technological context, have developed learning techniques that are different from their parents'. He holds that students are now totally different from what we used to be at their age. The current educational system is thus unfit for them, as it was conceived and then developed for another

type of learners. Consequently, we should adapt our teaching strategies to this new scenario if we want to engage our students.

- Sheldon, L. (2011). *The Multiplayer Classroom: Designing Coursework as a Game*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
  Sheldon suggests an innovative approach to teaching whereby courses are structured as a series of multiplayer games to better involve students. Through practical examples, he shows how gamification can transform any educational experience and render it much more engaging and stimulating.

In-class testing

To better manage the language learning activities and make sure students would participate in them, I split the class into four or five people teams. This was mostly dictated by practical reasons: if a 5-player team misses a person, the game can still take place without any issues.

The underlying idea is transforming the semester into a four-month tournament. Teams compete against each other by accumulating points every single week. Apart from being fun and educationally efficient, this strategy boosts team spirit, a sense of comradeship and collaboration among the students.

To further strengthen these features, I asked each team to choose a name. The first time we launched this "tournament" all teams were named after Peanuts characters. This is something all students agreed on, thus helping to create a particularly relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

Here is an example of the learning games we played: using expression with *avere*, *essere*, and *stare* verbs (that is, *to have*, *to be*, *to stay*). Usually, early on in the semester one of the most difficult things for ITAL 101 students to learn is how to distinguish and memorize idiomatic expressions using those verbs, such as *ho fame*, *sono stanco*, *sto bene* (that is, *I'm hungry*, *I'm tired*, *I'm fine*, respectively). Sometimes there are no exact equivalent idioms in the students' native langue. For this reason, it is important to review those expressions as often as possible.

To make the games more dynamic I modelled them after dominoes, using tiles that reported the Italian idiom on one side and the corresponding English expression on the other. Each team was expected to match the tiles correctly, thus finding the right English-Italian combination and creating a trail.

This game has favoured peer interaction and stimulated greater attention to language rules. Consequently, students learned Italian in a collaborative and friendly atmosphere, which made it easier for them to remember what we studied in class.

Conclusions

An issue I had to address during the semester was how to deal with large groups of students. In particular, when groups consist of six or seven people some students may lose interest or motivation. When that happens, they tend to delegate their tasks to other peers within the same group, without contributing directly to the in-class activities. This not only slows down the students' learning process but disrupts what should be a balanced participation by all group members. For this reason, I think teachers should consider making smaller groups, so as to induce their members to contribute more actively and responsibility to game learning.

Technology in the Class:
Figma and Wordwall for Online and In-person Teaching/ Learning

Elisabetta Blini

Abstract

The paper discusses the use of Figma (a digital board) and Wordwall (an online platform designed for teaching purposes) to make Italian language classes more stimulating both remotely and inside the classroom.

Keywords: Online and In-person Teaching, Figma, Wordwall, Teacher-friendly Methodology, Student-centered Educational Approach.

This short paper aims at encouraging my colleagues to familiarize themselves, if they have not done so yet, with simple and intuitive technological tools that teachers can use in their classes, so as to make them more engaging and stimulating.

Whether we like it or not, technology has broken into our lives. Initially, I thought I would not be able to make it a significant part of my work; quite simply, I felt I didn't possess enough skills and was not fit for that kind of change. During Covid, though, it became necessary to find an efficient and immediate solution that would allow me to transfer my courses online. Suddenly, as we all remember, that need turned out to be dramatically urgent. I thus started checking Google in search of potential tools that could teach me how to use programs to help me transition from in-person to online lessons.

And so it happened that through Figma I started using Figjam, an interactive digital board offering a wide range of options. So far, I have only used its main functions, which – I must say – are very simple and intuitive. Its basic version is free and easily accessible; as such, it does not have to be installed on your electronic devices.

Using Figjam in class allows me to write, underline, and highlight (also using colors) whatever I want while I teach. I can also create charts, diagrams, memory-aids or add catching emoticons and images (as if they were stickers), which make it easier – and more engaging – for students to follow what we do in class and remember it. It is also useful to share the digital board with the students, who will then have the lesson at their disposal whenever they wish to go over it again. Likewise, this makes it possible for the teacher to remind the students of the topics that have been covered in class, the language used, the examples given and the homework that has been assigned.

At first, I only used this digital board for my online courses. Then I felt comfortable and skilful enough to use it for in-person lessons too. When in class, I began sharing the screen with the students. This too had a truly positive impact. Figjam is not only user friendly (thus putting teachers at ease) but also much more engaging than writing on a traditional board with felt-tip pens or chalk.

Another useful instrument, especially in regard to practical exercises applied to language learning, is Wordwall. Wordwall is a platform offering a wide variety of options (which are also excellent to stimulate conversation), such as flash cards, quizzes, word matching games, fill in the blanks exercises, and other language learning games: The Wheel of Fortune, Memory, Open the Box, anagrams and many more.

Wordwall is very simple to use: all you have to do is select the option you wish, add the contents you would like to go over with the students, and that's it! The contents you have created for one kind of game will then be immediately available for the other options too. For instance, what you initially applied to The Wheel of Fortune can then be used when you choose flash cards or Open the Box. All your activities will then be automatically saved on your personal account. This way you can decide whether you wish to keep those activities, share them with your colleagues, partially change them or replace them altogether. It is thanks to other teachers, who shared Wordwall with me, that I found out about it and gradually learned how to use it. Another important feature of this

platform is that while online, you can share the activities that you want the students to do. When in class for an in-person lesson, you can also print out what you are showing on the screen.

Both Wordwall and Figma are user-friendly technological tools that teachers can rely on to boost their students' interest. I encourage all of my colleagues to try them out, especially if they have been reluctant to let technology into their class so far and now wish to take a different approach. They will discover that this simple change can help them create a more empathic atmosphere, which will make it possible for their students to learn better while having fun, too.

Reflections on Best Practices in Teaching Italian as a Second Language in AACUPI Programs

Some Suggestions at the End of the IN-Formiamoci Workshop

Emanuela Agostini

Abstract

The paper goes over the talks given at the Italian language workshop that ISI Florence hosted at Palazzo Bargagli on November 29th, 2024. In doing so, the author emphasizes their main features and comments on them. At the end, she focuses on what – in her eyes – is the essence of a teacher's task.

Keywords: International Education, Study Abroad Programs in Italy, Teaching Italian as a Second Language, Didactic Methods and Approaches.

When the Italian Department at ISI Florence decided to organize and host *IN-Formiamoci*, our main goal was to offer (both ourselves and our colleagues from other study abroad programs) an opportunity to exchange opinions and reflect on best practices relating to our job as professors of Italian language to foreign students. It was our hope that we would then go back to class with greater motivation and some new ideas that we could either apply immediately or use as starting points for new projects. And that is exactly what happened.

Catia Santi started the workshop with her paper *The Obvious is not Obvious*, highlighting a series of "false certainties" that we cannot (and should not) accept. Apart from Prof. Santi's specific examples, her general recommendation to us teachers is to adopt an approach based on paying attention and listening to our students' deepest needs. Those needs may

not be what students mention in their final evaluations; therefore, it is up to us (as teachers) to detect them in a precise, professional way. We should not approach them thinking they may be similar to the students we once were, or like our own children are (or used to be). Nor should we consider them similar to the foreign students who took our classes 20, 10 or even just 5 years ago. Teaching must be a dynamic process built around "real" students, that is, those who happen to be in our class each semester. It is to their problems that solutions must be found. Sometimes, this can put us in unpleasant situations, that make us look "bad"; for example, when – despite our students' age – we have to remind them that they should behave themselves, respect the other classmates, and study.

In this regard, I believe that Piero Ianniello emphasized something very important in his talk: we should consider where we work (the territory around us) as a laboratory, using it as an opportunity to give our students the chance to meet with the real Italian language and culture, that is, with Italians. It is a fact that students improve more quickly if they manage to establish this kind of relations, not only because of direct contact with the Italian language but also because those experiences boost their motivation, thus pushing them to do more and better.

This is certainly the case in the center of our city, which has lost its original identity to such a degree that it is no longer perceived as *Firenze* but as *Florence* instead. In other words, the historic district is now a faded copy of what it used to be, having been replaced by a sort of stage whose main goal is to sell products and services to tourists. Yet, in today's global village (as Ianniello's paper reminds us) the issue does not only concern historic districts of artistic cities, and it cannot be solved by simply moving away from the urban center. It is always crucial to build chances for our students to meet with Italians and establish a relationship with them. Among the best practices suggested by Ianniello (which ISI Florence professors already implement) is using a textbook specifically designed around our students' experience. To that purpose, years ago *Vorrei. Corso di lingua italiana di livello elementare* was conceived. Published in the ISI Florence Series by Firenze University Press (2016 and 2019), the

first edition was limited to ITAL 101, whereas the second included Intermediate Italian too. Under the supervision of Serena Baldini and David Marini, the whole ISI Florence Italian language faculty contributed to this book. Another important feature to include in any class of this kind is language exchange sessions with local students (whether they be seniors in local high schools or already enrolled at the Università di Firenze), as well as meetings with Italians outside the classroom. Volunteer activities and internships are also regarded as fundamental opportunities. For this reason, in the last 15 years or so ISI Florence has had Serena Giorgi serve as Community Engagement Coordinator, thus devoting a specific professional figure to these tasks.

To stimulate motivation in the classroom we must be able to engage and then lead our students. Three talks given at the *IN-Formiamoci* workshop moved in this direction. A common trait joining the papers by Elisabetta Blini, Carlo Lorini, and Tatiana Speri (despite their inevitable differences) is their practical approach. All three of them offer sound, previously tested teaching methods to involve students through games or technology (and sometimes both at once). If Saint Augustine was right in saying that "Only what we perceive as pleasant can nourish our soul", it is our task – as teachers – to make our classes appealing, enjoyable, fun and inclusive. The conference papers provide plenty of suggestions on how to use games to create a positive and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. This would make it possible to learn without always thinking about it, thus taking pressure off everyone's shoulders (both faculty and students). At the same time, those three papers also offer advice on which technological tools can be used to make teaching easier and our lessons smoother, clearer and more informative.

The symposium ended with a talk by Professor Claudio Manella. Metaphorically speaking, Professor Manella opened the window for us onto potential sectors and scenarios that may become real soon. Being an experienced teacher as well as a scholar and a publisher, he immediately understood the spirit of our initiative; that is, *IN-Formiamoci* stood out among other similar events previously organized in Florence because

it was conceived by teachers for fellow teachers. This is quite unusual, since workshops of this sort are mostly organized by publishing houses, whose goals – though praiseworthy – are inevitably different from ours. In his speech Manella highlighted the changes that he has seen taking place in Italian language students in the past 25 years or so. This led him to consider what changes teachers must implement to adapt their tools and methods to this new situation, so as to help "real" students" meet their expectations and reach their goals.

I wish to end my brief summary by coming full circle to the starting point, that is, Catia Santi's opening remarks titled *The Obvious is Not Obvious.* As teachers of Italian language in study abroad programs (mostly affiliated with AACUPI), our tasks and objectives are not limited to knowing and applying those methods, techniques, and best practices that whoever teaches a language to foreign students should know. In addition to teaching Italian language and culture we are expected to take on a broader role as educators. To that purpose, we must always start by paying great attention (and respect) to each student's personal character and background.

Our teaching proves to be most effective if we truly listen to our students and understand their needs. That approach builds the foundation of our didactic and educational mission, which is sometimes less pleasant than we wish. Our ultimate goal lies beyond teaching Italian; our students may forget the language we introduced them to, but they will remember the lessons they have learned – while studying abroad – on how to become mindful and responsible world citizens.


administrators

The Upset Awareness:
Reflections on East–West Relations from Classical Antiquity to the Early Modern Era *

Stefano U. Baldassarri

Abstract

Originally conceived as an introduction to a recent volume of conference proceedings, this article relies on the papers presented on that occasion to develop (in an English and revised version) a series of reflections on East-West relations from classical antiquity to the XVIII century, mostly focusing on the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Within this discourse, Italy plays a central role, because of both commercial and religious reasons. No less important are those political texts that draw comparisons between various forms of government in Europe and the Far East. The essay thus cites passages from works by authors and sources as diverse as Marco Polo, Francesco Patrizi, Giovanni Botero, and the most famous missionaries who served in India, China, and Japan between the XVI and the XVIII centuries.

Keywords: East-West Relations, Political Thought, Missionaries, China, Japan.

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The relations between Europe and Asia in the centuries spanning from classical antiquity to the early modern era (according to Western historical periodization) remind me of a clock in which the two hands move in opposite directions. Their contrary yet occasionally coinciding motion causes phases of separation but also of rapprochement, and – for some moments – even overlap. From these dynamics, which are both different and convergent at the same time, conflicts, encounters, expectations, misunderstandings, and exchanges arose. It is a centuries-old history, rich in surprising consequences (immediate, short-term, or long-term), in which wars, trade, travels, and discoveries intertwine, thus creating a plot as rich as it is difficult to reconstruct, driven by complex, intense desires which are often impossible to define or separate, such as the yearning to explore, conquer, convert, profit, or understand.[1]

The latest of the various exceptional books that Luce Boulnois has dedicated to the "Silk Road" – to use the term likely introduced by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) and first used by him in his *Tagebucher aus China* (1877) – presents countless examples in this regard, starting with the famous, dramatic episode with which the French scholar begins her narrative:

> In the early summer of 54 or 53 BC – some 700 years after the foundation of Rome – Marcus Licinius Crassus, consul-triumvirate of Rome and governor of Syria, rashly led his seven legions eastwards, beyond the Euphrates, in search of an elusive enemy.[2]

Once the battle finally began, Boulnois continues, «with an inhuman din, amidst the deafening roar of large leather drums covered in bells, the long-haired Parthian warriors hurled themselves at the Ro-

1. Many essays and books have been devoted to these topics. Among them I recommend the following, recent volume of collected essays: *East and West Entangled (17th-21st Century)*, ed. by R. Minuti – G. Tarantino, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2023.

2. L. Boulnois, *Silk Road. Monks, Warriors and Merchants*, in collaboration with B. Mayhew, Eng. trans. by H. Loveday, Hong Kong, Odyssey Books, 2012, p. 33 (Ch. 1: Serica).

man legions, showering them with arrows and surrounding them».[3] At that point the Romans, «their hands nailed to their shields by the arrows, bewildered and overwhelmed, nonetheless attempted again and again to engage in hand-to-hand combat. But the Parthians remained strategically close enough to shoot, yet far enough away to avoid the melée».[4] The legionaries soon realized they were facing an army far larger than they had initially suspected. As the French scholar writes, concluding her account:

> Within a few hours the battle was over and the defeat complete. Crassus had been killed, along with his son, who had served under Caesar in Gaul and been sent by him to fight in Syria beside his father with his Gaul mercenaries. Twenty thousand Roman soldiers perished and ten thousand were taken captive.[5]

This dramatic opening introduces some of the themes addressed at the International Studies Institute in Florence on 6-7 March 2024, during the conference titled *Europa ed Estremo Oriente: relazioni, incontri e conflitti nella prima età moderna* (*Europe and the Far East: Relations, Encounters, and Conflicts in the Early Modern Era*). For example, we find the tragic and millennia-old reality of slavery; among all the goods that were sought after and traded in the vast spaces between Europe and the Far East over the

3. *Ibidem.*

4. *Ibidem.*

5. *Ibidem*, p. 35.

centuries, human beings remained the most important.[6] In addition to the bodies of slaves, the following "items" were exchanged: knowledge, technology, science, and the arts.[7] Among all these skills, the first to be desired and acquired – given the professions many of those unfortunate individuals practiced before being enslaved – was the art of war. Foreign skills related to the production of new weapons were considered particularly precious. In 1590, when the first Japanese ambassadors to Europe emphasized their nation's superiority over China in the military arts, one reason – I think – was the rapid spread of firearms in Japan, which had been introduced by the Portuguese only fifty years earlier. I allude to this passage from the last chapter of the *De missione legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam curiam*, where the ambassadors provide an account (and a comparison) of the areas they visited on their way to Europe:

Beyond the kingdom of Cochinchina, you see the vast territories of China and our Japanese islands. Regarding these, I will only say that the kingdom of China excels in size, peace, tranquility, governance, wealth,

6. As Iris Origo wrote in her seminal article on the presence of slaves (especially from Northern Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East) in wealthy Tuscan families between the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance: «To trace the origin of these slaves and the means by which they were brought to Tuscany is to discover a curious and interesting story. They were one more commodity of the crowded trade-routes from the Levant – and came to be one of the most profitable». I cite from I. Origo, *The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, in «Speculum», XXX, 1955, fasc. 3, pp. 321-36: 325. For this vast and complex topic in the time frame that I wish to focus on, see *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. by T.F. Earle – K.J.P. Lowe, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005. Despite the title, the essays gathered in that volume also concern slaves from the Middle East and central Asia. On Christian slaves in Islamic countries, see R.C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 and Id., *Holy War and Human Bondage: Tales of Christian-Muslim Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Santa Barbara (CA), Praeger, 2009.

7. The Franciscan friar Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (ca. 1182 – 1252) is among the harshest critics of the Tatars. In his *Ystoria Mongalorum* he writes that they typically make false promises to their besieged enemies, claiming that they will spare their lives. However, once the enemies surrender to the Tatars and the siege is over, this is what happens, according to Giovanni: «Et cum illi ad eos exeunt, querunt qui sunt artifices inter eos et illos reservant, alios autem, exceptis illis quos volunt habere pro servis, cum securi occidunt» («And when the besieged go out to meet them the Tatars ask who among them happen to be craftsmen. They save those and kill all the others with their axes, except the ones they wish to keep as slaves». I cite from Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, in *Sinica Franciscana*, ed. by A. van den Wyngaert, vol. I, Quaracchi (Florence), Collegio di San Bonaventura, 1929, p. 83 (VI.6; my English translation).

and abundance of goods, while we are superior in military art, greatness of spirit, observance of good manners, and noble ranks.[8]

When, in 1661, the Jesuit Daniello Bartoli published the section of his *Istoria della Compagnia di Gesù* relating to China, the "Celestial Empire" craftsmen were still unable to master – according to him – the techniques for making firearms, despite having a centuries-old tradition in the art of working metals:

> As regards iron, they are better than us at casting and shaping it for a wide range of purposes. Although the artillery they cast is poor and crude, they still deserve much praise, if it is they who invented it and – consequently – gunpowder too, for they have remarkable masters in making fireworks of countless types and shapes.[9]

Japanese craftsmen, however, quickly learned the technique for producing arquebuses. By the second half of the XVI century, they had already added this useful weapon to the samurai's arsenal. Professor Shunsuke Shirahata addressed this topic at the ISI Florence-Kanazawa confer-

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8. I cite from A. Valignano, "*Dialogo sulla missione degli ambasciatori giapponesi alla curia romana e sulle cose osservate in Europa e durante tutto il viaggio" basato sul diario degli ambasciatori e tradotto in latino da Duarte de Sande, sacerdote della Compagnia di Gesù*, ed. by M. Di Russo, Ital. trans. by P.A. Airoldi, with a preface by D. Maraini, Florence, Olschki, 2016, Ch. 34, p. 522 (my English translation). On the artistic implications of this long and famous diplomatic mission (which lasted from February 1582 to July 1590), see P. Di Rico - M. Viganò, "*Don Mancio, Nephew of the King of Hizen": Echoes of the Japanese Tensho Mission to Europe in 1585 in the Portrait of Sukemasu Itô by Domenico Tintoretto*, in *Changing Hearts. Performing Jesuit Emotions between Europe, Asia, and the Americas*, ed. by Y. Haskell - R. Garrod, Leiden-Boston Brill, 2019, pp. 284-301. The Japanese ambassadors arrived in Italy (at the seaport of Livorno) on 1 March 1585. They remained in the Italian peninsula until the end of that year. Among the cities they visited were Rome (where they were introduced to Pope Gregory XIII and attended the election ceremony of his successor, Pope Sixtus V), Venice, Genoa, Florence, Naples, and Milan. On this mission, see also the essay by Francesco Morena in *Di linea e di colore: il Giappone, le sue arti e l'incontro con l'Occidente / Line and Colour. Japanese Arts and the European Connection*, ed. by F. Morena, Livorno, Sillabe, 2012 (a wonderful catalogue of the exhibition held at Palazzo Pitti on 3 April - 1 July 2012), pp. 231-34 and the related bibliography reported therein (p. 241). See also P. Di Rico, *L'ambasciatore giapponese di Domenico Tintoretto*, in *Aldèbaran II. Storia dell'arte*, ed. by S. Marinelli, Verona, Scripta Edizioni, 2014, pp. 83-94.

