

The Problem of a National Literary Language in Italy and in China in the 20th Century: Antonio Gramsci, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Lu Xun

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ABSTRACT

The Italian scholar and political leader Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an active opponent of the dictatorial government ruling his country before the 2nd World War. He was kept in prison for 11 years, until his death, by the ruling Fascist Party and during that time he filled over 3,000 pages, writing about Linguistics, History and Philosophy. He was concerned with the duty of Italian progressive intellectuals to create a ‘common literary language’, accessible to the underprivileged Italian people, who until then had been excluded from culture. After the war, during the sixties of last century, a ‘common Italian language’ started developing, through the introduction of the 10-years long compulsory school and the increasing power of mass media: that language was not fit to become the common literary language of the Nation. The writer and movie director Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975), who in his novels gave voice to the sub-urban proletarians of the city of Rome, was highly unsatisfied with the new common language that was in the process of being established in the country. As for China, when the imperial system was abolished by the ‘Xinhai revolution’, in 1911, the belief became increasingly widespread among intellectuals that the rebirth of China had to be based in the global rejection of the Confucian tradition and that the ‘Báihuà’ (people’s language) should be adopted in literature, replacing the ‘Wényán’ (classical language), not accessible to the common people. Lu Xun and his colleagues eventually succeeded in their efforts of establishing the ‘Báihuà’ as the common literary language of China. Purpose of the paper is the comparison between the efforts exerted by these literati in creating a ‘common literary language’ in their respective countries.

INTRODUCTION

Between the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century a theoretical approach to Linguistics found its source of inspiration in the French linguists Michel Bréal (1832-1915), the initiator of modern ‘Semantics’ (the science of ‘word significations’), the initiator of modern Semantics and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), author of “*Cours in General Linguistics*”. Saussure introduced the fundamental language dichotomies of ‘signifier and signified’ (where the ‘signified’ is a particular concept, while the words used to express it constitute the ‘signifier’), ‘langue and parole’ (where ‘langue’ is a language as a whole and ‘parole’ is a particular verbal expression), ‘synchronic/diachronic’ (where ‘synchronic’ is a language at a particular time and ‘diachronic’ is a language at a certain epoch), ‘syntagmatic and paradigmatic/associative relationships’ (where ‘syntagmatic’ is the relationship existing between a generic phrase and the strict rules of grammar and syntax governing it, while ‘paradigmatic/associative’ is a linguistic relationship between a phrase, or a single word, and another one, having the same meaning) (Allan, 2007).

As for Italy, the first theoretical studies referring to the possible adoption of a common vernacular language in liter-

ature date back to Dante Alighieri (1260-1321) who, between 1302 and 1307, wrote a long essay in Latin, entitled “*De vulgari Eloquentia*” (*On the eloquence in Italian vernacular*) (Gardner, 2016), addressed to the scholars of his time, where he examined the historical evolution of the vernacular languages of the various Italian regions and their grammatical structure, derived from Latin, recommending scholars to use, in high literature (*eloquentia*), the *volgare* (the Tuscan vernacular idiom of his times) instead of Latin, because the *volgare* possessed the freshness of a living language. Soon thereafter he gave literary dignity to this language, writing his “*Comedy*” (Brand & Pertile, 2008).

Italy had other important traditions in the use of vernacular in literature. Let us recall, before Dante, the *Sicilian Poetry School*, born at the court of the King of Sicily (and German Emperor) Frederick the Second (1194-1250) and, in more recent times, the playwrights Angelo Beolco (Ruzzante) (1496-1542), Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) and Gaspare Gozzi (1713-1786) in the Venetian region, and the poets Carlo Porta (1775-1821) in Milan, Giuseppe G. Belli (1791-1863), Cesare Pascarella (1858-1940) and Carlo Alberto Salustri (Trilussa) (1871-1950) in Rome, Gianbattista Basile (1566-1631) and Salvatore Di Giacomo (1860-1934)

in Naples, Giovanni Meli (1740-1815) and Luigi Pirandello (1867-1931) in Sicily (De Mauro & Gensini, 1980; Haller, 1999).

