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A Literary Fascination with China: Three Contemporary Novels by 'Foreign' Writers

*Giusi Tamburello**

Abstract

As China's influence on the world becomes increasingly evident, non-Chinese writers are including references to China in their narrative. In regard to this inclusion of China in the works of "Western" authors, this paper will describe these occurrences in the above mentioned novels. They are all contemporary stories that underscore a kind of fascination with China felt by the writers, no matter whether they are Australian or Italian. The perspective from the two different countries will supply a broader framework within which to present a comparative literature approach.

1. A Few Introductory Remarks

Today, it is no longer necessary to stress how present China is in everyone's daily life. Whether we approach the theme from a political, economic or cultural point of view, or any other, it becomes evident that it is not possible to avoid recognizing China's ever increasing influence in the world. Under such circumstances, the thesis of an "Easternization of the West" as described by Colin Campbell in his book¹ becomes very stimulating.

Campbell's point is whether there is an ongoing cultural change in the West and, when so, whether it is possible to define "the nature, direction, and dynamics of that change".² What Campbell discusses is the notion itself of "West", how it was produced already in ancient Greece times, and how this has changed along with the changes in the world's equilibrium among the different populations through the years. Campbell strongly refers to Max Weber's concept about culture that does not refer to the way people enact their social practices but rather to "their ideas and beliefs, especially as manifest in a worldview."³ Therefore, according to Campbell, it is necessary to look into those aspects of Eastern cultures that are influencing our way of living to try to understand whether the concept of "West" is being affected and to which extent. Starting from the big influence that the Eastern philosophies have had in the West, sprouting from the 60s of the twentieth century, and analyzing contemporary phenomena like the influence of yoga, feng-shui, and the like in our societies, Campbell suggests the idea that there is an underlying change that affects the West which is now absorbing and internalizing frames of thought from the East in such a deep way as to change the very 'nature' of what has so far been defined as "West".

Campbell's study is strongly thought-provoking, and it will be very interesting to find even more elements, if possible, to understand whether there is indeed an undergoing change in the nature of what we imagine as West. Reading the novels *The Red Thread*, *Five Bells* and *Il dio*

dell'I-Ching (The god of *I-Ching*) shows their Authors' literary fascination with China though it is more difficult to state whether this fascination has determined a change in their being representative of a 'nature' of the "West" that is undergoing a transformation.

2. Contemporary novels by 'foreign' writers and China

Most probably there are more people who write novels that, in one way or the other, include China. Without aiming at being comprehensive, this paper deals in particular with three works from three different writers: *The Red Thread* by Nicholas Jose, *Five Bells* by Gail Jones and *Il dio dell'I-Ching* (The god of *I-Ching*) by Isaia Iannaccone. The former two authors are both from Australia⁴ while the third writer is Italian. Whereas the title of Iannaccone's novel brings the reader immediately into a Chinese cultural environment, it is necessary to read the other two books to find out that they, too, involve China.

Having been published respectively in the years 2000, 2011 and 2017, these novels are definitely contemporary ones. They share this aspect, though the stories narrated are very different from one another. They are all built according to a complex structure, therefore it is not easy to summarize them. Nevertheless, a few descriptive elements might offer some hints about their subjects.

In the first story, the red thread of the title is the one that keeps together the pages of an old traditional Chinese novel. While the story evolves, the thread becomes also the invisible (therefore implying also other meanings) link between the two main characters of the actual story and the two main characters of the classical novel. The love story between Shen, a young Chinese art dealer, and Ruth, a young woman from Australia, happens in Shanghai as if in a parallel development of the story of Shen and Yun, the married couple of the ancient book.

The five bells of the title of the second novel too are a literary reference, as they recall the poem with the same title by the Australian poet Kenneth Slessor. The main characters of the story are four and will become five, like the bells, when also a child enters the picture. The whole story happens in Sidney in one single day, and each character has a background of suffering to deal with. One of them is a Chinese woman, Pei Xing, who personally experienced the Cultural Revolution, her part of the story detailing her attempts to cope with her sorrowful memories.