9. My English translation of D. Bartoli, *Dell'Istoria della Compagnia di Gesù. Della Cina. Libro primo,* Turin, Marietti, 1825, pp. 78-79 (Ch. 12: *Del disegnare e dipingere. Dello scolpire. De' lavori di getto*).

ence in his presentation *Technological-Military Exchanges Between Asia and Europe in the Premodern Era.*[10] An expert in military history and the author of two papers presented at conferences organized by both ISI Florence and the University of Kanazawa in 2016 and 2020,[11] Professor Shirahata sheds light on certain aspects of samurai culture and the rapid adoption of firearms within their ranks in the mid-XVI century, following the arrival of the Portuguese in Japan. This information may surprise many Western readers.[12] Indeed, the misleading assumption persists – at least among non-specialists – that samurai primarily engaged in close combat using their renowned *katana*. This long-standing misconception is one of many "cultural projections" that every society, regardless of its geographical location, tends to apply when encountering what it perceives as the "other".[13] The association of nobility with hand-to-hand combat – consid-

10. See now S. Shirahata, *Una rivoluzione militare in Giappone? Gli scambi tecnologico-militari tra Asia ed Europa nella prima età moderna*, in *Europa ed Estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 159-76.

11. See S. Shirahata, *A Comparative Study of Italian and Japanese Military Architecture in the Sixteenth Century,* in *Italia e Giappone a confronto: cultura, psicologia, arti. Convegno internazionale di studi ISI Florence – Università di Kanazawa – Università degli Studi di Firenze, Palazzo Rucellai, Firenze, 13-14 dicembre 2016*, ed. by S.U. Baldassarri, Florence, Pontecorboli, 2017, pp. 183-203 and S. Shirahata, *Mura contro i "pagani". Fortificazioni militari, cristiani e impero ottomano nei secoli XV e XVI,* in *Guerre di religione e propaganda (1350-1650)*, ed. by S.U. Baldassarri, Rome, Tab Edizioni, 2020, pp. 141-60. In this last case the conference, which was originally scheduled for early March 2020, was cancelled because of the Covid pandemic. Nevertheless, the papers that had been written for that event were gathered and published a few months later.

12. Likewise, some may find it odd that firearms soon became part of sacred iconography, especially in the case of Saint Michael the Archangel. This also applied to the image of this and other saints in non-European countries thanks to the work of missionaries, above all those belonging to the Society of Jesus; see K. Takeda, *Fighting Confraternities, Saints and Angels. A Study of the Christian Military Culture in the Medieval-Early Modern Iberian World*, in *Guerre di religione e propaganda*, cit., pp. 185-216 and the bibliography reported therein. Almost all European travellers who reached those islands before the modern era remarked how passionate the locals were about all sorts of weapons. Among such sources is Francesco Carletti (1573-1636), the first merchant who circumnavigated the globe. See F. Carletti, *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo*, ed. by A. Dei, Milan, Mursia, 2008, p. 122. On Carletti's *Ragionamenti*, especially the section on Japan, see G. Caputo, *L'aurora del Giappone tra mito e storiografia. Nascita ed evoluzione dell'alterità nipponica nella cultura italiana, 1300-1600*, Florence, Olschki, 2016, pp. 273-320. For this Florentine merchant's remarks on the Japanese and their keen interest in weapons see pp. 285-86.

13. On the misleading (and still prevailing) Eurocentric perception of samurai culture in the Western world see A.G. Scarselli, *Digital Shogun and Electronic Imperialism: Japanese History through the Lens of Historical Videogames*, in *East and West Entangled*, cit., pp. 189-98.

ered far more masculine and courageous than the use of ballistic weapons (including bows) – is a notion that can be found in almost all historians of ancient Rome. The above-mentioned disdainful view of Parthian soldiers shared by Crassus and his legionaries is confirmed in nearly all Latin sources from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages and beyond; as Renaissance literature scholars know, it also surfaces in Ariosto's and Cervantes' masterpieces.[14]

Remaining within the geographical, cultural, and chronological scope of the ISI Florence-Kanazawa conference, it is worth noting that most Europeans applied this negative opinion to the Mongols too; in doing so, they regarded their highly effective style of warfare as undignified.[15] The consequences of this judgment have shaped the way the West has viewed what the French scholar Marie Favereau evocatively describes as «an equestrian nation constantly in motion».[16] According to her, «The "Mongol Exchange" was a monumental process that facilitated the flourishing of art, the development of craftsmanship, and the advancement of research in various fields, such as botany, medicine, astronomy, measurement systems, and historiography. […] Ceramics, manuscripts, textiles, music, poetry, weapons – the Mongols wanted everything to be produced

14. In a passage probably reminiscent of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (IX 28-30 and XI 21-28) Cervantes has the protagonist of his *Don Quixote* complain (Part I, Chapter 28) that because of firearms a bunch of uncouth peasants can now exterminate a whole cohort of noble knights. Two centuries later, Voltaire would instead praise firearms for eliminating physical disparities between strong and weak and making it possible to hold barbarian peoples in check. See Voltaire, *Saggio sui costumi e lo spirito delle nazioni*, ed. by D. Felice, Ital. trans. by D. Felice - L. Passarini - F. Fraulini - P. Venturelli, with an introduction by R. Finzi, 2 voll., Turin, Einaudi, 2017, vol. II, p. 319 (Ch. 155, titled *On the Condition of Asia When the Portoguese Discovered China*. It is worth noting that in this passage Voltaire alludes to Asian peoples, in particular the Tatars, when he speaks of "barbarians".

15. Among the earliest European sources on this topic, dating from the late Middle Ages, is Marco Polo; see M. Polo, *Milione*, ed. by E. Mazzali, Milan, Garzanti, 20243 (first edition 1982), Ch. 69, p. 47 and *La storia dei Tartari di Hayton Armeno*, in G.B. Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, ed. by M. Milanesi, 6 voll., III, Turin, Einaudi, 1980, p. 355. Whereas the former's opinion in this regard is negative, the latter's opinion is neutral. The Tartars' harshest critic, as pointed out above, is Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, who often underscores their deceitful behaviour; see his *Ystoria Mongalorum*, VI.10, VI.16-17, VIII.3 and VIII.9-11 in *Sinica Franciscana*, cit., vol. I, pp. 80, 83-84, 94, and 98-99.

16. I quote from the recent monograph by M. Favereau, *L'Orda. Come i Mongoli cambiarono il mondo*, Ital. trans. by C. Veltri, Turin, Einaudi, 2023, p. 334 (original edition: Paris, Perrin, 2023).

and distributed within their territories».[17] At the end of her acclaimed monograph,[18] she highlights the following prejudice, which Europeans have often applied to various distant peoples: «In the historical imagination shaped by liberalism, nationalism, and humanism – interpreted through Christian and Islamic lenses – the construction of consensus and tolerance has been the exclusive domain of the 'civilized' and the 'modern,' while the Mongols have been regarded as little more than land-based pirates».[19]

Returning to the ancient Roman empire, it is interesting to observe an attitude of almost mystical admiration for hand-to-hand combat (at the expense of the use of ballistic weapons) in one of the earliest Western historians who tells us about the "Seres" (that is, literally, the "Silk People"). I am referring to Ammianus Marcellinus, who was both a professional soldier (as well as *agens in rebus*, i.e. "secret agent") and a historian. Describing the siege of Constantinople – in which he participated – Ammianus was both horrified and fascinated by the almost reckless courage (what the Germans and Scandinavians would call "Berserkr", meaning "a possessed warrior") of a young Saracen – that is, a nomadic Arab – who, wearing nothing but a loincloth, leaped like an angel from a knoll amidst the enemy ranks, holding a dagger in his hand.[20]

This, of course, does not mean that, as many panegyrists of the ancient Roman Empire long believed, the legionaries did not use stratagems, tricks, and deceptions. Various Roman authors who wrote about

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17. Favereau, *L'Orda*, cit., p. 5. Some readers may find Favereau's statement surprising. Karl Marx, on the other hand, noted that nomadic peoples are naturally inclined toward commerce and trade; see K. Marx, *Il capitale. Critica dell'economia politica*, ed. by E. Sbardella, Ital. trans. by R. Meyer, Rome, Newton Compton, 1970, p. 1139 (III 4).

18. For this book, Marie Favereau won the 2024 edition of the prestigious Premio Cherasco Storia ex-aequo with Tamar Herzig (T. Herzig, *Storia di un ebreo convertito. Arte, criminalità e religione nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, Ital. trans. by S.U. Baldassarri – D. Downey, Rome, Viella, 2023).

19. Favereau, *L'Orda*, cit., p. 332.

20. See Ammianus Marcellinus, *Le Storie*, Ital. trans. by A. Selem, Turin, UTET, 20073 (first edition 1976), XXXI.16.6, pp. 1098-99 (Latin text with facing Italian translation).

warfare (for instance, Frontinus' *Stratagemata*) disprove this.[21] But it is still common today to imagine Roman soldiers as typically engaged in frontal battle with their enemies, holding a sword and a shield; for centuries, this notion influenced the Western view of martial courage, projecting it onto other peoples as well. It is no coincidence that a complex figure of soldier-diplomat – and, as already mentioned, a spy in the service of the Roman Empire in regions now defined as the Middle East – such as Ammianus Marcellinus stands out as the first source of information about the Chinese, their Great Wall, and the mysterious art of producing precious fabrics from silkworms.[22] About eleven centuries later, the Sienese scholar Francesco Patrizi (whose fame was so widespread in the Renaissance, especially owing to his treatises on political theory, that he was nicknamed "Il Gran Patritio") would mostly draw from this late antique historian his information about the Chinese government, which many Europeans considered almost perfect.[23] Here is Patrizi's passage on the Chinese, which I translate into English from the Italian version of his *De institutione rei-*

21. Not surprisingly, Machiavelli is among those who consider it legitimate to rely on deceitful means to win a war. See, for instance, N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, III.40 (chapter titled *Come usare la fraude nel maneggiare la guerra è cosa gloriosa*), in Id., *Tutte le opere*, ed. by M. Martelli, Florence, Sansoni, 1992 (first edition 1970), pp. 248-49.

22. On Ammianus Marcellinus' notes regarding the "Seres" see L. Boulnois, *La via della seta. Dèi, guerrieri, mercanti*, Ital. trans. by F. Littardi, Florence-Milan, Giunti-Bompiani, 2017, pp. 199-200. It is worth noting that Ammianus Marcellinus continued to be considered a reliable source on Oriental peoples well into the XVIII century, being used – among others – by Montesquieu; see R. Minuti, *Oriente barbarico e storiografia settecentesca: rappresentazioni della storia dei tartari nella cultura francese del XVIII secolo*, Venice, Marsilio, 1994 p. 70 and n. 60 on p. 87. A few years after Ammianus Marcellinus, references to the "Seres" were provided by Heliodorus of Emesa in his novel, probably dating from around 380, titled *Aethiopica* (also known as *Theagenes* and *Chariclea*). See Heliodorus, *Le etiopiche*, Ital. trans. by A. Colonna, Turin, UTET, 1987, pp. 570-71 (X.25, Greek original with facing Italian translation).

23. On Patrizi, see now the excellent study by J. Hankins, *Political Meritocracy in Renaissance Italy. The Virtuous Republic of Francesco Patrizi of Siena*, Cambridge (MA) – London, Harvard University Press, 2023 (especially pp. 76-77 and 218-19 for the "Silk People"). I have just finished an Italian translation of *Political Meritocracy* with my friend and colleague Alessio Panichi for Viella Editore. See also J. Hankins, *Virtue Politics. Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge (MA) - London, The Belknap Press, 2019, in particular Ch. XVII (Francesco Patrizi and Humanist Absolutism, pp. 386-422). For an Italian translation of this book see J. Hankins, *La politica della virtù. Formare la persona e formare lo Stato nel Rinascimento italiano*, Ital. trans. by S.U. Baldassarri – D. Downey, Viella, Roma 2022 (Ch. 17: *Francesco Patrizi e l'assolutismo umanistico*, pp. 489-533).

publicae (originally dedicated to Pope Sixtus IV in 1471) by the Tuscan humanist Giovanni Fabrini (1516 – ca. 1580), in the chapter on how to choose the most suitable place to found a city:

> Nor do I think that the peoples of Asia called "Seres" have everything and lack nothing, although geographers praise them so much and regard them as blessed, saying that they are constantly at peace, always enjoying life, and never in disagreement with their neighbours. Apparently, they have the most temperate climate, the healthiest air, and an abundance of forests. From their woods they gather the silk fleece, which is a fine, delicate, and noble kind of wool, produced by the branches of those trees. Their land is so fertile and abundant that, even without being cultivated or tilled, it produces fruit and crops, so much so that it not only feeds the local people, but it can also supply their neighbours with what is left. Nonetheless, I think that sometimes the Seres, too, need something from their neighbours and they do not always scorn what foreigners bring to their land.[24]

His doubts, however, would soon be replaced by the uncritical and almost unanimous praise of the Chinese empire as an exemplary regime. A striking testimony to this is found in the second half of the XVI century in the work of Giovanni Botero. As John Headley writes, «Botero belonged to the first generation of European Sinophiles».[25] Among the

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24. I quote (and translate into English) from *Discorsi del Reverendo Monsignor Francesco Patritii Sanese […] libri nove,* In Vinegia, In casa de' figliuoli di Aldo, MDXLV (EDIT 16: CNCE 26955), VIII.1. On this Italian translation by Fabrini, see my recent article *Giovanni Fabrini traduttore di Francesco Patrizi e panegirista della famiglia Massimo*, in «Medioevo e Rinascimento», XXXVIII, 2024, pp. 201-13. For the original text, see *Francisci Patricii Senensis […] de institutione reipublicae libri novem […]*, Parisiis, Apud Aegidium Gorbinum, 1575, VIII.1, f. 217r (USTC 170263). The chapter is included in the fifth section of Patrizi's treatise, which dates from 1461-1471. The *editio princeps* was edited by the French humanist Jean Savigny and published by Pierre Vidoue, in Paris, in 1518 (USTC 144871).

25. I quote from J.M. Headley, *Geography and Empire in the Late Renaissance: Botero's Assignment, Western Universalism, and the Civilizing Process*, in «Renaissance Quarterly », LIII, 2000, fasc. 4, pp. 1119-55: 1141.

various works by Botero attesting to this is his treatise *Delle cause della grandezza delle città*, first published in 1588.[26] The image of China that emerges from this work by the famous Piedmontese writer is examined in the ISI Florence-Kanazawa conference proceedings by Morihisa Ishiguro, with an essay titled *Botero e la leggenda di Quinsai ("la città del cielo"). L'impero cinese e l'idea di "civiltà" nel tardo Rinascimento italiano*.[27] A "regular" of the conferences organized by ISI Florence and Kanazawa University,[28] Professor Ishiguro has – in this case – chosen a "classic" theme in East-West studies, although addressing it from a particular perspective, that is, Botero's reflection on China's global primacy. Understandably, the bibliography on the image of the "Celestial Empire" in Europe is now very large. The extremes that characterize this vision over the centuries broadly follow the same dynamics illustrated by Edward Said in his famous (and no less contested) study on the making of the notion of the "Middle East".[29] Regarding China, in an essay intended as a summary of this centuries-old and fascinating confrontation with the idea of "otherness", some forty years ago Zhang Longxi wrote: «For the West, then, China as a land in the Far East, becomes traditionally the image of the

26. See the excellent edition of this text by R. Descendre, Rome, Viella, 2016 and his important introductory essay titled *Le città e il mondo. Comparativismo geografico e teoria della crescita urbana all'inizio dell'età moderna*, pp. 7-52. In addition to the rich bibliography listed by Descendre, see the recent article by A. Ricci, *Geopolitica, realismo e visione globale nell'atlante scritto di Giovanni Botero,* in *Boteriana III. A trent'anni dal volume* Botero e la 'Ragion di Stato' *a cura di Enzo A. Baldini* (1992-2022). *Bilanci e prospettive di ricerca*, ed. by B.A. Raviola – C. Silvagni, Turin, Centro Studi Piemontesi – ETS, 2023, pp. 83-99.

27. See *Europa ed Estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 57-73.

28. Professor Ishiguro has participated in all the conferences organized by these two institutes. On each occasion he has written an essay for the related proceedings. See M. Ishiguro, *Kitaro Nishida lettore di Machiavelli: riflessioni sull'idea di 'Ragion di Stato' nel Giappone moderno (1868-1945),* in *Italia e Giappone a confronto*, cit. pp. 99-11 and Id., *Violenza e sacra alleanza nel pensiero machiavelliano,* in *Guerre di religione e propaganda*, cit., pp. 81-97.

29. See E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978. From the beginning Said emphasizes this conviction of his: «Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West» (pp. 4-5). On the criticism elicited by Said's controversial book, see R. Irwin, *Lumi dall'Oriente: l'orientalismo e i suoi nemici*, Ital. trans. by F. Gerla, Rome, Donzelli, 2008, especially pp. 277-310 (original edition: London, Penguin, 2007).

Ultimate Other».[30] It is legitimate to say that for many Europeans, over the centuries, the Mediterranean and the culture associated with it have represented that standard of ordinary classification, as described – with admirable elegance and sincerity – by the English protagonist of *A Passage to India* (perhaps with some reminiscence of the medieval *Alexander Romance*, considering Edward Forster's university studies):[31]

> The Mediterranean is the human norm. When men leave that exquisite lake, whether through the Bosphorus or the Pillars of Hercules they approach the monstrous and extraordinary; and the southern

30. Z. Longxi, *The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West*, in «Critical Inquiry», XV, 1988, fasc. 1, pp. 108-31: 110. Longxi's essay focuses on British and French authors from the XVII century onwards. For a more recent assessment, which surveys several countries (despite its somewhat misleading title), see J.E. Lux, *The Invention of China in Early Modern England: Spelling the Dragon*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. For an analysis of the relations between Christian and Islamic countries covering a much longer period (until the XX century), see F. Cardini, *Oriente,* Venice, Marcianum Press, 2024 and the vast bibliography reported therein. It is also worth noting that in recent years many texts on the Middle East (memoirs, diaries, reports, and so on) by Italian travellers have been published or carefully discussed; see, for instance, A. Agostini, *Guerra e non solo: le campagne militari in Levante (1684-1688) 'narrate' da alcuni cavalieri toscani*, in «Rivista di Letteratura Storiografica Italiana», V, 2021, pp. 143-60; R. Pasta, *Riflessi d'Oriente. Esperienze e memorie di due viaggiatori toscani in Levante (1760-1792)*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2021; D. Baldi Bellini, *Ipnosi turca. Un medico viaggiatore in terra ottomana (1681-1771)*, Tournhout, Brepols, 2022 and P. Della Valle, *Diario di viaggio in Persia (1617-1623)*, ed. by M. Vitalone, Rome, Scienze e Lettere, 2023.