At the beginning of the 19th century the Italian linguist, philosopher and political leader Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), former student at the University of Turin, devoted many pages to the ‘*language debate*’, aimed to create a national idiom accessible to the *lower classes* (craftsmen, factory workers, farmers). Those pages appear in his “*Prison Notebooks*” (*Quaderni dal carcere*) (Gramsci, 1987), written during the eleven years of his imprisonment, from 1926 to 1937, as an active opponent of the Fascist regime (Gramsci, 2011). With the fall of the dictatorship the Italian ‘*language debate*’ took on new vigor. The poet, writer and movie director Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) intervened in that debate and, as a novelist, gave voice to the urban sub-proletarians of Rome, using their slang in his books (Pasolini, 2007, 2016).

In the same period as Gramsci, at the other end of Eurasia the literary critic and novelist Lu Xun (1881-1936), pen name of Zhou Shuren, who is considered the father of modern Chinese literature, took part in a similar debate, devoting his life to the task of making the ‘*báihuà*’ (*plain language*), i.e. the contemporary vernacular language from Peking, the literary language of China. A link between those debates on language in Italy and in China has been done by the Chinese literary critic Gao Yuanbao (2018) in a paper entitled “*Lu Xun takes a look at Italian culture*”, where he writes that Lu Xun, ‘*in his advocacy of an artistic and a spiritual consciousness, was deeply influenced by Italy and, in the acceptance of that foreign influence, his works strongly highlighted a unique perspective coming from that foreign civilization*’ (Gao, 2018).

Aim of the present paper is to illustrate and, as far as possible, compare the efforts of those scholars and writers to create in their countries a common literary language, accessible to the ‘*lower classes*’ and to the cultured people as well. The sources of our research are shown in the References. The paper is composed of Section 1 (*Introduction*), Section 2 (*Antonio Gramsci*), Section 3 (*Pier Paolo Pasolini*), Section 4 (*Lu Xun*), Section 4 (*Conclusions*).

ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Antonio Gramsci was born in the island of Sardinia in 1891. In 1911 he moved to Turin, to study History and Philosophy at the local university. There he became a pupil of the linguist and glottologist Matteo Giulio Bartoli (1873-1946), who taught him the linguistic theories of Bréal and de Saussure (Carlucci, 2010). At that time Italy was going through industrialization and Turin became the major centre of the automotive industry, recruiting workers from the underdeveloped areas of the country, Sardinia included. Gramsci joined the *Italian Socialist Party* in 1915; soon later he abandoned the university to devote himself full time to political activity. In 1919 he founded the weekly political paper “*Ordine Nuovo*” (*New Order*) and in 1924 became a member of Italian Parliament in the rows of the ‘*Communist Party of Italy*’ (*Partito Comunista d’Italia*), vigorously opposing the *Fascist Party* which was about to establish its dictatorship in

Italy. In 1926 he was arrested, spending 11 years in jail, until his death.

While in jail, Gramsci resumed his historical, philosophical and linguistic studies, writing 29 notebooks, posthumously published as “*Prison notebooks*” (*Quaderni dal Carcere*) (Gramsci, 1987), and several letters addressed to his sister-in-law (the Russian citizen Tatiana Schucht, at that time university student in Rome) and later published as “*Letters from prison*” (Gramsci, 2011). Gramsci’s thoughts, referring to philosophy, history and linguistics, animated in the sixties the Italian cultural life.

Gramsci starts his considerations about language observing that “*language is essentially a collective name, which does not presuppose a single thing, neither in time nor in space. Language also means culture and philosophy. and therefore the language is a multiplicity of more or less organically coherent and coordinated facts: each speaking being has his own personal language, that is, a personal way of thinking and feeling. Culture, in its various degrees, unifies a greater or lesser quantity of individuals in numerous layers that understand each other. These historical and social differences and distinctions are reflected in the common language*”.

He then continues pointing at the dichotomy existing between ‘*common sense*’ and ‘*sound thinking*’. In his words, “*each social stratum has its common sense and its sound thinking, which are basically the most widespread conception of life and humans. Every philosophical current leaves a sedimentation of common sense: this is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not something stiff and immobile, but is continually transformed, enriching itself with scientific notions and philosophical opinions that have entered the costume. The common sense is the folklore of philosophy and is always in the middle between the real folklore and philosophy, science. the economics of scientists. Common sense creates the future folklore, that is, a rigid phase of popular knowledge of a certain time and place*” (*Quaderno 24, paragraph 4, p. 2271*) (Gramsci, 1975).