The third story offers a more direct reference to China. In fact, the *I-Ching* that is mentioned in the title is the traditional Chinese book for divination, the *Book of Changes*, that is also quite popular among readers of all walks of life. The story happens on two different backgrounds, one in China and one in Bruxelles, and the narrative is characterized in the style of a detective story that develops around a murder. The knowledge of things Chinese not only is fundamental to solve the case, but will also reveal the insincerity hidden in many of the characters of the story, with unexpected twists.

The above brief description of the stories narrated in the three novels shows that China and her culture play a very important role in each of them. Seen from the profound diversity of inspirational motives, it could be possible to think that the three authors have nothing to share, but a closer reading reveals more evidently how they can all be considered as representative of what could be defined as today's literary approach to China.

3. The three novels from a closer distance

Nicholas Jose's novel *The Red Thread* is composed of six sections, that might as well be defined as chapters, each with a title indicated below a progressive number: 1. *Wedded Bliss*, 2. *The Little Pleasures of Life*, 3. *Sorrow*, 4. *The Wheel of Existence*, 5. *The Singing Girl*, 6. *Beautiful Gleanings*; each 'chapter' is then composed of a certain number of parts, respectively: 8, 7, 6, 7, 10 and 5.

In the first chapter of his novel, Jose introduces the reader to the many dualistic interactions that seem to be the backbone of his narration. Old Weng, an old man who brings Chinese antiques to Young Shen, an art dealer of an auction house, to sell is depicted within his traditional style of life while at the same time made to consider money for his living. Jose specifies that: "[...] Weng has carried himself with the demeanour of a scholar [...]"⁵ and the whole description of Old Weng, the way he behaves, the clothes he wears, everything confirms the statement. Whereas the essence of the traditional Chinese culture is preserved in his person, a line of continuity can be found in Young Shen. It is interesting to note the two adjectives used to characterize the two characters: 'old' and 'young', as if two faces of the same medal. In fact, also Young Shen is very keen on traditional Chinese culture. He has dropped his father's wish to have him "become an economist and an American green card holder, an analyst of money flow for the transnational corporations that were extending their operations into China",⁶ and has instead deepened himself in the appreciation of beautiful pieces of art from the Chinese past by becoming employed in a Shanghai auction house.

The two characters' attachment to antiques makes the contrast with the modernization of China even more sharp. Old Weng does not "recognize himself"⁷ in the rhythm of the new Shanghai as given by computer systems installed in the boxes of pedicabs, automatic doors of tall buildings, sliding screens of glasses he has to pass to reach the elevator, and similar multiple details that imply that China, as described in the novel, has already moved towards a better life offered by mechanic as well as electronic modernity; in order to 'transform' the antiques brought in by Old Weng into goods for the auction, Young Shen "got his pad and calculator".⁸

The economical aspect that binds the two characters is also a way for Jose to describe the process of transformation that China is undergoing. If the direction towards modernization, taken and guided by Deng Xiaoping during the ending years of the 70s, after Mao Zedong had passed away in 1976, was characterized by a rushing attitude towards anything foreign and modern, more recently China, having slowed down her rhythm of development, seems to have moved towards a new consideration of her own past, of her own cultural values. The page giving a very detailed description of the way work is done at the auction house seems to suggest the very details of the economic development of China and the new turn the country has taken.⁹

By confronting the ways art dealers would handle economy in the traditional way and in the modern one, Jose also introduces the dual theme of what happens inside China and what concerns the world outside China, represented by the Overseas Chinese.¹⁰ In this respect, it is also noticeable the fact that the auction house belongs to a foreigner: "Shen's American boss had left early, as usual, leaving Shen to lock up".¹¹

Jose's novel's first chapter also introduces the core of the narration that develops around one

of the pieces brought in by Old Weng, four chapters of an old book. The book is central. Its title is *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*¹² and Young Shen, after having become a passionate reader of the book, will focus himself on the search of the missing two chapters. Because the narrating voice of the ancient book has the name of Shen Fu, Young Shen sees himself as the character self of the old book and identifies with the story narrated. In spite of the aim declared in the introductory part of the *Six Chapters* that reads: “[...] and I shall try only to record the real facts and real sentiments”,¹³ the word ‘floating’ in the title introduces the reader to the illusory nature of life as intended by the Buddhist philosophy, here, too, producing a dualism between ‘real’ life and the ‘floating’ dimension of it.¹⁴

The dialogue, in which Old Weng explains to Young Shen that two chapters of the book have not been found, makes it possible to observe that the narration takes a detective story turn since Jose uses the word ‘missing’, and to make note of the intervention of ‘fate’, a concept dear to the traditional Chinese culture, as the coincidence of the names, Shen, of the two characters suggests.