31. Among the many studies on this fascinating topic I would recommend C. Frugoni, *La fortuna di Alessandro Magno dall'Antichità al Medioevo*, Rome, Officina Libraria, 2022 (first edition 1978). In English, a deservedly well-known monograph is R. Stoneman, *Legends of Alexander the Great*, London, Dent, 1994.

exit leads to the strangest experience of all.[32]

In his essay, Ishiguro focuses on Botero's contribution to what Jonathan Lux calls "utopian sinophilism".[33] Lux describes it as a Renaissance phenomenon and yet still active (especially in Catholic countries, owing to Jesuit propaganda) for much of the XVII century,[34] before giving way to more nuanced and varied, if not outright contrary, judgments. According to these later views, China represents a clear example of the stagnation and backwardness which is typical of Eastern cultures.[35] By the 1750s, Montesquieu has no hesitation in judging the Chinese empire as the highest expression of despotism. Here is how he introduces the chapter on China in *The Spirit of Laws:*

Before finishing this book, I will respond to an objection that can be

32. E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, London, Penguin Books, 2015 (first edition 1924), p. 250 (closing paragraph in Ch. 32, that is, the second part of the novel, titled *Caves*, when the protagonist – Cyril Fielding – leaves India and returns to his native England for several years). Still today, some much-acclaimed scholarly books lead readers to believe that the area between Gibraltar and Syria (or, at best, Ancient Mesopotamia) represents the whole world. For this reason, they do not hesitate to apply such formulas as "globalization" to dynamics and events that occurred in the distant past (even as far back as the Bronze Age). See, for instance, E.H. Cline, *1177 a.C. Il collasso della civiltà*, Ital. trans. by C. Spinoglio, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2023 (original edition: Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014). On the idea of the Mediterrean as "a human-scaled sea" (and on the circulation of people, products, and news in that area from the late Middle Ages to the early modern era) see the fundamental studies that Fernand Braudel has contributed from the 1940 onwards. In particular, see F. Braudel, *Civiltà e imperi del Mediterraneo nell'età di Filippo II*, Ital. trans by C. Pischedda, Turin, Einaudi, 2010 (first Italian edition 1953), 2 voll., I, pp. 379-400 (Part Two, *Destini collettivi e movimenti d'insieme*, first chapter, titled *Le economie: la misura del secolo*, pp. 379-493).

33. See Lux, *The Invention of China*, cit., especially Ch. 2.

34. The optimistic, almost utopian spirit pervading the descriptions of many missionaries soon after their first arrival in China is aptly summarized by Pietro Citati in his elegant, erudite, and suggestive preface to *Lettere edificanti e curiose di missionari gesuiti dalla Cina (1702-1776)*, ed. by I. Vissière – J.-L. Vissière, Ital. trans. by A. Marchi - A. Silva, Parma, Guanda, 19932, pp. ix-xxi (first edition 1987).

35. For various reasons (mostly due to commerce, imperialism, as well as the development of science and technology), England was the first European country that changed its opinion of China from positive to utterly negative. In this regard, too, see *Lux, The Invention of China*, cit. For France, especially during the Enlightenment period, see R. Étiemble, *L'Europe chinoise. II. De la sinophilie à la sinophobie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989 and S.-C. Song, *Voltaire et la Chine*, Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1989. Among Italian scholars, see in particular R. Minuti, *Oriente barbarico*, cit. and Id., *L'Oriente nella cultura europea del lungo '700: studi di storia intellettuale*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 2004.

> raised about everything I have said so far. Our missionaries speak to us of the vast Chinese empire as a wonderful government, based on the union of fear, honour, and virtue. Therefore, I must have made a useless distinction when I established the principles of the three governments.[36] I do not know what this honour is that is spoken of, among people where nothing is done except with the stick. Furthermore, our merchants certainly do not give us the impression of this virtue that the missionaries talk about; they should consider the mandarins' corruption. I also call a great man as witness, that is, Lord Anson[37]. Moreover, the letters of Father Parrenin on the trial set up by the emperor against the recently converted princes, who had fallen into his disgrace, reveal a tyrannical, meticulous plan, and offenses methodically inflicted on human beings, in cold blood.[38]

After two more pages filled with negative examples, Montesquieu concludes:

> China is therefore a despotic state, based on fear. Perhaps in the early dynasties, when the empire was not so vast, the government deviated somewhat from this spirit; but today it is not so.[39]

The same "bipolar" dynamic can be observed in regard to Chinese inventions. After being credited with introducing almost all possible in-

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36. That is, honour, fear, and virtue, which – according to Montesquieu – characterize monarchy, tyranny, and republicanism, respectively. What follows in this same passage shows that he is making this statement in a humorous vein.

37. Montesquieu alludes to the travelogues of the English admiral George Anson (1697-1762), that is, *A Voyage Round the World*, first published in 1748.

38. I quote (and translate into English) from Ch.-L. de Secondat de Montesquieu, *Lo spirito delle leggi*, ed. by R. Derathé, Ital. trans. by B. Boffito Serra, with a preface by G. Macchia, Milan, Rizzoli, 2016 (first edition 1968), pp. 277-78 (VIII.21).

39. *Ibidem*, p. 280. See also XII.7 (on the crime of lese-majesty in China), *ibidem*, p. 348. Likewise, Montesquieu criticizes the Japanese authorities for being tremendously severe and violent; see *ibidem*, pp. 235-37 (VI.13).

novations known in human history, from the late 1600s onwards the "Celestial Empire" is often accused of backwardness and stagnation not only in the political realm but also in science and technology.[40] This negative judgment gradually became a "commonplace" in European culture, not without racist implications; eventually, even the least conventional thinkers accepted it. For instance, this led the nihilist philosopher Max Stirner (1806-1856, now mostly remembered as a precursor to Nietzsche) to postulate the existence of two main currents responsible for shaping the "Western spirit" throughout history. Stirner calls them "the Negro character" (North African) and "the Mongolian character" (Asian). Regarding the latter, here is what Stirner states in his *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*:

> It is the industriousness of insects, the industriousness of the Mongols. And so, among the Chinese everything remains as it was; nothing "essential" or "substantial" is subject to change. This way they can peacefully devote themselves to "working" on what remains and is said to be "ancient", passed down by "the ancestors" etc.[41]

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40. This is one of the main and most deeply rooted Western prejudices against Eastern cultures, according to J. Goody, *The Theft of History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006; above all, see chapters 4 and 5, titled *Asiatic despots and societies, in Turkey or elsewhere?* (pp. 99-122) and *Science and civilization in Renaissance Europe* (pp. 125-53), respectively. Along similar lines is the research that the Canadian scholar John Hobson carried out around the same years as Goody; see J.M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Before them, the US anthropologist and geographer James M. Blaut (1927-2000) had paved the way for this approach; in particular, see J.M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*, New York, The Guilford Press, 1993 and Id., *Eight Eurocentric Historians*, New York, The Guilford Press, 2000. A case apart is Martin Bernal's three-volume controversial work published by Rutgers University Press and Free Association Books in 1987, 1991, and 2006; see M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Goody, *The Theft of History*, cit., pp. 60-65 (section titled *Religion and 'Black Athens'*) offers what I consider a well-balanced assessment of Bernal's study.

41. I quote (and translate into English) from M. Stirner, *L'unico e la sua proprietà. Con un saggio di Roberto Calasso*, Ital. trans. by L. Amoroso, Milan, Adelphi, 1986 (first edition 1979). This stereotype eventually found its way also into Victor Hugo's saddest and most "Gothic" novel, *The Man Who Laughs*: «The Chinese have been beforehand with us in all our inventions – printing, artillery, aerostation, chloroform. Only the discovery which in Europe at once takes life and birth, and becomes a prodigy and a wonder, remains a chrysalis in China, and is preserved in a deathlike state. China is a museum of embryos». I quote from V. Hugo, *The Man Who Laughs*, Engl. trans. by W. Young, Boston, Dana Este & Co., 1902, p. 48 (end of the introductory section titled *The Comprachicos*).

Writing in the 1580s, however, Botero is still fascinated by China's prosperity, especially what he considers its extraordinary urbanization and its incredibly high population. The latter aspect would continue to amaze Westerners for centuries; among Botero's contemporaries, one need only read the *Ytinerario* written by the Spanish Franciscan friar Martín Ignacio de Loyola, a relative of the founder of the Society of Jesus, who had travelled to China in the 1580s.[42] In 1661, Bartoli reported an anecdote that was already quite old but still considered useful in summarizing China's proverbial population density (as well as the domestic confinement of unmarried girls):

> The Portuguese, seeing that wherever they went in China the place was so crowded with people as if it were all one huge market, asked – amazed and partly joking – if the women there gave birth to ten children, all boys, at a time.[43]

About a century later, Voltaire wrote as follows in his *Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations:*

> […] it seems difficult that China has fewer than one hundred and fifty million inhabitants; Europe does not have much more than one hundred million […]. Therefore, one should not be surprised if Chinese cities are immense; if Beijing, the new capital of the Empire, has a circumference of almost six of our leagues and contains about three million citizens; if Nanjing, the ancient metropolis, once had even more; and if a simple village, called Quientzeng, where porcelain is made, hosts about one million inhabitants.[44]

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42. See *Sinica Franciscana*, cit., vol. II, pp. 191-210, especially p. 202 (XI.2), where the Franciscan friar expresses once again his admiration at the size and the population of Chinese cities.

43. I quote (and translate into English) from Bartoli, *Dell'Istoria della compagnia di Gesù*, cit., p. 41 (I.18, chapter titled *Della grande multitudine de' Cinesi*).

44. Voltaire, *Saggio sui costumi*, cit., I.12-13, vol. I, p. 185 (my English translation).

Returning to Botero's text, he aims «for the entertainment and satisfaction of readers […] to understand why China is so densely populated and filled with such marvelous cities».[45] According to Botero, this is the result of various factors. First and foremost, he highlights an aspect that Ishiguro repeatedly emphasizes in his essay within the volume of conference proceedings mentioned above: China's privileged geographical location. In Botero's holistic approach, this element ultimately encompasses economics, natural resources, land use, ethical norms, politics, and religion:

> Now, China is the easternmost part of the known world, and therefore it enjoys all the perfections attributed to the East. First, the air – of which nothing is more important to human life – is tempered by the proximity of the sea (which largely surrounds China, almost caressing it, and penetrates deep into those regions with countless bays and gulfs). The land, in general, is flat and naturally suited to producing every delicacy, as well as all the necessities for sustaining life. The mountains and hills are always covered with trees of all kinds, some wild, some fruit-bearing; the plains are rich in rice, barley, wheat, and legumes.[46]

After listing other unparalleled Chinese achievements – such as the extraction of raw materials, various types of cultivation (including tea),[47]

45. Botero, *Delle cause della grandezza delle città*, cit., II.11, p. 109 (my English translation). It is a pity that Goody did not consider Botero in his assessment of the Europeans' century-old prejudices on urban life in the Middle East and the Far East; see Goody, *The Theft of History*, cit. (especially Ch. 8, titled *The theft of institutions: towns and universities*, pp. 215-39).

46. Botero, *Delle cause della grandezza delle città* cit., II.11, pp. 109-10 (my English translation).

47. Botero praises tea also for its therapeutic virtues; see *ibidem*, p. 110.

and the unique craftsmanship of porcelain –[48] Botero focuses on China's extraordinary population density, accompanied by exemplary ways of life practiced by its inhabitants (closely resembling the ancient laws of Lycurgus and Solon, which Italian humanists admired so much):[49]

> To this great fertility of land and water is added an incredible cultivation of both elements, extracting the greatest possible yield. This stems from two causes: one is the immense multitude of inhabitants, as it is estimated that China has more than sixty million souls; the other is the extreme diligence practiced both by the people in cultivating and making use of their land, and by the magistrates in ensuring that no one is permitted to remain idle or unemployed. As a result, there is not a single inch of land that is not thoroughly cultivated. As for the

48. See *ibidem*, p. 110. On the admiration for (and the diffusion of) Chinese porcelain in the XVII-XVIII centuries, see T. Brook, *Vermeer's Hat. The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, London, Bloomsbury, 2007 (Italian translation by A. Fontanesi, *Il cappello di Vermeer. Il Seicento e la nascita del mondo globalizzato*, Turin, Einaudi, 2015). In addition to the bibliography listed by Brook, see F. Vossilla, *La cupola per marca,* in *Ceramica e araldica medicea (Monte San Savino - Cassero, 20 giugno - 30 agosto 1992)*, ed. by G.C. Bojani, Città di Castello - Monte San Savino, Comune di Monte San Savino, 1992, pp. 73-93. On the remarkable importance of ceramics in Renaissance Florence, see M. Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence, Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, 1978; Id., *Ceramiche alla corte dei Medici nel Cinquecento*, Modena, Franco Cosimo Panini, 1994; F. Morena, *Dalle Indie Orientali alla corte di Toscana: collezioni di arte cinese e giapponese a Palazzo Pitti*, Florence, Giunti, 2005, pp. 25-71 and 93-143; Id., *Cineseria: evoluzioni del gusto per l'Oriente in Italia dal XIV al XIX secolo*, Florence, Centro Di, 2009, pp. 32-38. The production of porcelain in Florence only started in 1737. In 1708, it had started in Meissen (near Dresden). In addition to Chinese art, the Medici family collected Indian artworks; see K. Keating - L. Markey, *Indian Objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg Inventories*, in «Journal of the History of Collections», XXIII, 2011, pp. 283-300. As for the so-called "New World" and its artifacts, see L. Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, University Park, Penn State University Press, 2016. See also the interesting CAPASIA project on East-West trade relations in the early modern era, which is now being conducted under the auspices of the European Institute in Fiesole; see the related website at www.capasia.eu

49. Only a year later (1589) Botero himself – in his best-known work – would emphasize how ancient Greek laws and Chinese laws punish idleness in similar ways: see the section titled *De' poveri* in G. Botero, *La Ragion di Stato*, ed. by C. Continisio, Rome, Donzelli, 20092 (first edition 1997), p. 84. On these Chinese laws, see also *ibidem*, p. 124 (VIII.2, where Botero once again lavishes praise on China for its well-regulated government). In the *Ragion di Stato* Botero also extolls the «Kings of China» for their wise policies on p. 25 (*De' ministri di giustizia*) and p. 28 (*Del contenere i magistrati in ufficio*). On the image of China that Botero offers in another work (the *Relationi universali*), see Headley, Geography and Empire, cit., pp. 1141-44.

> arts, there is no need to discuss them any further, for nowhere else do they flourish more, both in variety and excellence. This too stems from two causes. Firstly, as mentioned above, everyone is required to engage in some form of work – even the blind, the maimed, and the crippled – unless they are completely incapacitated. Also, thanks to a law by Vitei, China's King,[50] women (no matter how noble or high-ranking) are obliged to practice their father's trade or, at the very least, to engage in spinning and needlework. The second cause is that children must necessarily learn their father's trade. As a result, artisans are countless, children (even girls) are trained from birth, and all the crafts reach the highest level of perfection.[51]

Interestingly, Chinese diligence is also praised a few years before Botero's work in a note written by the Dominican Ignazio Danti (astronomer, cartographer, and mathematician at the court of Cosimo I de' Medici), specifically referencing the city of Quinsai, that is, the subject of Ishiguro's study. This note was written on a map of China, which was then kept in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence both for practical purposes and to impress high-ranking guests. Its text (which can still be seen in that Florentine building, more specifically in the *Sala delle Carte Geografiche*) reads as follows:

> This city, like the rest of China, is inhabited by most clever people, who master all mechanical and liberal arts, as well as the sciences, particularly mathematics. They had printing and artillery long before us. Here, those beautiful porcelain vases are made, of which it

50. As Descendre explains in a note to his excellent edition of Botero's text, this king would be Huagndi, one of China's mythological emperors, whom Juan González de Mendoza called "Vitei" in his *Dell'historia della China*; see Botero, *Delle cause della grandezza delle città*, cit., p. 110 n. 251.

51. *Ibidem*, pp. 110-11.

> is said that if poison is poured into them, they break immediately.[52]

The passage quoted above refers to what Marco Polo calls «the supremely noble city of Quinsai, which in French means "the city of heaven"». Significantly, Polo's longest description in his account of China is dedicated to Quinsai. He introduces it as follows:

> The city of Quinsai stretches for 100 miles in circumference and has 12,000 stone bridges. A large ship could pass under most of these bridges, and at least a medium-sized vessel under the others. There is no reason to be surprised by this, as the entire city is surrounded by water and plenty of canals run through it; that is why there are so many bridges, which allow people to reach any part of this city.[53]

In addition to these reasons for admiration, Ishiguro's essay highlights the implicit and exceptional advantages that Botero (a former Jesuit and, at the time, secretary to Cardinal Federico Borromeo) attributes to China's privileged geographical location.[54] Being in the Far East, China is

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52. This comment (from 1575) is cited in Vossilla, *La cupola per marca*, cit., p. 76 (my English translation). The same map included Japan, bearing the following caption next to it: «Giapan overo Cipangu isola». On it see Caputo, *L'aurora del Giappone*, cit., note 3 on pp. 138-39. On the Palazzo Vecchio maps, see F. Fiorani, *Carte dipinte: arte, cartografia e politica nel Rinascimento*, Modena, Panini, 2010, pp. 31-55 (Ch. 2, titled *La sala della Guardaroba Nuova*). More generally, see this accurate study by Francesca Fiorani (especially Ch. 5, titled *La rappresentazione del mondo contemporaneo*, pp. 129-71) for a detailed discussion of the changes introduced in Renaissance world maps after the European discoveries of the XV-XVI centuries.

53. Polo, *Milione*, cit., Ch. 148, p. 115 (my English translation). The whole description is on pp. 114-18.

54. As Botero scholars know, in 1580 he left the Jesuit order after 22 years and started serving the Borromeo family. First, he became secretary to Cardinal Carlo (d. 1584), then to his cousin Federico (who was elected cardinal in 1587). On these events in Botero's life, see Descendre's notes in *Le città e il mondo*, cit., pp. 7-8 and the bibliography reported therein.

believed to be close to the original site of Earthly Paradise.[55] In emphasizing this fortunate circumstance, Botero draws upon an ancient tradition that viewed China not only as a land at the threshold of the first human settlement but also as the guardian of a primordial and uncorrupted form of wisdom. Among the Christian missionaries' tasks, therefore, was the rediscovery of this ancient *sapientia*. Facilitated by evangelization, the accomplishment of this goal would restore the original unity of knowledge and language, which was divinely bestowed upon humankind before our sins made us lose awareness of it.