People unconsciously absorb, with language, inconsistent prejudices. The problem arises then to *translate* into a language accessible to the people the terms of the question, bringing to the level of critical awareness what there is in it of incoherent. It is therefore clear that the ‘*linguistic question*’ becomes decisive. According to Gramsci, in those times Italy was lacking a ‘*national language*’ because it had been lacking, over the centuries, a ‘*hegemonic class*’, capable of producing a spontaneous consensus: centuries of foreign domination and, since 1861, a unitary state imposed from a French dynasty, the *Savoy*, settled in the North-West of Italy, to the entire peninsula: that dynasty had been felt as alien by the inhabitants of Southern Italy.

Three main linguistic units co-existed at that time in the country: several ‘*local languages*’ (*dialects*), a ‘*cultured language*’ spoken by the educated classes of the country and derived from the literary language of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), from which descended the ‘*standard Italian*’, used at official level but not well suited to literature

(Robey & Hainsworth, 2002). A third language was still used in the Peninsula, the ‘*medieval Latin*’, the official language of the Catholic Church in its encyclicals and liturgical ceremonies.

According to Gramsci, it was necessary that the *lower classes* (the craftsmen, the factory workers and the farmers), once they assumed a hegemonic role in the conduction of the state, produced a linguistic unity, to be obtained through a profoundly renewed school system, bringing the uneducated people to move from the exclusive domain of the dialects to a national language, grafting on the dialects the common idiom. It was also necessary “*to help the people to critically elaborate their own thoughts, in order to make them participate in an ideological and cultural community*”. An important problem then arose, the *translation* of complex terms into a language accessible to uneducated people: this problem was inherent in the very mission of the intellectuals supporting the ‘*philosophy of praxis*’ (that is, the *Marxian philosophy*), and who were seeking to achieve an *intellectual and moral reform*, radically transforming social relations. Gramsci observed that something similar had already happened in Germany during the 16th century, with Martin Luther’s ‘*Protestant Reform*’.

Gramsci mentioned Bréal’s words: “*All language is metaphor, and it is metaphorical in two senses: it is a metaphor of the ‘thing’ (i.e. a material and sensible object) and it is a metaphor of the ideological meanings attached to words in the preceding periods of civilization.*”

Gramsci’s premature death interrupted his studies in 1937. With the end of the Fascist dictatorship, the publication of his “*Prison notebooks*” and “*Letters from prison*” had a considerable influence in the definition of the role of intellectuals in democratic Italy and in the way of building up a ‘*national literary language*’, which could eliminate the traditional separation between *cultured people* and *common people*. The need for a concrete commitment in the political and social reality of the country became very vivid among Italian intellectuals: the keyword became Jean Paul Sartre’s call to arms, “*Engagement !*” (*Commitment*) (De Mauro & Gensini). The literary movement that arose from it was called ‘*New Realism*’ (*Neorealismo*), a word which recalled the fact that during the late nineteenth-century there had already been in Italy a literary movement called ‘*Realism*’ (*Verismo*) by Southern Italian writers as Luigi Capuana (1839-1915) and Giovanni Verga (1840-1922).

The main themes of ‘*New Realism*’ were episodes of the *partisan war* against *Nazi-Fascism* during the period 1943-45, the life in *Nazi’s extermination camps*, as described by Italo Calvino (1923-1985), Giuseppe Fenoglio (1922-1983) and Primo Levi (1919-1987) among others, the disbandment of intellectuals in the immediate post-war period, as described by Cesare Pavese (1908-1950), and finally the social rift of Southern Italy from the North, as described by Elio Vittorini (1908-1966) (Brand & Pertile, 2008).

Simultaneously to the literary movement of *New Realism*, a cinematographic *Realism* developed in Italy, which had a great resonance in Europe and North America, by initiative of the movie directors Roberto Rosellini (1906-1977),

Vittorio De Sica (1901-1974), Cesare Zavattini (1902-1989) (Thompson & Bordwell, 2010).