The dualistic components described above, old/new, tradition/modernity, Chinese/foreigner, cultural values/economic approach, are to be found all throughout the entire novel. Each in their turn, the characters progressively come into the picture to reflect one more duality, that between good and evil. Some of them act out of their benevolence, some others out of their personal interest that prevails over anything else. They are distributed through the whole text.

In the same first chapter, also the other main character is presented. This is Ruth, a 24 year old young Australian artist trying to make a living in Shanghai teaching English and selling her paintings. The moment Ruth meets Shen, their story, that will become a love story, runs parallel to the story of the married couple in the *Six Chapters*. Shen and Ruth are ‘border-line’ characters in the sense that they have crossed the borders between their original culture and the other one, the American or ‘foreign’ one for Shen, the Chinese one for Ruth, and both have internalized it. Shen can play freely with his own name in the American culture by joking about the assonance of his Chinese name with the name of Sean Penn, the movie star, as Ruth interacts with the Chinese culture in her daily life: “Shen looked down too. That was when he noticed the embroidered Chinese-style shoes she was wearing”. It is the mutual understanding of each other’s cultural background that brings Shen and Ruth together:

He rocked forward on his toes, losing his balance, all the time gazing at her. It was as if a connection already existed between them, but where did it come from? She looked at him and he felt completely lost, but also found.¹⁵

This already existing “connection” and the unknown illness from which Ruth will suffer, leads the two main characters to searching in the *Six Chapters* for a reflection of their own destiny. From this moment on, *The Red Thread* becomes a complex story because it is home to a multiple stories narration. In fact, while reading it, it is possible to follow the story narrated by Jose in his novel, Shen’s and his family story, Ruth’s story, the *Six Chapters*’ story, and the story of China during her process of contemporary transformation; the whole picture focusing and being kept together by the endless search of the missing two chapters of the ancient novel.

The relation between the two main characters of Jose’s novel and the ancient book is one of

fate and one of self-identification. Shen and Ruth believe that they are the actual forms taken on by the married couple described in the *Six Chapters*.¹⁶

The love Shen and Ruth feel for each other makes them feel that it resembles the love between Shen and Yun and they perceive this very strongly: "He rinsed the two cups and poured fresh green tea. They sat on either side of the table raising the cups to their lips, already with a sense of repetition, of things moving in a circular pattern."¹⁷

Through the "sense of repetition", Jose brings the reader into the realm of the Buddhist philosophy of the ever returning wheel of existence, and also the words he chooses derive from the Buddhist vocabulary: "reincarnation", "wheel of existence", "Guanyin, the Goddess of Compassion", "Heart Sutra" and others. In this frame of thought, love as the ultimate experience, with the wish that it can last forever, ever-renewing, seems to offer Shen and Ruth a kind of shelter from the difficulties of life, from the dark side of life represented, for instance, by Ruth's illness. A comment expressed by Old Weng sounds like a kind of sorrowful remark: "There is so much material missing everywhere. Where is completeness?"¹⁸ Can love be complete? Can life itself be complete? And what does "complete" mean? By developing a Buddhist inspired component, the novel acquires a metaphoric twist.

This turn could bring the novel to a very abstract level but Jose creates a perfect narrative equilibrium by introducing the very colorful character of Han. She is a young woman who tries in whatever possible way to take advantage of the situations that the new Chinese rhythm of life offers. She can sing songs in a karaoke cocktail bar with her extremely peculiar voice and behavior,¹⁹ she can also become the young mistress of a businessman upon presentation by a woman-dealer as well as she can like or be liked indifferently by men or women. If compared to that of Ruth, Han's body is a concentrate of energy that can come useful at any time. Han's philosophy of life is very direct: "'Old things are destroyed,' Han said, putting her nose into the fizzing champagne. 'Something new comes. Cheers! We're lucky, don't you think, to live in such a time of opportunity?'"²⁰ All her deeds cope perfectly with her way of relating to existence and they exert a very strong attraction on the observers, and especially on Shen and Ruth, from the very first time they meet her.