The Renaissance – largely Neoplatonic – version of *prisca theologia* (the doctrine of a millennia-old divine wisdom shared among different pagan traditions before Christ's coming) thus connects to a celebration of China as a priceless repository of primordial forms of knowledge, similar to the equally esoteric civilization of Ancient Egypt. The perceived (or rather, assumed and hoped for, if not outright imagined) similarities between hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms would serve as further confirmation of this idea,[56] just as Confucius' rational ethics – akin to Christian morals – could be traced back to a prior, ancestral, and shared source.[57]

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55. On this peculiar geography, see the well-documented and richly illustrated book by A. Scafi, *Il paradiso in terra: mappe del giardino dell'Eden*, Milan, Mondadori, 2007. As Scafi points out (p. 190), fifteeenth-century discoveries and the new maritime routes associated with them led cartographers to gradually push the Garden of Eden further East, from Africa to China and Japan. Eventually, toward the end of that century, the Garden of Eden stopped being included in world maps; see *ibidem*, pp. 214-15.

56. During the Age of Enlightenment, many *philosophes* made fun of this supposed Egyptian origin of the Chinese people. See, for instance, Voltaire, *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, ed. par. R. Pomeau, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, pp. 341-42. For an Italian translation, see Voltaire, *Storia della Russia sotto Pietro il Grande*, Ital. trans. by R. Ferrara, Rome, Avanzini & Torraca, Rome 1967, pp. 23-24 (*Prefazione*, par. 3). On the targets of Voltaire's polemic (that is, the scholars he makes fun of in this passage), see Minuti, *Oriente barbarico*, cit., p. 96.

57. On the contrary, in recent years many scholars have highlighted the similarities (and, sometimes, even the overlap) between Confucianism and the ideals promoted by European humanism (first in Italy, then also north of the Alps). See, for instance, Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, cit., *passim*, especially the last chapter (titled *Conclusion: Ex Oriente lux*, pp. 495-515). Some twenty years ago, in the first edition of his *The Theft of History*, Jack Goody wrote: «The parallels between China and Renaissance humanism are impressive, including the emphasis on ethics and literature, the recourse to the classics, the interest in editing texts, the belief that a general 'humane' education is better than a specialist training as an administrator». I quote from Goody, *The Theft of History*, cit., p. 243.

In this attempt at syncretic reconciliation, the medieval legend of Prester John – referred to as "Preste Giovanni" by Marco Polo and many other contemporary sources – found a lasting place.[58] Mentioned in Ishiguro's essay, this legend was discussed by Professor Rita Comanducci at the ISI Florence-Kanazawa conference (though unfortunately not submitted for publication), in a paper titled *Echoes of Prester John and the Imaginary East in Political Satire*. This is one of the many facets of Western mythology applied to the East, to which the latter, in turn, responded by weaving its own fantastic narratives about European peoples.[59] Belief in this mythical ruler also influenced political propaganda,[60] especially in contexts where the legitimacy of power happened to be fragile. At times, this resulted in a hybridization of styles, language, themes, and tones with parodic or satirical effects – something well documented in late medieval literature, particularly when portraying encounters (or clashes) between different cultures.[61] Nearly all governments in the geopolitical landscape stretching from Byzantium to northern Egypt at the end of the XII century suffered, to some extent, from a "legitimacy deficit". It is therefore unsurprising that in a series of forged letters concerning the enigmatic figure of Prester John satire and propaganda found common ground, giving rise to a distinct literary genre. This genre persisted well beyond the Renaissance, generating various adaptations in multiple languages, with over 400 manuscripts surviving today. As Marianna Ferrara, coordinator of an international research

58. See Polo, *Milione*, cit., chapters 63-67 (pp. 41-44) and chapter 73 (p. 51).

59. In her several books on the Silk Road, Luce Boulnois often mentions those Eastern and Far Eastern myths on the West; see, for instance, Boulnois, *La via della seta*, cit., pp. 44-45, 62-63, 84-87, 112-15, 172-73 and, above all, pp. 199-208.

60. As Ahmed Sheir also emphasizes, especially in regard to international relations among Arabs, Europeans, and Mongols in the XII-XIII centuries; see A.M.A. Sheir, *The Prester John Legend between East and West during the Crusades: Entagled Eastern-Latin Mythical Legacies*, Budapest, Trivent Publishing, 2022.

61. In regard to East-West relations, a case in point is the anonymous *Charlemagne's Journey to the East*; see *Il viaggio di Carlomagno in Oriente*, Ital. trans. by M. Bonafin, Parma, Pratiche Editrice, 1993 (first edition 1987) and the rich bibliography reported therein.

project on Prester John, recently wrote:

> The stories around the figure of Prester John provide a changing political background between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, involving the Mediterranean, Eurasian routes and the Franco-Mongolian alliance against the Mamluks, and religious and political relations with Ethiopia and Nubia. The narrative developments around the places, virtues and wonders of the kingdom of Prester John indicate the changes in the context of production and reception of the stories. They also show discrepancies that serve as clues to investigate the political and religious function these accounts assumed in political alliances, in cartography and in the symbolic horizon of medieval 'orientalisms' of Hellenistic, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian expressions.[62]

Somewhat like the Garden of Eden, over the centuries the mysterious Prester John migrated within the European imagination – from Africa to the Middle East and, finally, to Asia – as geographical discoveries, trade exchanges, and military conflicts disproved his existence in places where he was once expected to be found. The deep-rooted belief in his existence (tied as it was to the desire for universal peace) kept shifting the court of this imaginary prince ever further east. As such, Prester John proved to be at once always elusive and yet necessary, like a fascinating dream that could not be abandoned. Eventually, in the XVII century, Athanasius Kircher (a central figure in many intellectual debates of his time) and his fellow Jesuit Philippe Avril identified Prester John with the Dalai Lama in Tibet.[63]

Several themes already addressed in these pages help explain why many missionaries were driven by a deep, and often naïve, belief that converting Eastern peoples would be straightforward. The cultural ex-

62. I quote from M. Ferrara, *History-Telling about Prester John*, in «Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni», LXXXIX, 2023, fasc. 1, pp. 7-20: 15-16. On the initial stages of this myth, see Sheir, *The Prester John Legend*, cit.

63. See Ferrara, *History-Telling about Prester John*, cit., pp. 17-18.

pectations Europeans had developed over hundreds of years led them to assume that evangelization in the Far East would encounter fewer obstacles than elsewhere.[64] When, however, missionary efforts proceeded slowly, the same religious figures insisted that «the mission must be carried out by God using the methods tested in Peru and New Spain», as the Jesuit Alonso Sánchez (1547-1593) wrote in 1584 regarding the evangelization of China.[65] A few months later, this sentiment was echoed by Juan Bautista Román (*Factor Real* of the Philippines), who candidly shared the following recommendation on converting the Chinese in a letter he wrote to the Spanish monarch:

> We will never reach an agreement with them until Your Majesty's power is, at least in part, imposed on these territories, and until they are necessarily obliged to learn our language, which is much easier to acquire than theirs[66].

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64. A telling example is the letter that Saint Francis Xavier sent from Japan on 5 November 1549; see Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, cit., vol. II, pp. 1022-34, especially pp. 1027-28. See also his previous letter dated 12 January 1549 in F. Saverio, *Dalle terre dove sorge il Sole. Lettere e documenti dall'Oriente*, 1535-1552, ed. by A. Caboni, preface by F. Scorza Barcellona, Rome, Città Nuova, 2002 (first edition 1991), p. 239. This "wishful thinking" on the easy conversion to Christianity of lands hitherto unexplored by Europeans continued well into the XVIII century, as many examples attest. See, for instance, the essay by L. Zampol D'Ortia, *Representations of Tibet and Responses to Missionary Failure in Ippolito Desideri's Italian Writings,* in *East and West Entangled*, cit., pp. 33-49. Nevertheless, some cases of "elective affinities" between extraordinary figures have been documented, like the one discussed in F. Vossilla, *"Andavo d'accordo con lui e gli ho chiesto della Filosofia del Cielo". Alcune "missioni pericolose" di Francesco Sambiasi in Cina*, in «Rivista di Letteratura Storiografica Italiana», vi, 2022, pp. 93-107.

65. Cited in R. Po-chia Hsia, *Una gesuita nella città proibita. Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610*, Ital. trans. by C. Montini - S. Varani, Bologna, il Mulino, 2012, p. 106 (original edition: Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010). Alonso Sánchez's statement also impressed David Riesman, who alluded to it in his preface to the third (abridged) edition of *The Lonely Crowd*; see D. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd. A Study of the Changing American Character*, with N. Glazer and R. Denney, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1961, p. xxv.

66. Cited in R. Po-chia Hsia, *Una gesuita nella città proibita*, cit., p. 107 (my English translation). It is thus unsurprising that two centuries later (in the summer of 1795) Immanuel Kant expressed his complete understanding of Japan's isolationist policy and China's attempts to limit European influence on its own territory. See I. Kant, *Per la pace perpetua*, preface by S. Veca, Ital. trans. by R. Bordiga, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1995 (first edition 1991), pp. 66-67.

Various episodes – often dramatic, sometimes tragic – made European missionaries realize that reality in the Far East was quite different from their expectations.[67] The case of the Lucchese Dominican friar Angelo Orsucci is emblematic in this regard. On 13 December 1618, soon after his arrival in Japan, Orsucci was arrested by the local authorities; after spending almost three years in prison, he suffered martyrdom – aged 49 – in Nagasaki on 10 September 1622. His story is the focus of the essay *"Thesaurum Fidei". Il Giappone cristiano* by Monsignor Paolo Giulietti and Professor Olimpia Niglio.[68] Their contribution is part of a vast multimedia project that includes exhibitions, conferences, workshops, and the creation of dedicated websites.[69] Stemming from such a wide range of initiatives, Giulietti and Niglio's endeavor spans a broad chronological arc; its main focus, however, is on early modern missionaries in China and Japan. Among them was Orsucci, whose baptismal name was Michele. Their analysis covers the period (more than a century) between the arrival of Saint Francis Xavier in the "Land of the Rising Sun" and the revolt of Christian peasants and *ronin* against the Tokugawa shogunate in the

67. The same pattern (initial enthusiasm, followed by doubts and, finally, discomfort over the impossibility of truly converting indigenous people to Christianity) can be noticed in missionaries to India, despite an early tradition crediting Saint Thomas the Apostle with a first (partial yet significant) Christianization of that region. A telling example is that of Saint Francis Xavier, whose letters from India follow the emotional pattern summarized above; see Saverio, *Dalle terre dove sorge il Sole*, cit., pp. 165-66 (letter from Cochin, 27 January 1545, expressing high hopes) and p. 237 (despondent letter to Saint Ignatius of Loyola, dated «Cochin, 12 January 1549», confessing that his missionary efforts in India have proved almost completely useless). On the widespread legend of Saint Thomas the Apostle's preaching in India (in the mid-first century, in the southern province of Kerala), see C. Dognini - I. Ramelli, *Gli apostoli in India nella patristica e nella letteratura sanscrita*, Milan, Medusa, 2011, especially pp. 61-82 (*La tradizione su Tommaso apostolo dell'India*) and the bibliography reported therein.

68. See *Europa and Estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 47-56.

69. See, for instance, the wonderful exhibition catalogue edited by Giulietti and Niglio titled "*Thesaurum Fidei*". *Missionari martiri e cristiani nascosti in Giappone. Trecento anni di eroica fedeltà a Cristo*, Lucca, Arcidiocesi di Lucca – Pacini Fazzi, 2023 and the following websites: https://www.diocesilucca.it/thesaurumfidei/pubblicazione-atti-convegno-internazionale/ and chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.diocesilucca.it/thesaurumfidei/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2023/04/catalogo-THESAURUM-FIDE-2023_extract.pdf

Shimabara Peninsula (1637-1638).[70] After the suppression of this revolt, Japan started to adopt the isolationist *sakoku* policy, which lasted over two centuries. Among its consequences was the phenomenon known as *kakure kirishitan* (i.e., the "hidden Christians"), on whom Giulietti and Niglio are among the main experts today.

The complex relationships and mutual influences between European and Japanese culture in the early modern period are also the focus of Professor Hitomi Omata Rappo's essay in the ISI Florence-Kanazawa conference proceedings, titled *Louis Richeome and the Heretical Mirror of Japan. The Role of Japanese Idols in Early Modern European Religious Narratives*.[71] In it, Omata Rappo – who has recently published a book on the Jesuits in Japan, inspired by the well-known Nagasaki martyrdom on 5 February 1597 –[72] examines how encounters between Christian missionaries and the Japanese influenced European perceptions of idolatry. Until the mid-XVI century, most Europeans had a "mythical" notion of the Japanese archipelago, largely shaped by semi-fictional narratives like the one that Marco Polo provides in the opening paragraphs of his chapter on "Zipangu":

> Zipangu is an island in the east, on the high seas, 1,500 miles off the coast. The island is very large. The people are fair-skinned, well-mannered, and good-looking. They are idolaters and do not acknowledge anyone's lordship but their own. There, gold is abundant, and they have a great quantity of it; since foreigners don't go there, merchants do not take any gold away. That is also why they have so much of it. The palace of the lord of the island is very large and covered in gold, just as churches here are covered in lead. In

70. On the image of the "Land of the Rising Sun" shared by the first Jesuit missionaries who reached those islands, see Caputo, *L'aurora del Giappone*, cit., especially pp. 137-271. See also A. Boscaro, *Ventura e sventura dei gesuiti in Giappone (1549-1639)*, Venice, Cafoscarina, 2008, in particular for what concerns Italian missionaries.

71. See *Europa and Estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 133-57.

72. See H. Omata Rappo, *Des Indes lointaines aux scenes des collèges. Les reflets des martyrs de la mission japonaise en Europe (XVIe – XVIIIe siècle)*, Münster, Aschendorff Verlag, 2020.

> the chambers, the floors are all covered in gold, at least two fingers thick; likewise, all the windows, walls, and everything else (including the halls) are adorned with gold. Its value is beyond description. They have plenty of pearls, which are red, round, and large, and are more valuable than white ones. There are also many precious stones; basically, the wealth of this island is immeasurable.[73]

As previously mentioned, Europe's relationship with Japanese culture became significantly more intense and complex toward the end of the XVI century. Through an analysis of the theological works of the French Jesuit Louis Richeome (1544-1625), Omata Rappo shows how most members of that order considered Japanese religious practices similar to Protestant heresies. This comparison reinforced the rhetoric of spiritual warfare promoted by the followers of Saint Ignatius, particularly through such influential figures as Richeome, who served for nearly a decade (1608-1615) as assistant to Claudio Acquaviva, General Superior of the Jesuit order. Furthermore, Omata Rappo's study highlights the symbolic use of Japanese idols in art and religious narratives, emphasizing their role in Jesuit campaigns against both internal and external threats to the Catholic faith. Through a fascinating interplay of cultural misunderstanding and deliberate propaganda, the Jesuits labeled what they condemned as mere pagan idolatry, namely, Japanese religious practices. By offering a biased and manipulative interpretation of those rituals, the Jesuits added another resource to their fight against the Protestant movements in Northern Europe. This multifaceted phenomenon, as Omata Rappo explains, impacted many written sources (including documents related to the canonization of Ignatius of Loyola) and renowned works of art, too. Among the latter, a remarkable example is the chapel dedicated to the order's founder in the Church of the Gesù in Rome.

As regards the methods of evangelization adopted by missionaries in the Far East – especially through the use of specially made, illustrated

73. Polo, *Milione*, cit., Ch. 155, p. 123 (my English translation).

texts – Natsuko Kuwabara's contribution to the ISI Florence-Kanazawa conference proceedings (*The Acceptance of the Iconography of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Seventeenth-Century China: The Reception of the "Evangelicae Historiae Imagines"*) stands out as particularly insightful.[74] In recent decades, studies on cross-cultural artistic influences have multiplied in what has been termed the *Global Renaissance*.[75] The same applies to literature and folklore; one need only consider Chieko Irie Mulhern's well-known thesis that the early modern spreading of the Cinderella cycle in Japanese folktales was influenced by the Jesuits in that region between the late XVI and early XVII centuries.[76] Professor Kuwabara's study also serves as an excellent example of cross-cultural artistic influences – a topic she has often addressed in her research.[77] In her essay she reconstructs the reception of the *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*, a work by the Spanish theologian Jerónimo Nadal (1507-1580), one of the first Jesuits to arrive in China. Nadal wrote this text at the request of Saint Ignatius of Loyola to facilitate meditation on the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary. First printed in 1593 by the heirs of the renowned printer Christophe Plantin in Antwerp, the *Imagines* were used by Nadal's fellow Jesuits, particularly in the Chinese translations produced by João de Rocha (1565-1623) and Giulio Aleni (1582-1649).[78] As Ku-

74. See *Europa ed Estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 75-94.

75. See the following recent volumes of collected essays: *Eloquent Images: Evangelisation, Conversion and Propaganda in the Global World of the Early Modern Period*, ed. by G. Capriotti - P.A. Fabre - S. Pavone, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2022 and *The Routledge Companion to Global Renaissance Art*, ed. by S.J. Campbell - S. Porras, New York - London, Routledge, 2024. For an original approach to the topic of commerce and art production from the XVI century onwards (also as a consequence of the new nautical routes opened by European navigators), see G. Warwick, *Cinderella's Glass Slipper. Towards a Cultural History of Renaissance Materialities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

76. See C.I. Mulhern, *Analysis of Cinderella Motifs Italian and Japanese*, in «Asian Folklore Studies», XLIV, 1985, pp. 1-37.

77. Prof. Kuwabara has recently published a volume in Japanese whose title, in English, is reported as follows on the Internet: *The Last Days of the Virgin Mary: A Genealogy of the Iconographies in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Nagoya, The University of Nagoya Press, 2023. The book has won two important Japanese awards: the Herend Prize and the Nishiwaki Junzaburo Prize, from the Collegium Mediterrannistarum and the University of Keio, respectively.

78. On the significant impact that this work by Nadal had in the Far East, see also Po-chia Hsia, *Un gesuita nella città proibita*, cit., p. 314 and the bibliography reported therein.

wabara shows, the iconography of the Virgin Mary in the Chinese versions by de Rocha and Aleni is intentionally different from the original text and illustrations. For instance, contrary to Nadal's *Imagines*, their versions prioritize the iconography of the Virgin Mary's resurrection over that of her assumption. Additionally, in the Chinese translations of this work, the figures related to her resurrection are influenced by the imagery of the "Woman clothed with the Sun" from the Book of Revelation (12:1). Kuwabara explains that a similar process was taking place in Europe at the time; a case in point is Peter Paul Ruben's *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, which the famous Flemish artist painted for Antwerp Cathedral, completing it in 1626. Kuwabara's essay thus offers a significant iconographic analysis of Marian devotion and its international diffusion at a time when, in Europe, the Protestant Reformation was strongly challenging this Catholic doctrine and the rituals associated with it.