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

Pier Paolo Pasolini was born in Bologna in 1922, where he later studied Philology and Aesthetics. He spent the war years in Casarsa, in the Northwestern Friuli region, the native place of his mother. In 1950 he moved to Rome where, in the middle of an intense activity as a poet (Pasolini, 2014), novelist (Pasolini, 2007, 2016), literary critic (Pasolini, 1965, 2005) and movie director (Schwartz, 1992), was suddenly murdered in 1975.

In his novels “*The street kids*” (*Ragazzi di vita*), and “*A violent life*” (*Una vita violenta*) he gave voice to the ‘*sub-proletarians*’ coming from the countryside and living a precarious life in Roman suburbs. In one of his poems he wrote the following about those sub-proletarians: “*I watch them, these men educated to another life than mine: fruits of a story so different, and found, almost brothers, here, in the last historical form of Rome. I observe them: in all there is like the air of a pockmark who sleeps armed with a knife: in their vital juices lies an intense darkness. The evening exposes them almost in hermitages, in reserves made of alleys, low walls, entrance halls and little windows lost in silence. It is certainly the first of their passions the desire for wealth: sordid like their unwashed limbs, hidden, and at the same time denuded, devoid of all modesty: as without shame it is the bird of prey that flirts in anticipation of grabbing the morsel, or the wolf, or the spider; they crave money as gypsies, mercenaries, whores. They use flattery to obtain it, they complain if they don’t, they glory if they have their pockets full. If they work - good laborers like dogs - it happens that they still have the air of a thief: too much cunning in those veins*” (Pasolini, 1961).

Pasolini described that world with an extreme realism, and his best literary results can be found at the linguistic level. In those novels, the author adopted their jargon in the dialogues, while the narrative voice spoke the *standard Italian*. That linguistic choice could appear as the author’s intention to create a realistic and almost documentary work, but in reality it constituted the product of a linguistic research on the Italian popular languages, initiated with the study of the Friuli’s dialect, when he was residing there during the *Second World War*. The novelist and literary critic Elio Vittorini confirmed that impression in his “*Diario in pubblico*” (*Public diary*) (2017), observing that ‘*Pasolini presents, disguised as realistic, ...essentially philological interests*’ in his continuous lexical research of rare popular terms and in the syntactic construction of dialogues.

As for the ‘*common people’s language*’ invoked by Gramsci, Pasolini published in 1964 an essay entitled “*New language issues*” (*Nuove questioni linguistiche*) (Pasolini, 2005), where he carried out a critical analysis of the linguistic-literary panorama of Italy in the last twenty years (1945-1964), arguing that a true national language was being born in those years but, unfortunately, it was a ‘*technological language*’, created by initiative of a new ‘*ruling class*’, formed in the industries of Northern Italy, who considered

themselves as representing of the entire nation. He wrote: ‘*The lexical elements introduced and diffused by the industrialization are largely made up of lexical bases of languages other than Italian, that is, not only foreign to Italian but also to classical Latin.*’ He compared the influence and role of the Northern Italian industrials to the influence and role that the monarchies of France and England played in making those nations achieve linguistic unification: ‘*Now the radiating centers of the language are Turin and Milan, which do not give their dialects, but their technological language.*’

Since 1960, Pasolini successfully devoted himself also to cinema. In 1972, in his essay “*Heretical Empiricism*” (*Empirismo eretico*), he wrote that cinematography is the ‘*written language*’ of reality which, like any other written language, enables man to see things from the point of view of truth. This is the list of the movies that he directed: “*Accattone*” (*The beggar*) (1961), “*Mamma Roma*” (*Mother Rome*), “*Il Vangelo secondo San Matteo*” (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew*) (1964), “*Uccellacci e Uccellini*” (*The hawk and the sparrows*) (1966), “*Edipo Re*” (*Oedipus Rex*) (1967), “*Teorema*” (*Theorem*) (1968), “*Porcile*” (*Pigsty*) 1969, “*Medea*” (1969), “*Il Decamerone*” (*The Decameron*) (1971), “*I racconti di Canterbury*” (*The Canterbury tales*) (1972), “*Il fiore delle Mille e Una Notte*” (*Arabian nights*) (1974), “*Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*” (*Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom*) (1975) (Greene, 1990).

