SAGGI

Iniziative per la diffusione della lingua e della cultura italiana nella Cina pre-1949

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Abstract

The Promotion of Italian Language and Culture in Pre-1949 China

Until recently scholars who have examined the diffusion of the Italian language in China have focussed on the People's Republic of China. However, we have proof of early teaching and cultural activities by Italian schools in China since the late 19th century.
Most of them though were run by Catholic missions receiving financial support from the Italian government and initially they did not include language teaching, due to the locals' lack of interest. The reason for this was to be found in the weak diplomatic, political and economic role played – particularly when compared with other foreign powers. This was clear to Italian diplomats – yet a real breakthrough for the popularization of Italian schools and cultural associations occurred only as a consequence of the bold propaganda of the Fascist government from the 1930s onwards.
The paper, mostly based on official written evidence from the diplomatic archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also exhibits some rare grammars and manuals produced in China at the beginning of the 20th century.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy; Italian schools abroad; China; teaching materials; fascist propaganda.