Still in regard to the Christian missionaries' use of corresponding literary images in the Far East, their evangelizing efforts took place in countries that had centuries-old and highly refined traditions in art criticism. A telling example is Murasaki Shikibu's famous novel (probably written between 1002 and 1020).[79] The following excerpt from *The Tale of Genji* – based on reflections that first emerged in China and later developed during the Heian period of Japanese history (794–1185) – is part of a long dialogue on landscape painting and calligraphy:

> Or let us look at painting. There are any number of masters in the academy. It is not easy to separate the good from the bad among

79. The standard English translation is still the one by Arthur Waley: see M. Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, Engl. trans. by A. Waley, 6 voll., London, Allen & Unwin, 1925-1933. For an Italian translation (based on Waley's) see M. Shikibu, *Storia di Genjii. Il principe splendente. Romanzo giapponese dell'XI secolo*, Ital. trans. by A. Motti, with an introduction by G. Amitrano, Turin, Einaudi, 1992 (first edition 1957). Giorgio Amitrano's introductory essay beautifully highlights the main features of this extraordinary text; see, in particular, pp. X-XI for some insightful reflections on its original context. On this masterpiece of Japanese literature, a fundamental reading is still Ivan Morris' monograph: see I. Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*, New York, Knopf, 1964. For an Italian translation, see Id., *Il mondo del principe splendente: vita di corte nell'antico Giappone*, Ital. trans. by P. Parri, Milan, Adelphi, 1984.

> those who work on the basic sketches. But let color be added. The painter of things no one ever sees, of paradises, of fish in angry seas, raging beasts in foreign lands, devils and demons – the painter abandons himself to his fancies and paints to terrify and astonish. What does it matter if the results seem somewhat remote from real life? It is not so with the things we know; mountains, streams, houses near and like our own. The soft, unspoiled, wooded hills must be painted layer over layer, the details added gently, quietly, to give a sense of affectionate familiarity. And the foreground too, the garden inside the walls, the arrangement of the stones and grasses and waters. It is here that the master has his own power. There are details a lesser painter cannot imitate.
>
> Or let us look at calligraphy. A man without any great skill can stretch out this line and that in the cursive style and give an appearance of boldness and distinction. The man who has mastered the principles and writes with concentration may, on the other hand, have none of the eye-catching tricks; but when you take the trouble to compare the two, the real thing is the real thing.[80]

Moving further East, the conference essay by Kenichi Nejime (*The Immortality of the Soul in the Renaissance: Differences between the West and Japan*) also contributes to the debate between Christianity and Eastern re-

80. Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, cit., I, p. 38. On this passage, see Morris, *Il mondo del principe splendente*, cit., pp. 41-44 and 243-47. The bibliography on painting and calligraphy in medieval China and Japan is now vast. For an introduction to these topics, see the following studies and the bibliography reported therein: Y. Shimizu, *Transmission and Transformation: Chinese Calligraphy and Japanese Calligraphy, in Multiple Meanings: The Written Word in Japan – Past, Present and Future*, ed. by J. Thomas Rimer, Washington DC, Library of Congress, 1986, pp. 5-24; Y. Shimizu, *The Rite of Writing: Thoughts on the Oldest Genji Text,* in «RES», XVI, 1988, pp. 54-63; T. Lamarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan. An Archeology of Sensation and Inscription*, Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 2000; *Di linea e di colore*, cit.; S. Drake Hawks, *An Environmental Ethic in Chinese Landscape Painting*, in «Education About Asia», XVIII, 2013, fasc. 1, pp. 13-18; *Color in Ancient and Medieval East Asia*, ed. by M.M. Dusenbury, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2015. For an interesting comparison between Heian culture and medieval European courts, see E. Gerlini, *The Heian Court Poetry as World Literature*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2014 and Id., *Literature as a Tool of Power at the Heian Court in Japan and Frederick II's Court in Sicily,* in *Italia e Giappone a confronto*, cit., pp. 77-97.

ligions.[81] It was only during the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517), specifically with the papal bull of 19 December 1513 signed by Leo X, that the Catholic Church officially declared the soul's immortality a dogma. Professor Nejime's research addresses one of the most controversial doctrinal issues that the Christian missionaries faced in Japan, especially in their interactions with Buddhist monks. As is well known, Catholicism first appeared in Japan thanks to Saint Francis Xavier in 1549. Xavier was soon struck by how steadfastly adherents of local religions refused to believe in the immortality of the soul. He therefore undertook to demonstrate that the soul's immortality was an unquestionable and fundamental dogma of the Christian faith, established during that very Lateran Council at the beginning of the XVI century – an event whose opening, as Francesco Guicciardini wrote, was celebrated with «the most beautiful and holy ceremonies, capable of penetrating into the very hearts of men, if one really believed that the thoughts and the goals of those involved in such rituals were as noble as their words».[82] The Christian missionaries who arrived in Japan after Xavier – especially fellow Jesuits like Alessandro Valignano – continued to preach the immortality of the soul, always emphasizing its central importance. In doing so, they did not hesitate to engage in direct disputes, particularly with prominent representatives of Japanese Buddhism. They were fully aware that denying this dogma would undermine Christian ethics, which rested on the related doctrines of free will and divine justice, that is, the system of rewards and punishments awaiting human beings in the afterlife.[83]

These disagreements proved difficult to resolve, both in Japan and

81. *Europa ed Estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 95-117.

82. F. Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. by E. Mazzali, 3 voll., Milan, Garzanti, 1988, vol. II, p. 1140 (X.14; my English translation).

83. On these philosophical and religious issues, see the essays collected in *Paths in Free Will. Theology, Philosophy and Literature from the Late Middle Ages to the Reformation*, ed. by L. Geri - C. Houth Vrangbaek - P. Terracciano, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2020 and the bibliography reported therein. In particular, for what concerns Italian Renaissance culture, see M. Regoliosi, *Lorenzo Valla's "De libero arbitiro"*, *ibidem*, pp. 63-90 and S.U. Baldassarri, *Giannozzo Manetti on Free Will*, *ibidem*, pp. 91-107.

in China, as positions on both sides were deeply rooted. On the "superiority complex" attributed to the Chinese by many European travelers and missionaries at that time, Matteo Ricci wrote as follows in a letter to his best friend (and also a Jesuit) Girolamo Costa on 15 October 1596:

> Although they clearly see that we surpass them in many things – as shown by our paintings, tapestries, books, orations, mathematical sciences and machines, weapons, musical instruments, luxurious clothing (such as velvet, brocade, and woolen fabrics) and countless other things – they refuse to acknowledge our superiority and do not want to humble themselves. Likewise, they think that we cannot teach them anything about the law.[84]

Europeans, for their part, were no less condescending toward Eastern peoples. Here is what Isaia Iannaccone writes about Ricci himself:

> Regarding the issue of 'imperfect' or 'inaccurate' transmissions, the Jesuit [i.e., Matteo Ricci] opposed the Chinese cosmological school known as Xuan Ye (together with its notion of an empty, infinite space), which was a much more advanced view than the crystalline spheres of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system still shared in Europe by the predominant culture of that time. A product of his era and a militant representative of a dogmatic religion, Ricci never delved deeply into the study of Chinese science. He thus maintained strong prejudices and a sense of superiority that hindered the dialogue between European and Chinese scientific systems. The same attitude prevailed in Europe, to the detriment of a fuller understanding of China.[85]

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84. The original passage is quoted in Po-Chia Hsia, *Un gesuita nella città proibita*, cit., p. 205 (my English translation).

85. I quote (and translate into English) from I. Iannaccone, *Le fasi della divulgazione della scienza europea nella Cina del XVII secolo,* in *La missione cattolica in Cina tra i secoli XVII e XVIII: Emiliano Palladini (1733-1793), Congregato della Sacra Famiglia di Gesù Cristo, Procuratore della Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide a Macao. Atti del Convegno (Lauria, 8-9 ottobre 1993)*, ed. by F. D'Arelli - A. Tamburello, Naples, Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1995, pp. 59-76: 63.

Another topic addressed in Nejime's essay is the presence of Italian travelers – especially from Tuscany – in the Far East during the XVII century. Appropriately, he cites various passages from the account by Francesco Carletti (1573-1636), in which this Florentine merchant describes his major experiences during what appears to have been the first around-the-world journey ever undertaken by a tradesman.[86] In my opinion, the dual metaphor *homo viator* / *homo venator* befits Carletti, both for the "global pilgrimage" he undertook and his intense curiosity, which could be labeled as "anthropological" today. At the same time, one should not overlook his pragmatic (at times even cynical) interests, which – as was common back then, unfortunately – led him to participate in the slave trade. Understandably, such an overlap of various interests (travel, commerce, and the study of different civilizations) did not originate with this Florentine merchant. In fact, it is an ancient phenomenon. Centuries before Carletti, it had already provoked multiple (sometimes opposite) reactions, almost always dictated by ethical concerns. I will limit myself to two famous examples, beginning with the leading figure of classical encyclopedism, whose masterpiece had a significant impact on medieval and Renaissance culture: Pliny the Elder.[87] In several passages of the *Naturalis Historia*, Pliny condemns the morally corrupting effects of that obsession with exotic novelties into which the Roman elites of his time seemed to

86. See Carletti, *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo*, cit. and Caputo, *L'aurora del Giappone*, cit., especially pp. 273-320.

87. Pliny the Elder's wide influence was also felt in the visual arts, as shown by S. Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance: The Legacy of the "Natural History"*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 2013.

have fallen, as though in a hypnotic trance.[88] In the Italian Renaissance, one of the foremost advocates of this ethical viewpoint – imbued with ideas that today we might call "environmentalist" or "sustainable" – was Leon Battista Alberti.[89] On the other hand, those who openly praised exploration, its positive consequences, and the virtues that prompted it included (not surprisingly) some of the most prominent figures of Italy's mercantile culture from the late Middle Ages onward. Giovanni Boccaccio is a case in point. One need only look at this quote from the prologue to the tenth book of his *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*:

> It is a marvelous thing to behold, with the help of God's light, ships – devised by human ingenuity and built by human craft – gliding over the waves, driven by the breath of the winds, now with oars, now with sails unfurled, bearing great cargoes. And who would not marvel, thinking of the courage of those who, for the first time, entrusted themselves to unknown seas and untested winds? A spectacle that truly inspires awe. [...] Through these sea voyages it happens that the Cimbri and Celts, from opposite ends of the world, may come to know the Arabs, the Red Sea, and what the trees of the Sabean forests exude, or the inhabitants of Hyrcania and the region of the Tanais may learn of those of Atlas and the West and taste the golden

88. Such criticisms already abound in Pliny's second book, which actually serves as the first of his *Naturalis Historia*, since Book One is only an index of the subjects that the author is going to discuss; see Plin., *Nat. hist*., II.45.118; II.63.158; II.67.170 and II.68.174-75. In the Christian Middle Ages, as is well known, almost all ecclesiastical authors condemned long-distance trade and explorations (in keeping with the Church Fathers) as vices dictated by greed and a misleading kind of intellectual curiosity. In their eyes, the desire to accumulate material wealth and worldly knowledge were two similar sins stemming from the same insane ambition. Although it is difficult to pinpoint specific contributions addressing such broad and complex topics, I recommend the following studies as useful introductions: J. Le Goff, *Lo sterco del diavolo. Il denaro nel Medioevo*, Ital. trans. by P. Galloni, Bari-Rome, Laterza, 2012 (original edition: Paris, Perrin, 2010) and M. Tasinato, *La curiosità. Apuleo e Agostino*, Rome, Carocci, 2000.

89. This tendency stands out, above all, in Alberti's *Intercoenales and Profugiorum ab aerumna libri*. Among the most recent studies on this famous (and in many respects truly extraordinary) author, see M. McLaughlin, *Leon Battista Alberti Writer and Humanist*, Princeton (NJ) – Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2024, especially pp. 146 and 159 for those features mentioned above.

> apples of the Hesperides. Likewise, those from the cold North and the Sarmatians may journey through hot Ethiopia, the Nile, and the unhealthy climate of Libya; the Spaniard and the Moor, once visited, may in turn visit Persia, India, and the Caucasus or those from distant Thule may tread the shores of Ceylon. And while all these people exchange goods with one another, it comes to pass that they not only admire each other's customs, laws, and habits, but that the one who – while observing the other – believes him to be of a different world and not surrounded by the same ocean, begins to build trust through trade. And so, they blend their ways and become friends. Also, it comes to pass that, while teaching their own languages, they learn foreign ones. Thus, navigation unites and brings harmony to those who, because of distance, were once strangers to one another.[90]

In the seven decades or so that separate Boccaccio's *Genealogiae* from the full development of Italian humanism (with its "rediscovery of classical antiquity", largely carried out through a substantial number of translations from Greek into Latin) a more refined version of this praise of human industriousness and ingenuity develops in the treatises centered around the idea of *dignitas hominis*. As evidence of such extraordinary qualities, humanists often mention engineering, the visual arts, and landscape architecture, through which the work initially sketched out by the Divine Creator is said to reach its ultimate perfection.[91] The same spirit

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90. I quote (and translate into English) from the proem to the tenth book of Boccaccio's *Genealogiae* (parr. 2-3); see G. Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, ed. by V. Zaccaria, in Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, ed. by V. Branca, vol. VII, Milan, Mondadori, 1998, pp. 966-69. On this passage, see R. Morosini, *Rotte di poesia, rotte di civiltà. Il Mediterraneo degli dèi nella Genelaogia di Boccaccio e di Piero di Cosimo*, Rome, Castelvecchi, 2021, pp. 70-72.

91. See, for instance, G. Manetti, *Dignità ed eccellenza dell'uomo*, Ital. trans. by G. Marcellino, with an introduction by S.U. Baldassarri, Milan, Bompiani, 2018. Giannozzo Manetti (Florence, 1396 – Naples, 1459) wrote his *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* in 1452, dedicating it to King Alfonso V of Aragon ("The Magnanimous"). For an English translation of this text, see G. Manetti, *On Human Worth and Excellence*, Cambridge (MA) – London, Harvard University Press, 2019. For a survey of these topics (including landscape architecture) and the related fifteenth-century sources, see my article *City Views, Maps and Panegyrics in Quattrocento Florence*, in «Letteratura Italiana Antica», XVIII, 2017, pp. 423-34.

pervades most European descriptions of Chinese gardens (regarded as supreme examples of harmony and balance between earth and sky, man and nature) as well as many projects by Jesuit architects in the Far East.[92]

All these activities require skills and materials that only exchanges between distant regions can provide. Supporting what Shirahata argues in his essay discussed above, the contribution to the ISI Florence-Kanazawa conference proceedings by Professor Maria Grazia Petrucci (*Monsoni, mercenari, e mercanti: i corsari giapponesi e gli europei nelle rotte marittime asiatiche*) reconstructs the complex interactions that led, among other things, to the spread of European firearms in the Far East during the XVI century.[93] Moreover, through meticulous research that complements – from the Eastern perspective – David Cordingly's famous study on pirates and privateers in the Caribbean, the Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean during the XVI-XVII centuries,[94] Petrucci sheds light on the political, military, and commercial dynamics that, for a long time, involved mercenaries, merchants, missionaries, smugglers, and high-ranking dignitaries in both China and Japan. Among the goods sold or traded in this dense web of relations were sulfur (needed for making gunpowder), silk, and European rifles.

A contribution that fits neatly into this context is that of Professor Francesco Vossilla, founder and president of the Società di Studi Giuseppe Castiglione, named after the famous Jesuit artist who worked in China for over fifty years, from 1715 until his death in 1766 in Beijing. In his essay *Francesco Sambiasi SJ, Vittorio Riccio OP and Their Contacts with*

92. See, for instance, the essays by L. Zangheri, *The architecture and the hydraulics of the Xiyang Lou (Western Mansions)* and C. Benocci, I *giardini dei gesuiti a Roma e sui Colli Tuscolani: il noviziato di S. Andrea e il Macao, in Ferdinando Moggi (1684-1761) architetto e gesuita fiorentino in Cina*, ed. by S.U. Baldassarri - C. Cinelli - G. de Juliis - F. Vossilla, Florence, Pontecorboli, 2018, pp. 113-23 and 149-73, respectively.

93. *Europa ed estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 119-32.

94. I refer to the useful study by D. Cordingly, *Storia della pirateria*, Ital. trans. by A. Tissoni, Milan, Mondadori, 2003, (original edition: New York, Harcourt Brace, 1995), which – however – pays little attention to the Far East. A recent volume that contributes to fill this gap is *The Problem of Piracy in the Early Modern World. Maritime Predation, Empire, and the Construction of Authority at Sea*, ed. by J. Coakley - C. N. Kwan - D. Wilson, Amsterdam-Cambridge, Amsterdam University Press - Cambridge University Press, 2024.

Zheng Zhilong and Zheng Chenggong,[95] Vossilla reconstructs the many relationships – often intricate and dramatic, at times not without touching moments and a sense of genuine friendship – that developed between the two Italian missionaries mentioned in the title and some of the most prominent figures on the Far Eastern political stage of their time. These missionaries often played a key role in relations and conflicts involving Portuguese merchants, Southeast Asian pirates, Japanese lords, as well as the Chinese and Spanish emperors. Standing out among such figures are Zheng Zhilong (1604-1661) and Zheng Chenggong-Koxinga (1624–1662), father and son, both pirates and merchants, whose rise and fall coincided with the collapse of the Ming dynasty and the gradual rise of Manchu-Qing rule.

The ISI Florence-Kanazawa volume of conference proceedings ends with a sort of flashforward, that is, an essay on the early days of photography in late nineteenth-century Japan. The author is Marco Fagioli, a renowned expert in Japanese art and the history of photography, who already contributed an article to the symposium that ISI Florence and Kanazawa University organized in 2016.[96] On this occasion, Professor Fagioli has chosen to discuss a series of photographs that Felice Beato (Venice, ca. 1832 - Florence, 1909) took during his long stay in Japan.[97] These are foundational works, as Fagioli explains in his essay, for better understanding the impact that the culture of the "Land of the Rising Sun" had on Europe in the late XIX and early XX centuries. As is well known, that influence extended far

95. *Europa ed Estremo Oriente*, cit., pp. 177-93.

96. See M. Fagioli, *La scoperta moderna del Giappone e l'Italia,* in *Italia e Giappone a confronto*, cit., pp. 61-75. Professor Fagioli also participated in the Moggi symposium organized by ISI Florence and the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno: see M. Fagioli, *L'immagine filmica dei gesuiti in missione: un confronto tra Mission (1986) di Roland Joffè e Silence (2016) di Martin Scorsese,* in *Ferdinando Moggi*, cit., pp. 213-31.

97. In addition to the bibliography listed in Fagioli's essay, see A. De Angeli, *Captured Glimpses of Modernity and War* in *Late Qing China,* in *East and West Entangled*, cit., pp. 137-57, especially p. 141 for the seminal role that Beato played in the early history of photography in the Far East.

beyond the visual arts.[98] One need only think of opera,[99] the contemporary literary output of a figure as unique in many respects as Lafcadio Hearn between 1898 and 1904, or the short stories that Marguerite Yourcenar wrote in the 1930s. In regard to Western literary exoticism, a stylistic tendency often found among European authors setting their narratives in the Far East is the search for a light, almost fairytale-like or didactic tone, resembling an apologue or a parable, often concluding with some sort of dreamlike escape from reality or a "fade-out" effect. One can observe this, for instance, in the first of Yourcenar's *Oriental Tales* (probably the most famous, about the old Chinese painter Wang-Fô and his disciple Ling).[100] In *How Wang-Fo Was Saved*, Yourcenar draws on a Daoist parable to tell how an exquisite painter (Wang-Fô) is forced by the emperor to make one last painting on a silk scroll before being executed, thus meeting the same fate as his beloved assistant Ling, who had just been killed in front of the whole imperial court. Obeying the emperor's order, Wang-Fô starts painting the sea and a boat; gradually, the objects he paints become alive and replace the tragic reality in which he started his last artwork. In the end, Ling miraculously comes back to life and flees with Wang-Fô, while the emperor's palace is being filled with water. Here are the closing paragraphs of this Yourcenar short story in Alberto Manguel's English translation:

> The fragile boat in the foreground now filled the whole first plane of the silk scroll and the sound of oars splashing in the water could

98. Especially in regard to Italy from the late XIX century onwards, see F. Morena, *Arte giapponese e Liberty italiano, in Italia e Giappone a confronto*, cit., pp. 151-81 and Fagioli, *La scoperta moderna del Giappone e l'Italia*, cit., both with vast and up-to-date bibliography. See also M. Monserrati, *Searching for Japan: 20th Century Italy's Fascination with Japanese Culture*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2020; Id., *Cosmopolitan Possibilities in Translation: Luigi Barzini's Views from the Russo-Japanese War, in Italia e Giappone a confronto*, cit., pp. 129-49; R. Bruni, *Parise: il viaggio in Giappone come esperienza estetica*, *ibidem*, pp. 17-31; S. Catitti, *The Japanese Roots of Carlo Scarpa's Poetic Architecture*, *ibidem*, pp. 33-75, and F. Vossilla, *Some Examples of Artistic Exchange between East and West, particularly from the Japan-China-Italy Perspective*, *ibidem*, pp. 237-62.