Han is, in a way, what Shen and Ruth are not and cannot be. In fact, she has no culture. What she has is a pragmatic approach to life. She is sufficiently selfish, and has no regrets about the past. Nevertheless, the way Han lives her life presents an intense component of romanticism, that of the hero, though a negative one, that faces life. This is too what Shen and Ruth cannot do, or be immersed in, as they are in the imaginary world of an ancient novel. This is also the reason of their attraction towards Han. Concerning Han, Jose puts into action a kind of expedient. The disordered life of Han cannot be conceived within the frame of the traditional Chinese culture, and in fact Jose presents her as being an outsider, someone belonging to a culture other than the Chinese, that therefore can find expression in ways that are not harmonious: "Here her story trailed off. 'So you have Xinjiang blood?' Shen asked. He looked at her in the variegated light as they drove through the empty streets. She seemed to have the whole story of Shanghai in her veins."²¹

With her peculiarity, Han is the 'resolving' character of the novel. In fact, her diversity makes contradictions explode both within the one person and among the people. Attracted towards her,

and by her refused, Shen and Ruth are forced to look into the depths of their own beings, and into dealing with the unsolved issues each of them hides inside. The apparent cruelty of Han, who disappears with no second thoughts, reveals to Shen and Ruth the impossibility of avoiding a direct confrontation with the self. Ruth, the only character walking in dangerous equilibrium along a line suspended between two cultures, being unable to create a synthesis between them, in the end of the story is destined to perish.

Gail Jones's novel *Five Bells* is composed of six sections each introduced by just one progressive number from 1 to 6. Each section is composed of fragments of narration each concerning the four main characters: Ellie, Catherine, James and Pei Xing, the Chinese woman. Their stories converge in the space of time of one single day in Sydney.

Two elements strike the attention immediately: the word 'bells' of the title, and the word 'circular' in the *incipit*: "*Circular Quay*: she loved even the sound of it."²²

For what concerns 'bells', the first of the two words, it is noticeable how the sense of listening, bound to the concept of sound, is strongly underlined in the whole story. Sounds are perceptible all through the narration as if a kind of sound-track. Words and sentences connected to sounds are scattered all through the text, from "clamour"²³ to "cacophonous spaces",²⁴ for instance; or sentences like: "From somewhere drifted the sound of a busking didgeridoo with an electronic backbeat, *boum-boum, boum-boum, boum-boum, boum-boum*. The didgeridoo dissolved in the air, thick and newly ancient."²⁵

A complete list of words and sentences that in the novel concern 'sounds' would become a very long one. Therefore, here, it will only be noticed that a particular attention seems to be put by Jones on the component of sound. Before elaborating on this aspect though, it will be useful to direct the attention to the second of the two words taken into consideration: 'circular'. Though it is referring to the Circular Quay, the train stop situated at Sydney harbor, the pulsating heart of the city, as a matter of fact it is an element that is common to all the four main characters of the story. For one reason or another, either because of a meeting or because of having to take from there another means of transportation, each one of the characters will, or has to, reach the train stop at *Circular Quay*. Reaching Circular Quay allows all four characters to react to the peculiarities of the Opera House or of the Bridge, as in the example below:

It was moon-white and seemed to hold within it a great, serious stillness. The fan of its chambers leant together, inclining to the water. An unfolding thing, shutters, a sequence of sorts. Ellie marveled that it had ever been created at all, so singular a building, so potentially faddish, or odd. And that shape of supplication, like a body bending into the abstraction of a low bow or a theological gesture. Ellie could imagine music in there, but not people, somehow. It looked poised in a kind of alertness to acoustical meanings, concentrating on sound waves, opened to circuit and flow.²⁶