On November 2, 1975, Pasolini was brutally murdered for unknown reasons in Rome’s suburbs: he was buried in Casarsa, in Friuli, near his mother.

LU XUN

The problem of language in China at the beginning of the 20th century can be summarized as follows: the written language, utilized in literature, was the ‘*Wényán*’ (文言 *Classical Language*), originated during the late “*Warring States Period*” (5th century BC) and evolved during the various Chinese imperial dynasties, from the *Qin* (221 BC), *Han* (206 BC-220 AD), *Tang* (608-907 AD), *Song* (960-1279 AD), *Yuan* (1279-1368 AD), *Ming* (1368-1644 AD) dynasties to the *Qing*, initiated in 1648 AD and ruling the country until 1912. Like the *Latin* language in medieval Europe, *Wényán* was an exclusively written communication vehicle, used in parallel with vernacular languages verbally used in the various provinces of the Empire. Through the production of a literary corpus mainly written in *Wényán*, a written tradition, characterized by a textual and semantic stratification (produced by sedimentation from the contribution given by each author), was consolidated over the centuries. Access to the texts was limited to the few who, with vast scholarship, were able to grasp the allusions, references, quotations that were an integral part of the *Wényán*.

As far as the spoken language is concerned, alongside a multiplicity of dialects that existed from the earliest times, additional unofficial administrative languages were in use, that allowed oral communication between officials of the state of different geographical origin. These languages, which succeeded each other over the centuries, were based on *cultured variants* of the dialect spoken in the region where the capital

of the ruling dynasty had settled. That language was also used for the literary pronunciation of classical written texts and for the composition of poetic works. At the times of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the country’s capital was Beijing and the language spoken by imperial officials was the *Guānhuà* (官话 *Mandarin language*), from which in later times the *Báihuà* (白话 *White speech = vernacular language*) derived. Some of the “*Classical Novels*” from the 16th-17th centuries AD were written in *Báihuà*, but that language was looked upon with contempt by the scholars of *Confucian* education, as completely inadequate to express profound feelings (Fairbank & Twitchett, 1978; Abbiati, 1992).

Things began to change when the imperial system was abolished in 1911 by the ‘*Xinhai revolution*’: the belief became then increasingly widespread among intellectuals that the rebirth of China had to be based in the global rejection of the *Confucian* tradition and the country should be re-founded on new bases, inspired by the West (Furth, 1983). The Chinese scholar and writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) (pen name of Zhou Shuren) was the main architect of the introduction of *Báihuà* in literature. Born in Shaoxing (in the province of Zhejiang), he received an early education in the traditional *Confucian* and *Neo-Confucian* texts and continued his education at the “*School of Mines and Railways*” in Nanjing, where he came in contact with Western science, foreign languages and literatures. From 1902 till 1909 he was in Japan, where he intended to study Medicine, but in 1906 he abandoned the university to devote himself to the study of world literatures (Denton, 2002). He greatly admired the Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1260-1321), of whom he read the first part of the “*Divine Comedy*”, the “*Hell*”, from German translations. Lu Xun thought that Dante had utilized the Italian vernacular in his *Comedy* to educate Italian people, and wrote: ‘*Italy fell apart, but it was unified through Dante Alighieri, who used the Italian vernacular. The voice of Dante is still there. The basis of Italian unification is the new Italian language, especially the poet Dante made outstanding contributions to the establishment of the new Italian language*’ (Gao, 2018).

Back to China in 1909, Lu Xun and his younger brother Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967) adhered to the “*New Culture Movement*”, created in 1912 by the scholars Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), Hu Shi (1891-1962) and others, aiming at modernizing the cultural world of the country. Those scholars intended to achieve their goal through the adoption of a literary vernacular, as Dante did in Italy six hundred years before: the critical study of “*Classic Chinese Novels*” (*Gǔdiǎn xiǎoshuō*) and the massive translation of western masterworks from the 19th century were part of their program.