99. On this, too, see Morena, *Arte giapponese e Liberty italiano*, cit.

100. See M. Yourcenar, *Oriental Tales*, Engl. trans. by A. Manguel, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1985.

be heard in the distance but came closer and closer and grew louder and louder, till it filled the hall of the Son of the Sky. Then it stopped and only the melancholy dripping of the raised oars broke the imperturbable silence. It had been some time since the red irons heated to close old Wang-Fô's eyes had gone out and become cold in the hot coals of the executioner's brass bowl. The courtiers, immobilised by the etiquette of the court, stood on tiptoe reaching for breath above the waters that filled the room without walls.

The water finally reached the Imperial chest and Ling, for it was Ling who rowed the boat, a tear in one sleeve still un-darned since it had been ripped that very morning by the soldiers at the inn, wore around his neck a strange read scarf. Wang-Fô said to him with sweetness, as he continued to paint: "I thought you were dead". "While thou live, how could I die?".

He helped his master into the boat. The green jade ceiling reflected in the still waters and the braids of the courtiers floated beside their heads like serpents, while the pale head of the Emperor floated like a lotus above the wetness.

"Look my disciple", said Wang-Fô with melancholy, "these poor unfortunates will drown, if they haven't already. I didn't know there was enough water in the sea to drown an Emperor. What can we do?".

"Don't worry master, they will soon be left without even a memory of having been wet; only the Emperor will retain a bit of marine bitterness in his heart as memory of this moment. These people weren't made to lose themselves in a painting".

And he added: "The sea is tranquil and the wind favourable. The marine birds are making their nests; shall we be underway, Master, to a country the other side of the waves?".

"Let's embark", said the old painter. Wang-Fô took the tiller and Ling bent over the oars; their cadence filled once again the room without walls, firm and regular as a heartbeat. The water's level lowered around the majestic vertical rocks that turned back into pillars and very soon only puddles on the floor remained and a little

> sea foam on the emperor's sleeve.
> The roll of painted silk sat on the low table and the boat that filled its foreground receded slowly in the sea of blue jade invented by Wang-Fô, until it became so small only Ling's scarf and the Master's long beard could be divined.[101]

Another example of this fade-out effect applied by a European writer to a tale set in the Far East is Italo Calvino's well-known chessboard description in his *Invisible Cities*. In this case, the young Marco Polo – through a sort of role reversal (or a turning of the tables, to use a metaphor particularly akin to the setting) – teaches the mighty Kublai Khan the art of observation:

> "Your chessboard, sire, is inlaid with two woods: ebony and maple. The square on which your enlightened gaze is fixed was cut from the ring of a trunk that grew in a year of drought: you see how its fibers are arranged? Here a barely hinted knot can be made out: a bud tried to burgeon on a premature spring day, but the night's frost forced it to desist".
> Until then the Great Khan had not realized that the foreigner knew how to express himself fluently in his language, but it was not this fluency that amazed him.
> "Here is a thicker pore: perhaps it was a larvum's nest; not a woodworm, because, once born, it would have begun to dig, but a caterpillar that gnawed the leaves and was the cause of the tree's being chosen for chopping down … This edge was scored by the wood carver with his gouge so that it would adhere to the next square, more protruding...".
> The quantity of things that could be read in a little piece of smooth and empty wood overwhelmed Kublai; Polo was already talking about ebony forests, about rafts laden with logs that come down

101. *Ibidem*, pp. 20-21.

rivers, of docks, of women at the windows …[102]

In concluding this essay, I must admit – in a rather melancholic way – that Jack Goody is probably right when, criticizing the concept of "European exceptionalism" (and more broadly, of "Western primacy"), he states: «In reality, comparative history is still largely a dream».[103] A similar disillusionment must have affected XVII-century historians, when – in their attempt to carry out the new encyclopedic project launched by Renaissance humanism – they came to the bitter conclusion that the number of civilizations to be studied was far greater than had previously been imagined – just as the universe itself, thanks to Galileo's telescopic observations, proved to be far less predictable, concentric, and orderly than had been supposed.[104] The "humanist dream", to borrow the fortunate formula coined by Francisco Rico,[105] was transformed – metaphorically speaking – into a cognitive nightmare. In the realm of historiography, its consequences were twofold: on one hand, overly ambitious (an inevitably vague) "universal histories"; on the other, valuable works on specific –

102. I. Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, Eng. trans. by W. Weaver, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1974, pp. 131-32. For the Italian original, see I. Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, Mondadori, Milano 2002, pp.129-30 (first edition 1972).

103. J. Goody, *The Theft of History*, cit., p. 23. Goody's disappointment is made worse by his awareness that there exist, in fact, close relations and many reciprocal influences among Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Eastern peoples; see Goody, *L'Oriente in Occidente*, cit., pp. 359-75 (section titled *Appendice. Antichi legami tra Oriente e Occidente*).

104. On the wide, deep, and complex impact that Galileo's astronomical discoveries had on early seventeenth-century European culture, see the detailed essay that Andrea Battistini wrote to introduce one of the reprints of Maria Timpanaro Cardini's outstanding Italian translation of the *Sidereus Nuncius:* G. Galilei, *Sidereus Nuncius*, Venice, Marsilio, 2010 (first edition 1993). It is worth remembering that the first edition of Galileo's ground-breaking treatise was published in 1610, the same year Matteo Ricci died.

105. See F. Rico, *Il sogno dell'umanesimo. Da Petrarca a Erasmo*, introd. by G.M. Cappelli, Ital. trans. by D. Carpani, Turin, Einaudi, 1996 (original edition: Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1993).

much narrower – themes.[106]

Today's situation is undoubtedly much better than in the early modern period; despite the ongoing persistence of nationalism, I believe progress has been made even compared to some twenty years ago, when Goody published the first edition of *The Theft of History*.[107] This is due to various factors, not always limited to the academic sphere. One need only consider the ongoing phenomenon of migration, the triad of values encapsulated in the formula *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, or the concept of *humane education*.[108] Despite many inevitable doubts, one thing is certain: we wish to avoid the attitude of those British colonists who – in Forster's *A Passage to India* – host a "bridge party" to improve relations with the locals but, when trying to speak their language, fail to realize they only know how to conjugate verbs in the imperative.[109] In the field of "international education" I often notice this unconscious colonial paradigm even in people who are genuinely well-intentioned.

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106. See A. Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Likewise, in the realm of natural sciences, early modern European discoveries expanded traditional boundaries in an unprecedented and almost "mesmerizing" way; a clear, "semi-popular" approach (in the best sense of this expression) to this vast topic is the one offered by Charles Mann is his now-classic book *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*, London, Random House, 2011. For an Italian translation see C.C. Mann, *1493. Pomodori, tabacco e batteri. Come Colombo ha creato il mondo in cui viviamo*, Ital. tran. by C. Lazzari, Milan, Mondadori, 2013.

107. On nationalism and related forms of mythmaking, Benedict Anderson (1936-2015) carried out seminal studies ever since the first edition of his *Imagined Communities* in 1983; see B.R. Anderson, *Comunità immaginate: origini e fortuna dei nazionalismi*, introd. by M. d'Eramo, Ital. trans. by M. Vignale, Rome, Manifesto libri, 2009 and the bibliography reported therein. Eric Hobsbawn, Terence Ranger, and Ernest Gellner are among the scholars who have made a particularly significant contribution to this field. For a sociological approach to these issues, see K.A. Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*, London, Profile Books, 2018. For an Italian translation (by F. Santi) see K.A. Appiah, *La menzogna dell'identità. Come riconoscere le false verità che ci dividono in tribù*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2019. For a useful and up-to-date survey, see H. Mylonas – M. Tudor, *Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know*, in «Annual Review of Political Science», XXIV, 2021, pp. 109-32.

108. On conflict resolution and an objective approach to historical analysis, I find so-called Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to be an interesting case, starting with those set up in South Africa in the 1990s; see F.R. Ankersmit, *Past, Present, and Future,* in *Theories of History. History Read across the Humanities*, ed. by M.J. Kelly – A. Rose, London – New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. 104-18, especially pp. 108-17 and the bibliography reported therein.

109. See E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, cit., p. 34 (Part I, Ch. 5).

Having translated dozens of texts from various ancient and modern languages into both Italian and English over the past thirty years, I believe that valuable insights against any temptation (or drift) toward ethnocentrism can be found in studies devoted specifically to the theory and practice of translation.[110] I am also convinced that a healthy blend of humility, dedicated study, and extended stays abroad can help develop a better *forma mentis* for a world that – whether we like it or not – is now undeniably globalized.[111] To this end, I believe that international conferences like those regularly organized by ISI Florence and Kanazawa University can contribute to create an ethical community and foster better mutual understanding among diverse cultures.

110. In this regard, I recommend the writings of an acclaimed specialist like Antoine Berman. See, for instance, A. Berman, *La prova dell'estraneo. Cultura e traduzione nella Germania romantica*, Ital. trans. by G. Giometti, Macerata, Quodlibet, 1997 (original edition: Paris, Gallimard, 1984), especially the suggestions he offers in the *Conclusione* on pp. 225-44.

111. I fully subscribe to what Longxi writes at the end of his essay *The Myth of the Other*, focusing on how the West has decided to interpret the East so far throughout history: «Once China or Japan is recognized as truly different, that is, not as the imaginary Other with its history of Imagery in the Western tradition but as a country with its own history, and once the desire to know the Other is genuine enough, being part of the desire to expand the horizon of knowledge in the West, it becomes necessary to demythologize the myth of the Other […]. To demythologize the Other is surely not to deny its distance, its alien nature, or the possibility of its poetic charms, but to recuperate real rather than imaginary differences. The beauty of real difference or the aesthetic of the Other cannot be truly appreciated unless various misconceptions are exposed and the false polarity between East and West is totally dismantled. To demythologize the Other is not to become self-alienated in adopting alien values, but eventually to come back to the self with rewarding experiences» (Longxi, *The Myth of the Other*, cit., pp. 130-31). I find this approach also useful to avoid a dangerous "flight from reality" that seems to characterize many political leaders today. On this, see the latest book by the renowned US psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton: R.J. Lifton, *Losing Reality. On Cults, Cultism, and the Mindset of Political and Religious Zealotry*, New York - London, The New Press, 2019.


alumni

Navigating Intersectional Identities Abroad

Ahmya McCoy

> "To be Black and queer is to be conscious of the prejudice that the system has in place to go against you. Carry a legacy of resilience and creativity, to stand at an intersection that constantly redefines strength and self-acceptance. Attempts to tear us down Our identities, rooted in the struggles and triumphs of our ancestors, hold space for a future that welcomes difference as a source of power and unity." - *Ahmya McCoy.*

The moment I decided on University of Connecticut as the school where I would spend my next 4 years earning my undergraduate degree, I knew at some point that studying abroad was a goal of mine. My older sister had obtained her MBA from Syracuse University and studied abroad in Rome for a year, which inspired me by seeing the beneficial experience she gained, thus making me feel even more encouraged in this endeavor. I was introduced to two choices before deciding on a study at an abroad location; one was The London College of Fashion, the other ISI Florence. With my individualized major on the rise centered in the fashion business, my advisors kept these two choices in mind regarding the arts. Later, it came to my attention that ISI would be the most cost-efficient option and after doing further research I knew this would be the best choice, since it would be something out of my ordinary thus getting a true study abroad experience.

Regarding my study abroad experience, I often wondered about the prospective treatment that I may face being in a space that is unbeknownst to me in all aspects. Those around me such as family and friends often would "warn" me about potential racism I may face. However, I did not let those warnings discourage me in any way and kept an open mind

about my prospective experience. One thing I did know for sure is that I didn't know the language, the culture, or the people. But how could I? I grew up in a predominantly black and brown community in the most diverse borough of New York City, Queens. The only times I got a glimpse of Italian culture was when I would go to SoHo New York and go to our "Little Italy" section. Or when I would go to the Bronx to eat at my favorite restaurant named *Venice*, to get my usual "Linguine with white clam sauce" or what I would later know to be called "Linguine alle vongole." The workers there knew my father well and treated him like a brother; so, I always had high hopes for the Italian community. While I truly enjoyed the culture of the Italian Americans that I knew, I still understood there was so much to learn and so many differences from Italians who live in Italy. For all these reasons, I was excited to embark on this journey.

But what did this mean for ME going to Italy? During my time in Florence, Italy I have done some research into some local black Italian lives. In doing so, I have found some stories that varied in response to their existence and identity here in Italy. I began this research by contacting the co-founder of "The Recovery Plan" Justin Thompson. "The Recovery Plan" is a research center that "fosters transnational exchange around Afro descendent cultures and peoples employing research, production, and documentation in relation to cultural production as a means for examining the history and contemporary legacy of Blackness in a global context". Founded by Justin Thompson and Janine Gaelle Dieudji in September 2019 but officially holding space at SRISA (Santa Reparata International School of Art), this center was created to bridge the gap between Italy and the black migrants who predominantly come from the Mediterranean area and recover historical inaccuracy while encouraging transnational dialogue. Another notable work that comes out of the Recovery Plan is the "Black History Month of Florence," which Justin co-founded with his friend Andre Hyrad. Justin is a black media artist, cultural facilitator, and educator originally from Peekskill, NY. However, he left at a young age and has been based in Florence since 1999. He studied painting and drawing, thus becoming an artist. He studied for his undergrad in

Tennessee and moved all around from states like Kansas, California, and New Jersey. Yet none of these areas seemed to pique his interest or be the right place to start his career as an artist. Once introduced to the idea of studying abroad he was all for it, because he knew that his professors in the States weren't pushing him enough or stimulating his creativity.

Justin then decided to embark on this journey to study in Florence and immediately realized the major differences in the treatment of Italy vs. America. He told me that in the 1990s a lot of illegal drugs (especially hashish) were being sold in Italy. Hashish was predominantly sold by North Africans. Since he fit the aesthetic or description of some North African men, during police checks he would often be stopped. Although this sort of racial profiling did happen, Justin made it clear that it was nothing compared to the extent of the same phenomenon in the US. In the US, he often felt a tremendous amount of fear when having to be in contact with authority figures. The climate around race is different in the States and he understood how it could be a life-and-death situation in a matter of a second, if he even gestured or spoke in the wrong way. In Italy, instead, he noticed that police officers did not try to belittle citizens because they were in a position of authority and that interactions with them were very respectful and civil; they simply just asked for identification and went on about their day.

In terms of the overall treatment he received from Italians, Justin told me that it was basic racism but out of ignorance, such as being called "Bob Marley" or whatever else they wanted to call him due to a lack of knowledge of him and blackness in general. As for language, Justin was studying basic Italian before his study abroad experience and then further got accustomed to the language while making some friends in Italy; he didn't see it as a barrier. Overall, he explained that Florence felt more like home than the US ever did and had this energy about it that he has been looking for artistically and creatively. He felt very pushed while being in Florence for a year as a student; that's why he eventually decided to start a new life in that city and has then stayed ever since.

After getting in touch with Justin Thompson, I was able to speak

with one of his staff workers from "The Recovery Plan": Benedicta Djumpah. Her experience as an African Italian woman was extremely important to me as I am aware of the huge differences between the experience of an American-born Italian versus an Italian-born person with African heritage (let alone a woman). She discussed how growing up in the late 90s and early 2000s being the daughter of African migrants who moved to Italy was hard, because there was a lot of ignorance around her status and a lot of stereotyping. Benedicta grew up in predominantly white spaces and felt as though being the only black person also meant that there was no room for more. She mentioned how in primary school she especially felt like she always stood out. While she stated how the ignorance in Italy led her to be looked at a certain way often with stereotyping, she also mentions how in Italy there was that kind of openness that made it possible for her to find comfort and call that place "home." Benedicta and her family originally lived in Rome. She then moved to Florence to work with The Recovery Plan due to her passion for history and art and her involvement with the community to educate others on the African diaspora. She pointed out something very interesting about the "hypervisibility and invisibility of black bodies", which means that you are either not seen at all or seen too much. As a woman, she would often be anxious in other spaces outside of her home (i.e., Italy) and felt that she would often be too visible to others, which in turn would make her feel self-conscious. She felt this a lot when she studied abroad in the UK. At a young age, she would be approached by older men and felt that she couldn't embrace her own body fully. She was often hyper-conscious of how she dressed or walked into a space because of people commenting on her looks. In a city like London, which is more multicultural, she did feel like she was seen in a bit more normal way and being appreciated for her beauty and blackness, which empowered her (unlike in Italy). However, when walking or going into shops she would be harassed and followed more often than in Italy. She told me how the intersectionality of being black, foreign, and a woman put her in a weird position depending on where she was because she was praised for her self-being on one hand, and she was harassed for

it or not praised enough on the other.

Gaining insights into Benedicta's and Justin's experiences was extremely useful to me. It allowed me to open my mind a bit in terms of Italy's treatment of people of color. For the most part, I gathered that both of them feel a sense of home and have created a community in which they feel they belong. With this information, I was still left with the question of how one with queer identity is treated.

After interviewing both Justin and Benedicta on their experiences as to being people of color in Italy, I was left very curious about the queer community here. While reaching out to those who could give me information on what it means being in the Italian peninsula, I felt that my task was a bit hard, as I didn't see many such communities based in Florence. I was then introduced to Kali Swaid who is a Fashion Design professor at FIT, an English language teacher, and a diversity & inclusion counselor. Kali identifies as a Middle Eastern woman of trans experience. So, she was able to give me insightful information about her experience moving to Florence and describe related specific initiatives taking place in that city. Kali explained to me that during her transition (which occurred ten years ago) Italy gave her a huge helping hand in making this possible for her. She came from a country like Saudi Arabia, where not only is being queer dangerous but the very act of identifying as a woman makes you a man's property. In this regard, she saw no potential growth by staying in her home country; she thus ventured off after having been introduced to Italy from her past studies there when she was younger. Kali has been living in Italy for ten years now and she feels more accepted than ever before in terms of her identity. As a trans woman of color, she has been able to create a safe space for many others and has invoked a sense of belonging in those that she comes in contact with. She has done work with many organizations outside of her professional career; among them, IREOS stands out. There she serves as a photographer for one of their biggest events: "The Florence Queer Festival". The Florence Queer Festival is an annual event that showcases different queer films in various languages. I was able to attend one of those days, despite my busy schedule. It was

on that occasion that I interviewed Kali. When I entered the theatre, I felt as though the staff of the organization was a bit unwelcoming, almost as if they had never seen a person of color before. I then proceeded to greet them and ask more about the festival and their other initiatives. A staff member told me that they started as an organization focused on counseling and aiding parents with younger children. Despite their doing such initiatives, I still felt like Florence didn't show clear signs of having a queer community or queer spaces. On top of this, I think it's essential to add that there were no visibly queer people of color at the event I attended or that I would see casually in the streets. That is why I say there is a clear lack of representation. Also, I feel that there are few public initiatives for the queer community in Florence if compared with nearby cities such as Bologna or Lucca. For instance, last fall Lucca hosted the annual Tuscan pride parade, which I was unfortunately unable to attend. Finally, I have the impression that Florence likes to stick to its own, very traditional "Renaissance"-like historical heritage and is still in the process of becoming more open in terms of queer spaces.