In the language of a city's transportation system, like a subway can be, 'circular' is the adjective that describes a line that keeps going around, that moves continuously in a closed

trajectory and always follows the same direction, evoking therefore the development of a circle. In Jones' novel, the first connection to the circle is the circularity of the narration: it starts, in fact, at Circular Quay on page 1, and it ends at Circular Quay on page 216. As all the four main characters have the Circular Quay in common, the idea of circularity might refer to all of them. In fact, it does. Ellie, Catherine, James and Pei Xing all have a hidden story. Being a sad story, it has prevented them from experiencing life in a serene way, actually it has put a burden on their shoulder that has strongly influenced their lives. Not one of them is Australian, each of them has moved to Sydney to escape from something and in search of something. Therefore, the city becomes a kind of neutral territory through the confrontation with which each character will have to face her/himself. The bright light that illuminates the city somehow sheds light also on the recesses of the lives of the four characters, and it allows them a clearer look. The process of acknowledgement begins at Circular Quay and is completed there too.

A 'process' is something characterized by a transformation from one state into another and therefore it implies movement. All the four characters move: they have moved to reach Sydney, they all walk, they take the train or a boat. They are seldom depicted in a house or in a closed place, and are most often described while perceiving what is around them while being outside.

The dominance in Jones' novel of elements such as sounds, movements and circularity contributes to the impression of her narration, acting as a musical score of a symphony. Each character's sorrow has reached a depth beyond which it is not possible to go. Each of them has begun to work on the resolution of the pain. *Five Bells* seems to offer the four individual 'symphonies' the stage on which to be performed. The process of emancipation from suffering encounters resistances from the side of each character, and is itself painful. Nevertheless, it happens. On the first page, it is possible to read: "[...] she knew from the lilted words it would be a circle like no other, key to a new world."²⁷ Of the four characters, the three women are the ones who are able to dig into the dark side of their lives and in the end overcome it by coming to terms with life itself, whereas James seems to be the weakest and will eventually succumb to it.

The 'movement' involved in the process is described by Jones through words recalling the liquid element. The other chosen landmark of the city of Sydney is, in fact, the Harbour and its water. The fluidity of liquids is what more precisely can be used to describe the movement, the change that goes along with the process of transformation, and it recurs in the scenes that indicates the moments of critical change. Interestingly enough, it is recurrent in the narration the description of characters consuming drinks or close to liquid food.

The Harbour, with the liquidity of its water, is also the powerful background of the resolution moment of the existence of James. In fact, while he goes towards the last moment of his life, actually physically walking towards the Quay, the perception that he has of the surroundings is that of a transformation. In a long passage following James's deed of letting himself go into the water, the Harbour becomes almost an animated entity and the description presents a perfect fusion of terms related to liquidity, movement and sound.²⁸

The link between liquidity, movement and sound, that suggests a metaphoric rendering of the process of transformation, also drives attention towards a narrative approach in which synesthesia plays a role. This aspect is also stressed in the following passage:

Central Station was abuzz with the Saturday morning crowd. Calls rang out, loud voices, random vowels and consonants. In what must have been, she later realized, a synesthetic moment, the voices seemed orange, bright orange, and gleaming like graphite.²⁹

Since the life experiences that are the core of Jones' narration are the experiences of an entire life, synesthesia seems what can best offer an all-inclusive account. The four main characters have all gone through extremely sorrowful situations that have affected their whole being, both physical and sensorial. At due time, they make an attempt to overcome their sorrow and this attempt too cannot be other than one that includes the whole person. Therefore, synesthesia, when all senses come into play excited by stimuli of different nature, can become an impressive synthesis of the process that all the main characters are involved with.

They all move towards a freer dimension of life, liberated from constraint, from pain, from regrets, from what they have missed. Missing is the feeling derived from what has been taken away due to the loss of a dear person, or to humiliation unjustly suffered, or to the sense of guilt that one can carry; and missing creates an unbalanced relation to life itself. Words such as "displacement", "erasure" and "discomposure", all recall the idea of something that is missing.