The “*New Youth*” (*Xīn qīngnián*) journal was their forum for heated literary debates referring to the ‘*vernacular movement*’. Hu Shi, Lu Xun and other Chinese lexicographer choose the ‘*classic novel*’ entitled “*Dream of the Red Chamber*” (*Hónglóu Mèng*), written in the 18th century by Cao Xueqin (1715/1724-1763/1764) in the Peking’s dialect (*Běijīng Bǎihuà*), as the proper model to establish the vocabulary of the new standardized language. To that purpose Hu Shi created in Peking the “*Doubting Antiquity School*”

(*Yí gǔ pài*), whose primary goal was that of establishing the authenticity of the 100 chapters of the text.

At the same time, those scholars also devoted themselves to an intensive translational of literary works, under the slogan: “learning from Western countries so as to save China”. During the period 1917-1937 over 2,000 foreign literary works were translated in Chinese by those scholars: 600 from English, over 450 from Russian and about the same amount from French, 250 from Japanese, 180 from German, 50 from Italian and slightly more than 100 altogether from authors of Denmark, India, Greece, Belgium, Poland (Chan, 2001). A great debate arose among the Chinese intellectuals, concerning the nature of *translation*: Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987) was a supporter of a ‘free translation’ (*Zìyóu yì*), in agreement with the recommendations of the ancient Buddhist monk (and translator from Sanskrit texts of Buddhism) Zhi Qian (222-252 AD), who had declared that a good translation should possess *faithfulness*, *fluency* and *elegance*: those recommendations had been followed for centuries by Chinese translators, until the last decade of life of the Qing dynasty. On the contrary, Lu Xun was an advocate of the so called ‘takenism’ (*Ná lái zhǔyì*), i.e. the introduction of Western syntactic structures, derived from European works, into Chinese, according to a ‘word by word’ (*Yīng yì*) translation: he focused on the duty of *faithfulness* to the original text, at the expense of *fluency* and *elegance*, in the hope to succeed in westernizing the literary Chinese language (Gao, 2014).

After the ‘Xinhai’ revolution, the scholar Sun Yat-sen was chosen as provisional President, but the political power was soon monopolized by Yuan Shikai, an Army General: the same happened in various provinces, and China fell in the hands of the ‘warlords’. On May 14, 1919 a student protest took place in Beijing in response to the *Versailles Peace Conference*, which attributed to Japan parts of Chinese territory. From that protest, the ‘May Fourth Movement’ came to light, which radicalized the Chinese intellectuals, who eventually split between ‘leftists’ and ‘rightists’. A literary controversy arose between Lu Xun and Hu Shi, concerning the relationship between ‘language’ and ‘thought’. While Hu Shi considered the ‘vernacular movement’ exclusively a literary tool, Lu Xun asserted that ‘form is content, language is thoughts’ and accused Hu Shi of ‘instrumentalism’, asserting that the latter lacked a profound insight into the nature of language, because he thought that ideas and words stay in a mutual relationship of *superiority* and *inferiority*. Lu Xun expressed his viewpoint very clearly, publishing a total of 27 essays, from September 1918 to November 1919, in “*New Youth*”. He wrote: “We should offer to our audience a proper literature and art to improve their way of thinking. Learning Esperanto is one thing, learning Esperanto’s spirit is another thing: if the mind remains the same, we change the brand but not the product. Language is thought; to adopt a language means to accept a new way of thinking. The so called ‘elegant people’ who insist on the standpoint of using classical Chinese and consider vernacular language contemptible and shallow, are the butchers of the present” (Chan, 2001).

In 1919 Lu Xun published in *Báihuà* the novel “The diary of a mad man”, written and inspired by Gogol’s novel

with the same name and, in 1922, “The true story of Ah. Q”. The first work is an allegory of the state of *Confucian* culture in China, written in the form of a diary of a madman who, after having studied the “Four books and the Five classics” (*Sishū Wǔjīng*) of old *Confucian* culture, began to see the injunction “Eat people!” between the lines of the texts which he was reading. He began also to see all people around him, included his brother (a respectful scholar) as potential cannibals. The second novel is a satirical metaphor of several Chinese people of those times, in the form of the adventures and the tragic end of a peasant with no cultural background and no real occupation, who had often been victim of other people but persuaded himself to be spiritually superior to his oppressors, even when he was eventually sentenced to death for a minor crime. Lu Xun wrote afterwards in *Báihuà* a great number of other novels, essays of literary critics and translations of European authors (Lu Xu, 1980, 1987).