Regarding my personal experience as a visibly black and queer person of West Indian heritage from New York City, while in Italy I encountered endless things that will shape me for the better. To begin with, my experience in Florence has been one that will be unforgettable in many ways. I think that, as often happens, there have been many pros and cons. However, my optimistic outlook on life has allowed my pros to outweigh the cons. In regard to my intercultural identities and my interests, Florence was something completely different for me; it seemed to lack both resources and diversity. One prominent thing that I noticed immediately was the amount of white Italians that partake in doing black hairstyles. While this was not something new to me, I had never seen it as often as in Italy. The contradiction that struck me, though, was that while partaking in black hairstyles like locs or braids, Florence provides little to no resources for people with black hair textures to get the proper care or products for their hair. This slightly affected me because at home I do have a location that specializes in doing my hair and I do not allow others to

do it. Having those vital products in Florence would have been nice. Although I did find something that was sufficient enough while being there, I was glad I had taken with me some products for my hair's well-being.

In terms of social life, I'd like to think of myself as a social butterfly, at least at times. Lately, though, due to my father's passing. I have been pushed into a bit more isolation. This has made me more of an ambivert, so to speak. While being here I went out as many times as I can count on one hand: and yet, each time it was a different experience. For the most part I did not really like the club/bar scene in Florence. As a dancer, I am usually looking for other dancers to vibe with and my genre of music is more varied than what they will play in general clubs. Nevertheless, while in Florence I did enjoy two sessions I went to with MelaninPop Events, when they played a diverse selection of music from Amapiano to Brazilian funk. Speaking of MelaninPop, they also have skillful dancers that will have fun with you there and throw you in the center, which I enjoy doing as a performer. As for the more ordinary clubs that my counterparts in this program usually go to, I had the feeling I would not like them much. However, I did go to see them, trying to have a good time anyway.

Unfortunately, one of the lowest moments during my time in Florence was when I decided to go out with my white roommates to a club called *Space*. *Space* is mostly known as a study abroad club. While suspecting that I wouldn't necessarily like the music or the energy in that club, I still wanted to be a team player and go out with my roommates to bond with them. Honestly, though, things didn't start out well. Throughout that evening, before going to *Space*, I felt small nuances of microaggressions from the staff at *The Lion's Fountain* pub. Yet I kept pushing through and ignored any negativity. Upon reaching the club, I again felt singled out from the security outside of the establishment, which was very unwarranted. While only being in the club for 5 minutes, I needed to use the restroom and proceeded to ask the security that was inside where it was. He pointed to one that was in front of me and one that was upstairs. I looked to see which line was shorter, as I needed to use it promptly; the one in front of me had no line, so I proceeded to that bathroom. As I

am very comfortable in my skin as a black non-binary person who uses they/them pronouns, I do not usually focus on the labeling of gender in bathrooms. Another security guard who happened to be right in front of the restroom said I could not use that bathroom, as it happened to be the men's room, and pointed upstairs. I replied that his colleague had told me that I could use this bathroom, but he immediately became hostile and slapped me across my face. At the same moment, a second security guard cuffed my arms and carried me out of the club, as if my blackness and queerness were a threat. Before I knew it, I was walking home alone late in Florence. I was in a state of shock, and I still very much am, having yet to find the words to describe the assault that happened that night. I think those who love me feel pity for me, but I do not want them to. I think at that moment I became stronger. The only thing I wish I had at that moment was a sense of community; my roommates were not around and did not know of this. But even after telling some of them, I felt as though this went right over their head. I believe that my intersectional identities and the amount of racism, homophobia, and heteronormative ways that Italians hold is the reason for the actions that night. Coming from one of the biggest and most accepting cities in the world, while keeping in mind that society may not be as accepting of who I am, I still have been able to embrace all that I am and live unapologetically as myself. Instead of allowing that moment to encapsulate my entire experience in Florence, I decided to make the most out of my semester abroad. Have I fully found a sense of belonging in that Italian city? No. However, I did find spaces that, if I could spend more time there, I could make my own and call them a haven. What happened at that club was simply an attack on the visual perception that some people have of me, not what I really am. It also has to do with the hate against what they believe me to be. All this doesn't break me: it shapes me, instead. No matter how much it could have affected me, I did not let it get the best of me. I was stronger than I ever was after that moment, because I knew I couldn't allow that to happen to me again. While I did not return to that place to protect my peace, I know that I could in any aspect reclaim my hardships.

Outside of that experience, I can say that there is some sort of openness toward this. In the early stages of my Italian language course, when learning the pronouns and how they are used with specific verbs, I questioned my Italian professor on how Italians would use my pronouns, and if they would at all. She was honest and told me they would be confused since this is a very binary country but if those are my pronouns, she would respect me in that and use them.

Overall, this experience has pushed me out of my comfort zone in ways that I never thought of and allowed me to challenge myself in all respects. I do not regret my decision at all, despite the hardships. Through gaining research I opened up my horizons and discovered realities like *The Recovery Plan*, which is doing a great job of creating a safe environment for people of all backgrounds, where they can connect, learn, and celebrate culture together. I wished that I found that in the queer community in Florence. However, I have high hopes that soon there will be more of that exposure. As for my personal interests, I was able to take some dance classes with *SayWhat Studios*. It was great to see that they have people dedicated and committed to different genres of dance; they stay true to their authenticity while not losing their own Italian flair. Being a fashion student has been phenomenal for me in all regards. I now feel more inspired than ever before to start my genderless clothing brand and just go for it. The people I have met in Italy overall have been very welcoming and I have been introduced to some remarkable individuals, places, and things that I can take back with me to the States. Learning about Italian culture and visiting cities like Rome, Venice, Milan, and Alghero has shown me the vast difference of things you can gain from being in Italy. My time in Florence has been unforgettable and I am walking away with my head held high, a new language skill under my belt, friends for a lifetime, and a heart filled with beautiful memories to recollect.

FOMO Abroad

Budgeting and Balancing Personal Needs

Justus Miller

FOMO, if you didn't already know, stands for fear of missing out. It is that feeling of worry and anxiety that arises when you realize that other people are doing something that you are not. It can be your friends, it can be acquaintances, it can be absolutely anybody or a group of somebodies doing something, and it has gotten so much worse with social media. Because now, even if you hated having to say no to a group trip, or checked your bank account and realized you can't fly out for another weekend, or simply have another commitment or school work to be doing while others experience something, when you look at your phone, you see the photos, you see the story videos, and the group photos tagged with everyone who is not you. Even if it is total strangers, you feel like every single stranger did something you didn't. FOMO is not quite jealousy, but a little sigh-worthy moment, a quiet linger of dissonance.

One would argue there are different variations and levels of FOMO, some so minuscule that you would not even use that term to word it, and perhaps you don't.

The typical type of FOMO one thinks of is situational, where you are missing out on some event, whether that is a trip, an experience, or a night out at the bar. It can be simply being unable to participate or join the event, not receiving an invite, or seeing what others are doing and thinking you are not doing or seeing enough. This can be exacerbated with social media, as clips of skydiving in Interlaken flood the stories, and seemingly everybody does a Dublin or Ireland photo dump after St. Patrick's Day Weekend. Overall, this is like a single moment sparking the feeling that one experiences, and then passes by.

Another level is social FOMO, where you might feel like a group of friends is bonding without you. This can occur and be a bit difficult when you are abroad, as you are meeting and bonding with new groups of peo-

ple constantly, and trying to figure out who to hang out with. However, it can also be in relation to home friends, where you are worried about the status of your friend groups and your relationships. Perhaps you note your best friend always hanging out with other people, or your friend group has a new couple, and you are unsure of the vibes and what it will be like when you return. Both of these are fine, and both are normal, but both run deeper than just a simple occurrence, and can be understood as a sense of anxiety.

Then there is a FOMO that can occur in relation to your time abroad, perhaps thinking you're not maximizing every second of it. Typically, this is less about missing a certain thing or worrying about relationships or people, but rather stressing about how much time you have. It is looking at your time abroad as a time limit, worrying if you are doing enough, experiencing enough, and seizing every moment. It can be when you regret taking a chill day, or sleeping in because you think you need to be outside doing something, or traveling somewhere because you are only abroad once. At some level, it initiates a future fear that you will look back and think you missed out.

This relates to an existential level of FOMO, where one ponders their performance in life, if they are doing it right. It is looking at your experience in relation to the broader expectation and milestones, if you are thriving and having that perfect life you think you are expected to have, and that you hear about, if you did all those bucket list items. It can also be in relation to regular life, as if you got your internship, if you have that summer job when you get home, etc. Overall, it is when you are having anxiety, and stress over what you perceive life as supposed to and meant to be or do.

Then there is that FOMO rooted in social media and our digital lives, which is bigger than those occasional situations. It is the constant streams and posts of others' lives on social media that you feel you have to be connected to in order to stay in the loop. It might be constantly watching stories, to stay updated on lives back home, or staying signed into your sorority email to be up to date on what is going on. It is the

pressure coming from a notification, or lack thereof. It is trying to stay connected back in your home time zone. It is the feeling that you need to post and share what you are up to.

Either way, at some point in your experience abroad, there are going to be times you wish you were somewhere, with somebody, or missing something. It can be missing home, and your family movie nights, or college and your friends meeting up for drinks or a sports game. It can be your friend group abroad, on a trip, perhaps posting, perhaps not, while you are elsewhere, or going out to the bar with other friends without you. At some level, at some point, you will experience FOMO, at any of the levels, and that is a hundred percent okay, and completely normal. Perhaps, you feel a different type, or a combination of one's both myself and friends have felt, either way, it is okay, and it is normal. Acknowledge those feelings, do not suppress them, ignore them, or try to act like they do not exist, because they do.

Once you are able to note them, potentially taking time to figure out exactly how you feel and what is giving you those feelings, you are able to figure out the best way to address it. Perhaps that is stepping away from your phone, without the notification updates, and the subconscious click to scroll through your social media platforms. Maybe all you have to do is turn off your notifications, or put your phone on silent for a bit, or maybe it's better to always put your phone up at a certain time in the day. Taking that time to unplug can be refreshing, as it removes what is triggering the feelings, but also gives you that time to step back, quiet the jumble, and reset. It can be reshaping your thoughts and the narrative you are telling yourself. Noting that what you are seeing is not every single person's experience, and that you are only seeing what people choose to post. Looking at what you are doing, what you are gaining, perhaps you need a rest day and you are having a relaxing, chill moment. Stop the comparison and focus on yourself. Studying abroad can be an amazing time to learn about yourself as a person and grow. What do you want to do? What do you want to gain? What do you want to experience? Without the influence of somebody else, or what you see or hear, you have to. Re-

alize that you are living your own life; you cannot miss out on something if you are living out your intentions, your expectations, your decisions, and your definition of what matters. Similarly, create your own moments, and have things you do for yourself. This can be a small ritual, such as a coffee or sweet treat once a week, or a solo thrift or museum moment, or even a little evening walk, or sunset at Piazzale Michelangelo (a personal favorite). For a good friend who is eating bacon, to remind her of home and touch some grass after a long week where everything seems hectic. It can be absolutely anything, with the point and intention to do something that makes you feel like yourself, that keeps you grounded and a bit sane as you undergo so much in so little time. In relation to others and relationships, embrace those around you and be present, and set aside time to call and connect back home. Connect with those around you, cook a meal together, plan a hangout, or just talk. The people who can relate to you the most are those around you, as they also left home to study abroad; they are in the same place, taking the same classes, in the same school. It can be comforting to share a feeling and talk things out with others, knowing that you are not alone. Additionally, when it comes to friends and family back home, set time to talk to them, perhaps you have a set call time, or send a voice memo or two for the mini update moment. No matter what, know that your relationships have been built over time, and those closest are not disappearing with a little distance between you.

Studying abroad brings a lot of change, new experience, and new feelings; but embrace it, and those feelings. Realize that you are part of a small percentage of the entire world population that is having this opportunity, and even if you spent every day in your bed, you were in a bed hearing new sounds, in a new city, in a country across the world. Look at the positives and how amazing this opportunity is. Studying abroad is not about how much money is in your bank account, how many countries you go to, or how many "big" experiences you have. It is seeing a new part of the world, experiencing a new culture, and doing school in a new place. It is about learning a bit about yourself, doing things for yourself, and seeing the world through your own eyes. Seeing that the world can

be walking through a new neighborhood, journaling on a park bench or the riverside, or spending a day market shopping. It can be trying a new gelato flavor or testing out different cafe pastries. Rather than a fear of missing out, it should be a joy of missing out, a joy that you are doing what you want to do, that you are having your own experiences. It is finding the joy in your present life, finding the things that make you happy, and embracing them, living your life rather than focusing on or thinking about anyone else's. Only you can build your meaningful, authentic, once-in-a-lifetime experience, so build it for you, live for yourself, not for or through somebody else.

Budget Your Study Abroad Experience with Me!

Why is it important to budget while abroad?

Budgeting is important. It is a life skill that helps you with financial stability and helps set a baseline where you are controlling your money and where it is going, being aware of your spending. It allows one to save for an automobile or meet financial goals such as paying off debt, or loans. While studying abroad is not quite the same, one is still paying for tuition, rent and course fees, which may have been fully paid prior to your arrival, but also have travel, groceries, dining out, perhaps shopping for clothes, souvenirs, etc.

When studying abroad, everybody is coming from different monetary backgrounds, some solely using a parent's card or others have a monthly amount, while others have saved up various amounts from jobs, scholarships, and grants, with only a set amount of funds to spend throughout the semester, and without an income. If you have worked, you are typically used to a bi-weekly paycheck to budget with, or perhaps a monthly benefits check, or parents dropping money in your account, and studying abroad could have changed that, and typical students do not have a paycheck. This means that the money in your account is likely not increasing at any given time, solely decreasing as you lack an income

but still have expenses.

Every study abroad student has a different amount available to spend, and it is important to get an idea of yours, such as to make potential travel plans, allotted amounts to eat out and try new foods, as well as have experiences. While doing this, it is important not to compare your funds to others, noting different backgrounds, and that having different amounts of money does not need to limit your study abroad experience. Money is solely an aid, which may lead you to different things, perhaps an underground bar, or more authentic fresh markets; and having a budget, and sticking to it is not shameful, but rather respectable and responsible of you.

What happens if I don't stick to my budget?

ADJUST! Whether that means adjusting the amounts you have allotted to different categories, or need to adjust your spending to stick to it. It is important to be flexible, not to let money be a stressor or put a damper on your study abroad experience, but rather note how to improve and do better.

Personally, I have failed a budget or two, things like dropping your phone in the Venice Canal or forgetting to validate a tram ticket end up with you spending a couple hundred that you were not expecting, or did not budget for. This is understandable; you are only human and life happens. Whether it is your first or seventeenth time budgeting, you are learning life skills and growing as a person. However, this also has led me to understand the importance of an emergency, or as I call it an 'oopsies' fund, to ensure a couple hundred dollars are set aside in case something happens, because you truly never know.

Making a Budget: Try a Spreadsheet.

Feel free to search for a budgeting sheet, available on Google Sheets and Excel, and customize it to fit your budget. Edit categories to match what you need, feeling free to add or edit them throughout your experience. You can also convert an Excel into a GoogleSheet or vice versa.

If a spreadsheet is not for you, there are many budgeting apps available for purchase or download. Additionally, some banks incorporate a budgeting tool for planning purposes, and make it available to you from your account. Look into your bank and find out their resources.

Budget on Your Own: Step by Step Guide to Creating Your Own Budget.

For starters, one needs to decide how much money they have and allotted to spending during their time abroad. One can leave it like that and divide certain percentages into various categories or take the semester budget and divide it into months, and then into each category. For example, if you are allotted twenty-five hundred dollars for the semester, you can either divide that into the 4 months studying abroad with $625 dollars a month and budget that each month, or take your entire study abroad amount of $2500 and allot an amount, such as $400 for groceries, and then divide that into the 4 months to have roughly $100 a month towards groceries. Either method works; it just depends on what is easier for you to break down and budget.

Once you have established your set amount per semester or per month, decide what your spending categories will be. This can include groceries, eating out, nights out (including club cover fees, and drinks at bars, etc), travel (which can be divided into subcategories of flights/transportation, accommodations, food budget, souvenir shopping), fun funds (for experiences, like wine tastings, or pasta making class), or any other categories you want to categorize, and then most important a little oopsies funds (just money set aside in case of something unexpected). One would recommend fairly medium sized categories, not too broad that it is difficult to categorize what falls where, but not too niche that budgeting becomes tedious.

Now, allot a certain amount or percentage of the budget into the categories. Noting which ones are more and less necessary and important. Such as groceries, and eating out may be a bit larger given you need to have food and eat everyday, and that category does not need as much as your nights out and buying drinks at the bars and paying your club

covers. Feel free to research certain percentage breakdowns, or use the spreadsheet budget as inspiration below.

Now that you have your percentages, and your budget for your study abroad, you can break this down into monthly, or weekly or bi-weekly to ensure you are sticking to your budget and adjusting as you see fit.

As you swipe your card and are spending, be sure to track your transactions, either keeping record of them, or signing in once a week to check, make this part of your like weekly chores, such as on your laundry day, you do your budgeting while they are in the wash. Tracking transactions can seem a bit tedious, but checking your bank account and noting how much you spent allows you to be prepared for your future, and ensure you won't be struggling as much at the end of your semester

As you budget, note how much you over or underspent, possibly adjust your categories to better reflect where you spend the money, and keep that monthly cap on the budget. If you have extra funds, you can decide to save them, or add them into your next budget because a little extra cash never hurts.

My Little Notes and Suggestions.

I highly recommend a little oopsies fund. I hope you do not need to use it, but I used this to pay for hospital bills (which get refunded, but may need to use for a moment). My suggestion would be roughly $250, or fifty to a hundred a month. And if you do not use it, then it can be extra spending money etc.

I also recommend that with travel, you book it early. So you may be spending more in that first month or two booking and planning all of your travel information, paying for flights, and your accommodations. With your budget, you can either budget a bit more to those travel categories in those earlier months, or when booking the travel, add it to the transactions and amount you spent in that month. For example if you have $200 a month for travelling, and you book your spring break when you arrive in January, be sure to subtract your $60 dollar flight from your

March travelling budget, or make your January travel budget closer to $300 and update your march to $100 and leave it as a January travel cost.