Jones' very punctual use of the language seems to become unavoidable when it is necessary to regain distance from what has happened in order to prevent being sucked in by the power of situations otherwise uncontrollable. The same applies to the descriptions of the beating during the Cultural Revolution in Pei Xing's experience.³⁰

At a closer look, in Jones' novel language seems to be the real means through which experience can be transmitted, as if in a process of translatability. Therefore, it is possible to encounter various passages in which the references are to the language, like in: "Pei Xing looked into the multicoloured tubs arrayed in rows before her. They had beautiful labels: *nocciola, limone, bacio, fragola*."³¹ Or to translation, like in: "Her father owned a Feltrinelli first edition, in Russian, from 1957. And then one in English, Harvill, from which he wrote his translation."³²

The word 'translator' comes directly to the foreground in a passage concerning Pei Xing: "At the police station she was asked to wait a few minutes. On the wall in the waiting area was a poster asking in many languages, including her own, if she needed a translator."³³

Though the worlds of Jones' *Five Bells*, characters develop around a concept of 'missing' produced by their lives' sorrowful experiences. They then reach a given moment, a certain stage of their lives when they all move towards an emancipation from pain. The process seems to be aimed at recovering the *inward music*³⁴ that human beings all have. The conclusion of the process can bring consolation or failure, nevertheless, for human beings the process still happens through communication. This remains based on the possibility of language being used as a means of producing profound mutual understanding. In this sense, the character of Pei Xing becomes a means to show the fact that communication can happen. Being Chinese, Pei Xing is the 'extreme' possible example. The wish to forgive goes beyond boundaries, and the wish to interact overcomes the linguistic barrier.

Isaia Iannaccone's novel *Il dio dell'I-Ching* (The god of *I-Ching*) is composed of sixty-four

parts that are each called “Esagramma”, hexagram, followed by the corresponding progressive number from 1 to 64; then, below, there is the drawing of the relevant hexagram with its lines (continuous or broken), and still below, on the same line, there is the pronunciation of the hexagram (according to the *pinyin* system)³⁵ followed by the actual Chinese character, and finally in parenthesis its translation. For instance, on the first page of the novel, at the center of the page, in the upper part, there is the following composition:

ESAGRAMMA 1



Qian 乾 (Slancio)³⁶

“Slancio” can be rendered as ‘momentum’ and, in fact, in Chinese 乾 (*qián*) is: “the first of the Eight Trigrams denoting the principle of Heaven, the sovereign, the male, and strength”³⁷ and it can also mean ‘creativity’.

By this initial beginning of his novel, Iannaccone confronts the reader immediately with a world which is also visually ‘other’. The reader might not know anything about the visual, but he/she is given the means to go beyond the limit created by a different language as the Author offers beforehand explanations. The visual impact is nevertheless there.

For the first fourteen parts, the action happens alternatively from one ‘hexagram’, so to say, in China, to another one in Bruxelles. The Chinese part narrates a story that is placed in the year 1276, roughly during the Yuan dynasty (AD 1271–1368), one of the ‘foreign’ dynasties of China, and it is about the violent destruction of a monastery by the “barbari del Nord”,³⁸ the Northern barbarians. The Superior of the monastery, Lao Zhang, being very old and feeling that he is going to die, asks his preferred disciple, Xiao Sun, to take good care and to protect “il dio dell’*I-Ching*”,³⁹ the god of *I-Ching*. This god is an amorphous thing immersed in liquid and contained in hermetically sealed glass. Whenever the ‘thing’ moves, a very rare event in itself, it means that something terrific is going to happen.

From this very first part, the parallel story of the first fourteen parts develops; in China, with the actual destruction of the monastery, the escape of Xiao Sun who eventually entrusts the younger and faster Gao, who also has escaped from the monastery, to reach Hangzhou in the shortest possible time to bring the god to the safe place of Mr Li’s bookshop; in Bruxelles, with Matteo D’Ortica, an Italian professor of Chinese History and Civilization at the Free University, who becomes progressively more worried while translating a page, written in ancient Chinese, that he had collected a couple of months before in Peking. In fact, the page had fallen from the trouser pocket of a visitor at the museum that D’Ortica was then visiting.

Starting from hexagram fifteen until the last one, the story proceeds, either in Bruxelles or in China according to the narrative needs, as if along the lines of a detective story in which the Director of the Europe International School in Bruxelles has been mysteriously murdered. What relates the two different geographical settings, in Bruxelles and in China, is the peculiar way in

which the body of the Director has been arranged: the head cut off from the body, the fingers of his hands around his head as if rays. In fact, the same pattern was applied to the body of the monk, centuries before, as described in the text given by Lao Zhang to Xiao Sun as divination related to the movement of the god of I-Ching.