In 1927 the civil war between Nationalists and Communists exploded and in 1930 Lu Xun created the “League of Left-Wing Writers” (中國左翼作家聯盟 *Zhōngguó Zuǒyì Zuòjiā Liánméng*), in response to the westernizing ‘Crescent Moon Society’ (新月社会 *Xīn yuè Shèhuì*), created in 1923 by Xu Zhimo (1897-1931) and Wen Yiduo (1899-1946). In 1934 Lu Xun published his last collection of short stories, “*Old Tales Retold*”. By 1936 he had developed chronic tuberculosis: when death reached him, in the same year, he was busy translating Gogol’s “*Dead souls*” (Yu Yuanban, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted so far evidences a *consonance* between Gramsci and Lu Xun in their theoretical elaborations concerning the creation of a national literary language, aimed at making the popular masses participate in the culture of the respective countries. Lu Xun was very successful in that commitment: *Báihuà* has become nowadays the national literary language of China, while Gramsci did not see the realization of his theoretical design: death reached him prematurely in 1937. As for Pasolini, he enriched Italian language, giving voice to the urban sub-proletarians of Rome. His efforts were only partially successful: in those postwar years he saw the gradual emergence of a common, unsophisticated Italian language, due to the extension of the compulsory education period (which was raised from 5 to 10 years of study) and to the growing power of *mass media* (Durham & Kellner, 2012), while the great part of writers kept on utilizing a higher language, not completely accessible to the *lower classes*.

Since the last quarter of last century the debates about the language seem to have subsided in the West: the ‘post-modern era’ constitutes a moment of disenchantment. In the words of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979), ‘faced with the growing complexity of the computerized society, traditional knowledge - its ability to legitimize discursive, theoretical, ideological and political practices, giving life to the self-sufficient systems of the nineteenth century - begins to crumble’. In China, on the contrary, we assist to the birth of a new literary movement, the ‘Ethical Literary Criticism’, based on the *Confucian* tradition, by initiative of the scholar Zhen-

zhao Nie and others (Tian, 2019): this movement is giving a new perspective to Chinese authors.

Let us conclude this paper recalling the first *stanza* from Pasolini's "The Ashes of Gramsci" (*Ceneri di Gramsci*) (Pasolini, 2015), as our humble tribute to him *in memoriam*. In this *stanza* Pasolini finds himself visiting the 'Garden of the English' (the *Non-Catholic Cemetery* in Testaccio, a neighborhood of Rome) at dusk and in a light rain, addresses an imaginary confession to Gramsci's ashes, kept in an urn. He recalls how Gramsci wrote in his journal (*Ordine Nuovo*), in May of many years before, about his political and philosophical ideals, that still illuminate the silence of Italian society, while all Pasolini's hopes and illusions of remaking his personal life and succeed in changing the mentality of Italian people have vanished. In the mean time, in the cemetery arrive the sounds of the hammer blows that a boy beats, in a neighboring workshop, among old irons, while the day ends in darkness and the rain stops to fall.

*It's not like May, this impure air
that darkens the foreign garden
already dark, then blinds it with light
with blinding clarity... this sky
of foam, above the pale yellow eaves
that in enormous semicircles veil
the bends of the Tiber, the deep blue
mountains of Latium... Spilling a mortal
peace, estranged from our destinies
between the ancient walls, autumnal
May. In this the grey of the world,
the end of the decade in which appears
among ruins the profound, ingenuous
effort to restore life over;
the silence, rotten and barren...
You were young, in that May when the error
was still life, in that Italian May
when at least passion was joined to life,
how much less baffled and impurely sound
than our fathers: not father, but simply
brother -already with your skinny hand, you
were outlining the ideal that illuminates
(but not for us: you, dead, and us
equally dead, with you, in this humid
garden) this silence. Can't you
see it? -you who rest in this alien
place, again confined. Weariness
of nobility surrounds you. And, faded,
the solitary peal of the anvil reaches you
from the factories of Testaccio, lulled
in the evening: amid the shacks of the poor,
unadorned heaps of tin cans, old iron, where
singing, dissipated, an apprentice is ending
his day's work, at the end of the rainfall.*

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