Extra Little Tips to Stick to Your Budget.

Sometimes it can be helpful to take out physical cash, and use that. This becomes especially true when it comes to spending money of the week. It can be easy to use ApplePay or just go around tapping and swiping your card, and while cash sometimes may also feel like fake money, it is not as endless. Limit how much cash you carry with you, perhaps you only take a 10 euro in your bag on your way out, and limit yourself to really think about what you are spending your money on. Perhaps that limits you to only coffee and a croissant for the day, to go back home to cook lunch. When grocery shopping, perhaps you do not pick up all the extra random sweets and chocolates, but limit yourself to just one or two to stick to your budget.

Additionally, when taking money out of an ATM, be aware of the conversion rates. I would suggest declining the automatic conversion, and charging your bank account in euros. This also applies with some online purchases, especially if using Paypal, as you will need to select your card, and then change the conversion to charge your card in euros, as Paypal's conversion rate typically runs higher than the banks. This also applies if a business offers your USD or Euro, as the business conversion rates are almost always higher than the rate your bank uses.

Marine Biology on the Island of Elba

Allison Morello

This past May of 2024, I had the incredible opportunity to take a Marine Biology course abroad in Italy along with thirteen other students from Penn State University. This program lasted four weeks and took place both in Florence and on the Island of Elba. I was beyond excited about this course, as marine biology, the ocean, and sustainability have always been my passion. I was so thankful to have had the opportunity to travel and experience Italy, which was a country I had never visited before.

We first began our studies in Florence, where our class time was focused on learning about marine biology, experimental design, and Italian culture. During our time in Florence, we had the opportunity to design a research proposal on various topics related to marine organisms in Elba. My group, with the help of our incredible professor, Dr. Rebecca Branconi, decided to investigate the health of corals on the island. Specifically, we wanted to research the distribution and overall health of the *Balanophyllia europaea* coral. This coral is prominent in the waters surrounding the Island of Elba and other parts of the Mediterranean Sea. By the time we arrived at our destination, we had outlined our research plan and were ready to observe these corals.

Once we were on the island, we underwent training to conduct this research. We students had so much fun trying on our snorkel gear and learning how to properly swim with it. To our surprise, it wasn't long before we were able to identify and record findings for the *B. europaea* coral in the open sea. Throughout this process, we observed many healthy corals and successfully collected data. While conducting our research, our group had become attached to these corals and enjoyed assessing their health. During one of the final days of research, after a period of exceptionally hot weather, our group spotted a bleached coral. Coral bleaching


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(i.e. when corals are heavily stressed by changes in environmental conditions such as temperature, light, or nutrients and expel the symbiotic algae living in their tissues causing them to turn completely white) is linked to anthropogenic effects, such as rising seawater temperatures, acidification, or pollution. We were all extremely devastated by witnessing the effects of global warming on marine life. While this was a heartbreaking finding, it became one of the most impactful takeaways from the trip. I have truly become more conscious of my personal contributions to global warming. Consequently, one of my main goals now is to educate others about what they can do to solve this crisis.

This course, offered by Penn State and ISI, has been one of the most wonderful and impactful experiences of my life. It has inspired a desire to travel the world and embrace other cultures and experiences. I will forever cherish the time spent with Dr. Branconi and my fellow students

during this incredible experience on the Island of Elba and in Florence. I hope that other students fortunate enough to take this course in the years to come will find it just as meaningful and memorable.

Finding Foundlings:
A Student's Journey into the *Archives of the Innocent*

Saketh Mandayam

While studying at ISI Florence last semester, I had the incredible opportunity to work with Professor Gaston Basile in the ISI Scholars program. Part of the reason I had chosen ISI Florence for study abroad was to develop my undergraduate research project. I am focusing on children in the early years of the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence, the first modern orphanage founded in Europe. More specifically, I am interested in children of enslaved descent, whether they were connected to the Black Sea slave trade or the emerging Portuguese trade network. Studying abroad in Florence gave me the perfect chance to work directly with the *Archivio dell'Ospedale degli Innocenti di Firenze* and consult original documents tied to my research.

When I enrolled in the Scholars Program, I was paired with Dr. Gaston Basile, who quickly became more than just a research supervisor – he became a close mentor and friend. We met over Zoom before I departed for Italy to discuss the project and introduce ourselves. Once I arrived in Florence, we established a schedule for the semester to structure my time in the archives.

I also participated in the Medici Archive Project's one-week paleography seminar during my first week of classes. Alongside a group of mostly doctoral students, I learned from many scholars how to read handwritten Italian documents from the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. One of the many visiting scholars of this program was Dr. Basile. Having a familiar face helped during a seminar where I often felt a bit behind, given the advanced coursework. I could not attend every lecture due to my ISI classes, but the seminar was a great way to get initial exposure to the types of documents I'd be working with.

Walking into a centuries-old archive in a foreign country was honestly intimidating at first. I had worked in archives in the U.S. before, but

always in English and a setting I was more familiar with. In Florence, I had to deal with language barriers, old handwriting, and the general pressure of not screwing anything up. Dr. Basile joined me for my first few visits and helped me get my bearings — both with the documents and with the incredibly helpful archivists.

The first visits at the Innocenti were a "feeling out" process, so to speak. I started with entrance records of black children, which scholars like Kate Lowe and Angela Zhang had already written about. Since I was already familiar with the general content of these records, these served as a good way to test my ability to read and interpret the material. I am still learning Italian, and while living and studying in Italy certainly helped, I am not fluent. I initially felt frustrated and overwhelmed – at times, it felt like I was flipping through incomprehensible text.

So, I decided to refocus my archival objectives. Seeing as there was already extensive scholarship on black children in the Innocenti, I narrowed my scope to the first two years of the Innocenti's operations, 1444-45.

I looked through all of these documents, taking scans of the papers that mentioned the word *schiava*. *Schiava* was a term used in these documents to denote an enslaved person - many records from these first two years mention children that are born explicitly of a *schiava* (enslaved woman). The way the record keepers wrote the word *schiava* was very distinctive; so specifically searching for this one phrase (and other repeated phrases) made my work more efficient and the documents less daunting.

As the semester stretched on, I started going to the archive independently. I targeted the specific documents, scanned and organized them, and built a system. By the end of the semester, I had around 30 documents from 1444-45 that I could analyze in depth, ones that scholars had not previously discussed.

Parsing the details of individual records was often difficult – I could understand some parts, but I needed Dr. Basile's help to fully interpret some of them. One fascinating case was a record about a child named Giovanni Innocente. He was taken in by the hospital in March 1445 and adopted in 1454 — which was rare. Even more interesting, we found a

mention of Giovanni di Bartolomeo di Michelozzo (brother of the famed Renaissance artist Michelozzo) in the record making a contract fully detailed in the *Ricordanze*, a separate part of the archive that focuses on the hospital's operations and finances. We even had the exact date of this contract — November 6, 1445 — but it was still difficult to track down the full details. Many leads from the *Balie e Bambini* (the section of the archive that details the entrance of a child to the Hospital) didn't pan out when cross-referenced in the *Ricordanze*, though occasionally something would come up entirely by chance.

I was looking in the *Ricordanze* for the year 1482, hoping to find mentions of enslaved children being adopted. I flipped to a page with a register of all the children in the Innocenti at that year and came across a likely black child identified as Ghaberotto Nero. Ghaberotto hadn't been mentioned by Kate Lowe or Angela Zhang — the two leading scholars on this topic — which made the find even more exciting. As I learned firsthand, the best discoveries in an archive tend to be unplanned and improvised.

Overall, working with the ISI Scholars Program and spending time in the Innocenti archives was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. Opening those huge Renaissance-era books and realizing I was handling something a record keeper had six hundred years ago was surreal. Dr. Basile's guidance meant a lot, and the Scholars Program gave me the structure and support to pursue serious research abroad. As I head into graduate school, I plan to return to Florence to keep following those threads I uncovered — and maybe, one day, piece together the full stories of Giovanni, Ghaberotto, or others whose lives deserve to be known.

None of this would have been possible without the ISI Scholars Program.

A New Life in Italy
Overcoming Culture Shock

Joelle Zamperini

Hello! My name is Joelle Zamperini, and I am a rising 4th year student at the University of Virginia. My third year started out like most, and then took a twist when I made the life-altering decision to study abroad in Florence, Italy. The choice felt natural. With family traditions rooted in Italian heritage and a heart set to see the world, I was eager to embark on my journey across the world. Endless pasta, gelato, and European adventures at my fingertips. What could go wrong?

In the weeks before my semester abroad, I spent most of winter break reading posts and watching videos on packing tips, travel guides, and must-see destinations – all curated into aesthetic videos that depicted the study abroad experience as effortlessly fun. While it is true that these will be some of the best months of your life, reality always creeps in. Leaving home and adjusting to life in a foreign country will undoubtedly present an array of challenges. However, I want to reassure that these hardships are what makes the experience not only transformative, but worthwhile.

There will be hurdles (lots of them). But at the end of the day, studying abroad is incredibly rewarding. I am here to share some insights that I believe helped me navigate the hard times and fully embrace the discomfort. After reading, I hope that you can identify some takeaways that will allow you to do the same.

Embracing the Adjustment

Upon arriving in Italy, one of the foremost important steps (and maybe the most obvious) is to acknowledge that you are living in this new destination. This experience is a marathon, not a sprint. While it will feel unnatural at first, try to accept Italy as your home and not a temporary vacation destination. Keep in mind that those initial weeks may feel like you are moving 100 miles per hour but finding a sense of balance

early on is critical. I recommend gradually establishing a routine, even a flexible one, so that there can be some form of structure and stability when everything else in your environment is uncertain.

Your routine will look different from the one you have established at home, but do not let that scare you. Let it excite you! The goal is to incorporate small, yet meaningful habits that can support your mental and physical well-being. Take myself as an example: At home I am a devoted coffee drinker and will never pass up a trip to Dunkin Donuts. In Florence, I incorporated those habits through a combination of brewing Italian roasts at home and exploring local cafés. With a cappuccino costing as little as one to two euros, that daily coffee run elevated to not only more delicious but delightfully affordable.

Another area I learned to adjust was my exercise routine. At home, I relied on a yoga studio membership, but in Florence, I had not found the need for one. The city is incredibly walkable, which offers countless opportunities to get steps in while discovering the scenic side roads of Florence – killing two birds with one stone! Walking not only served as a form of exercise, but a great way to further my connection with this wonderful city.

While adjusting my routine proved beneficial, it is important to recognize that it took time. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or anxious in the process, remember that you are not alone. These feelings are not only normal, but critical. Give yourself grace and recognize the magnitude of the step you have taken. Acknowledge your emotions – excitement, fear, uncertainty, or something in between – and allow them to ground you in the present moment. These feelings are not setbacks. These feelings are part of your journey to newfound growth.

Understanding the Differences

In addition to building a grounding routine, an equally important part of this process is recognizing and embracing cultural differences. You are only living in this new country for a few short months, so why spend it wishing everything was the same as home? I encourage you to embrace

what makes this transition unfamiliar and unique.

As it may come to no surprise, one of the most significant differences I experienced as a study abroad student in Florence was the language barrier. While some locals speak English, you will hear this new foreign language everywhere in daily life. At first it felt suffocating, but as I learned new words and phrases it felt inspiring. However, some words of advice: If I could go back in time, I would have dedicated more time learning Italian beforehand. Download Duolingo – even 10 minutes a day can make a noticeable difference. Don't get me wrong: the Italian instructors at ISI Florence did a fantastic job in cultivating an engaging learning environment, but having a better foundation can make those initial weeks feel less daunting.

Another hurdle was grocery shopping. To put it lightly, my first trip did not go exactly as planned. While it may feel overwhelming at first, take comfort in knowing it gets better (like most parts of studying abroad). To avoid pacing the aisles and leaving not only frustrated but empty-handed, here is my best advice: come prepared with a list, knowing the Italian translation for items. If you still find yourself lost, familiarize yourself with asking for help in Italian. Whether you get an English response or point in a general direction, this is far more effective than wandering the store in confusion. The same guidance applies to pharmacies, home good shops, and any other convenience store. While Florence has many of the items you will need, I recommend packing any specific haircare, skincare, or wellness item you rely on in advance. Shipping packages is timely and particular items may not be readily available near the city center.

In regards to other differences – the list is infinite. Whether you choose to spend most weekends in Florence or traveling to other countries, it is undeniable that you will continue to encounter countless cultural nuances. Every country, city, and neighborhood will be characterized by their own rhythms, and I encourage you to treat it all with curiosity and respect. These few months are a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to immerse yourself in ways of life that differ from the American norm. Embrace the contrasts and find beauty in the diversity of it all!

Balancing Comfort and Exploration

While adjusting to a new country requires stepping outside your comfort zone, it does not mean you need to abandon the habits you love. There is always a way to achieve balance; finding it is the kicker. From my personal experience, it takes trial and error and is undoubtedly a personal journey. Begin by solidifying a routine that makes you feel whole, and then gradually take baby steps with unfamiliarity. Don't be afraid to test the waters, but feel secure knowing you have your safe spaces to resort back to.

Try Florence's incredible cuisine, but also stock your kitchen with groceries that make you feel your best. If you're used to cooking certain meals at home, find ways to recreate them using local ingredients – perhaps even adding a creative twist. Visit the market to explore new fruits and vegetables, then treat yourself to gelato with friends. If exercise is important to you, you don't necessarily need a gym membership. Florence's scenic neighborhoods and green spaces offer the perfect backdrop for long walks or outdoor movement. Go out with classmates on a Thursday night, but also honor your need for rest – sometimes a quiet evening with a book is exactly what you need. Discover your favorite spots around the city and let Florence become a place of comfort and familiarity. That way, when you return from weekend trips, you'll find peace in the space you've made your own.

One of the most helpful practices I adopted was loosely planning my weeks, especially when I anticipated high-energy travel days. If I knew I'd be away from Friday through Sunday, I intentionally structured Monday through Thursday to include restorative habits. For me, that meant cooking meals at home, setting aside mornings for long walks or workouts, and scheduling dinners with friends. This rhythm helped me strike a healthy balance between routine and adventure. While it may take some trial and error, carving out a structure that works for you can make all the difference in maintaining a fulfilling and sustainable study abroad experience.

Navigating Travel

Have you ever wondered how so many study abroad students can

afford the frequent weekend trips to a large number of different countries? Well, if you did not already know, European public transportation operates slightly different than its American counterpart… Let me break it down: convenience, proximity, and affordability. Truly, it is by no surprise that this is one of the major incentives for students to embark on the journey. While these new and exciting norms are very enticing to American students, it is important to keep in mind that the reality of public transportation requires flexibility and patience. Take Italy as a prime example: train, tram, and bus strikes are unpredictable, especially in contrast to American infrastructure. While I encourage exploration, it is important to exercise caution and awareness.

As you adjust to Florence, you will be pleased to find it an incredibly walkable city. Just about anywhere can be reached by foot. In fact, I went the first two months before knowing how to utilize the bus system! This is definitely to your advantage. Walking is an amazing form of exercise that allows you to simultaneously discover the city's hidden gems. Some of the best initial advice I received from ISI staff was "wander and get lost." Florence's quaint streets and shops reward those who stray from the bustling city center. Appreciate this aspect of Florence: it is one of the many things that sets it apart from other study abroad locations.

This leads me to my next point: a new set of rules that accompanies traveling beyond Florence. To begin, trains are one of the most common form of region and cross-country transportation and I recommend you to familiarize yourself with the system. In Italy, Trenitalia and Italo are the two main providers and booking in advance was often helpful to secure reasonable prices. However, always account for delays and occasional platform changes by incorporating buffer time into travel plans. In any uncertain scenario, tickets can also be bought at in person booths and representatives are often present to aid in any other complications. While unexpected hiccups are inconvenient, they are bound to happen. Make an active effort to remain positive and calm; these burdens breed adaptability.

Like trains, air travel is also shaped by regional nuances. Budget airlines such as Ryanair and Vueling made it possible to explore Europe at

incredibly low fares, but this affordability came with trade-offs. Many of the most cost-effective flights departed from secondary airports like Pisa or Bologna, requiring additional planning and transportation time compared to flying directly out of Florence. These airlines also limit what's included in the base fare – carry-on luggage often incurs extra fees unless carefully sized. My friends and I quickly learned the art of packing light, squeezing a weekend's worth of essentials into a single small backpack. Exceeding the size limit could result in surprise fees upwards of $80 – that is one expensive mistake!

Above all, travel taught me the art of flexibility and patience. Whether I was waiting 2 hours for a delayed train in Switzerland or navigating the metro system in London, I gradually learned to appreciate the unembellished journey. Work alongside your friends and remember that the ISI Florence staff is there to help in cases of emergency. Not everything can (or should) be figured out alone. It was on the weekend trips that did not go "as planned" that I learned to cultivate the connections that were integral to my most meaningful moments abroad.

Go with the Flow

While there are countless steps you can take to ensure your study abroad experience goes smoothly and according to "plan," at some point, you'll need to learn how to let go of the reins. Take it from someone who likes to be in control – at home, I follow a strict routine and head into each day with clear expectations. Unknowingly, one of the most valuable lessons I learned while abroad was how to embrace the opposite. Things won't always go as expected – and that's okay.

Flights will get canceled. Buses will be delayed. Cell service will be unreliable. These inconveniences are inevitable, and ironically, it's in navigating them that you grow the most. One of the first challenges I encountered was during my first weekend trip to Rome. Three friends and I had just lined up to visit the Vatican when, out of nowhere, my phone screen stopped working. At first, I assumed it was a minor glitch – something that would resolve on its own. My friends reassured me,

but by the end of the day, it was clear: my phone was done for. Our dinner reservations were canceled as we made an emergency trip to the Apple store. After waiting several hours, I was told to return the next day. The following morning, we walked 30 minutes across the city, only to be told they were out of stock – I would have to wait until I got back to Florence. In that moment, I was devastated. I broke down, called my parents in tears, and seriously questioned whether I was cut out for this experience.

And yet, I continued the rest of the trip – phoneless, slightly frazzled, but present. I visited the Colosseum, wandered through St. Peter's Basilica, and admired the beauty of the historic city in a way I might not have with a screen to distract me. Looking back, that small crisis was a turning point. It forced me to be more adaptable, lean on others, and find positivity in hardships. While there are some things we cannot control, we can control our mindset. While I cannot predict the inconveniences you may face, I can assure you that every setback is a new step forward.

Make Florence Your Home

Whether you are preparing for, considering, or simply just curious about studying abroad, I hope my honest reflection has provided insight and inspiration. While there is no step-by-step comprehensive guide to navigating culture shock, my goal was to share an honest outlook that captures the experience in its true complexity and beauty.

If you are contemplating taking this leap and parts of my reflection surprised you, let that be a source of preparation! Study abroad entails a roller coaster of emotions: comfort and discomfort, excitement, and fear. No matter the day, strive to find your own balance. Hold on to habits that ground you but keep an open mind to the unfamiliar. Make friends with locals, try foreign cuisine, visit new cities. Dive in, but most importantly, extend yourself immeasurable grace along the way.

This chapter in your life will contain many ups and downs and will evidently pass faster than you think. While I cannot predict how your

experience will pan out, I can wholeheartedly ensure that you will look back with gratitude for the growth and moments that shaped you. Whatever comes – a challenge, discovery, disappointment, or memory you will cherish forever – lean into it all. The world is waiting for you!

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