The pace impressed by Iannaccone to the story is captivating and it moves steadily step-by-step towards the resolution of the case. The fact that the murderer, professor Centfils, is a colleague and also a friend of D'Ortica makes the case more complicated. But the complexity that the story brings to the surface is one more related to contemporary societies. The concern of the Author is about the serious problem of the spread of drugs in schools. Drugs find an easy path when the school system is not able to attract students' attention, and when the educators, both teachers and parents, are not able to establish a sympathetic relation to the young people.

Centfils' personality is devastated by the loss of his young son due to a car accident, which will reveal that the boy was on drugs, a thing that the father had not perceived and that will activate the distortion of his grief. In fact, he will trap young students in the vicious circle of drugs as if vindicating himself for his own loss. During the search for the murderer, the characters to whom the reader is introduced, parents and teachers, do not seem to represent a point of reference. As a matter of fact, they are all closed within their own selfishness and are not able to look into young people's real needs.

The four hexagrams from 38 to 41, respectively 'opposition', obstruction', 'liberation' and 'diminution',⁴⁰ that Iannaccone dedicates to the dinner offered by the wife of the murdered director to professor D'Ortica and other colleagues, reveals all the characteristics of a class of *nouveau riches* that seem to have difficulties behaving naturally. Mrs Moreno, the wife, is presented in the following way:

It was Maria Moreno who welcomed him. She flung the door open and exclaimed in a loud voice: "Oh, professor D'Ortica!" And added at once: "Please, come in ... I'm very pleased...". She was dressed in a sober purplish dress, not low-cut, from which her face emerged with strained features; an imperceptible veil of make-up highlighted her big, shiny black eyes. Only pieces of jewelry, the heavy bracelet and the gold watch that, bumping with each other, tinkled at every movement.⁴¹

Though Mrs Moreno behaves like the high class wife of the director of the Europe International School, she is not able to show motherly affection to her two children, who nevertheless both show up at the dinner. The daughter comes over in a wonderful attire, in magnificent beauty, "un'apparizione",⁴² an apparition according to Iannaccone, of her teen-age youth, while the mother shows her discomfort.

The kind of subtle dissatisfaction her words reveal show the kind of uneasiness that today many parents experience in dealing with their children, especially during adolescence. Therefore, when Manuel, the brother of Sophie comes in, his whole person is a presentation of he himself, without anybody else's comment, let alone his mother's:

Manuel had raven hair, worn with a cut that would let a long asymmetrical tube dyed in

shocking pink color fall on his forehead. His slightly brown complexion denounced the hereditary contribution of some distant Moorish ancestor but the face, although regular, whose traits had a strong resemblance to those of his sister, was that of a person who suffered: deep dark circles bordered his eyes of the same green as those of Sophie but from which the light had to have disappeared already for a long time; his cheekbones were floppy, the sparse hair above his lip was hinged with tiny droplets, the corners of his mouth had a bitter downward turn, the hands, by the long tapered fingers on which the nails were drawn well demarcated, were prey to a slight tremor. The only flash of light – if you can call it so – that was reflected in his face, was due to the luminous glare of a ring that he carried infix into his lower lip. He dressed just as he had appeared fleetingly in the church: the jeans he wore without a belt and a T-shirt that could not completely cover the large portion of the boxers that escaped from the trousers abandoned in a sloppy way on the hips; at his feet, sneakers with laces that dragged on the floor; two large leather bracelets filled with steel studs decorated his wrists.⁴³

As proposed in the above translation, the way Manuel is dressed, “the jeans he wore without a belt and a T-shirt that could not completely cover the large portion of the boxers that escaped from the trousers abandoned in a sloppy way on the hips; at his feet, sneakers with laces that dragged on the floor; two large leather bracelets filled with steel studs decorated his wrists, shows that he shabbily approaches clothing. The description seems to suggest a sense of unhappiness that is stressed also by the fact that nobody in the room welcomes the boy. Another character that seems to make a pair with that of Manuel is the character of Johnny. He, too, a young boy, heavily on drugs, cannot correspond to Sophie’s affection also because, due to his addiction, he is trapped in the unlawful plan of the murderers.

Both Manuel and Johnny are themselves expressions of a kind of dissatisfied mood that is not transmitted into words but which is denounced by the way the body presents itself.

The two boys do not seem to be interested in anything whereas Sophie is very keen on the study of the Chinese language. She has apprehended it with her grandmother, who had been the daughter of the Spanish ambassador to Peking. Sophie has continued to study the language on her own, attracted as she has become towards the Chinese culture. This is the reason, their shared cultural passion, why she comes into contact with Professor D’Ortica. Together, reasoning on the basis of the suggestions derived by their knowledge of the Chinese culture, they solve the case of murder. The case is especially important to Sophie since the murdered Director was her father.

Through the process undergone to solve the case, Sophie grows into a young woman and she unconsciously exercises a subtle but innocent fascination on Professor D’Ortica, who for her is a paternal presence.

Therefore, *Il dio dell’I-Ching* can also be read as a ‘romanzo di formazione’, an educational romance novel, which describes the process of growth of the young characters. In this respect, the title the Book of Changes, that includes the reference to the *I-Ching*, becomes a key of interpretation.

Possibly, also the light irony that is scattered through the text might be connected to the wish of the Author to reach a broader audience inclusive of younger readers. When D’Ortica himself is made the target of a murder attempt, Iannaccone so comments:

Matteo D'ortica saved his life through a cluster of excrements of one of those dogs which the masters leave freely defecating on public sidewalks.

The professor saved his life, therefore, because he was on the right sidewalk at the right time.⁴⁴

The light irony of passages in the book like the above contribute to release the narrative tension. Similarly, the two hexagrams, 46 and 47, in which the cameo appearance of a young Neapolitan couple visiting the museum with their two small children in a very noisy way is described, also adds a light component to the story.⁴⁵ At the same time, the attention given by Sophie and by Professor D'Ortica, who explains the secret of the 'magic square' to the vivacious two children, seems to suggest a more caring approach towards young people. Both, the description of the way Matteo D'Ortica saves his life when he avoids to be struck by the murder after having fallen on the ground because of accidentally stepping on dog excrement, and the description of the too vivacious children of the Neapolitan parents, are two elements in the book that are colored with light humour. Humour tells the readers that a story is being told, a story that is fiction and not a real story. The story is trying to convey thoughts, and the thoughts of Iannaccone's novel seems to be referring to the young people. They present shortcomings, but they need to be taken care of as they are our link to the future. Therefore, the 'bad' characters in the novel, namely Centfils and Michel, his assistant-killer, have to die, which in fact, is what happens.

4. The common factor

As described above, *The Red Thread*, *Five Bells* and *Il dio dell'I-Ching* are three novels that are very different from one another. The stories' narrations, their development, the concerns of the Authors are all very different and each quite peculiar. Nevertheless, the three novels have some elements in common. One of them is the emotional component of sorrow. The stories all develop around the resolution of the sorrow, by this constructing the backbone of the narration along a process of change, from the initial condition to a new one. Conducting towards a higher level of consciousness, the process of change is also a process of growth, of individual, personal growth. The characters who are unable to adjust themselves to this process all disappear, they perish.

Another element the three novels share is their immersion in Chinese culture. The biographies of the Authors clarify this even further, as all of them have very strong relations to China: Nicholas Jose, Professor of English and Creative Writing, taught in China from 1986 to 1987, and has also been a Cultural Counsellor for the Australian Embassy in Beijing from 1987 to 1990;⁴⁶ Gail Jones was a writer in residence in Shanghai in 2008, sponsored by the Shanghai Writers' Association;⁴⁷ Isaia Iannaccone, who has been professor of chemistry and mathematics at the European School of Bruxelles from 2000 until 2010, is a sinologist specialized in the History of Chinese Science and Technology, and in the History of European-Chinese relations from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, and since 2009 is an expert for the International Academy of History of Science.⁴⁸

The personal and professional experience of the Authors is immediately reflected in the

enormous amount of information about China transmitted through their novels, and also in the precision of their language when it comes to Far Eastern issues. With regard to the first aspect related to information, a few examples will offer an idea.

In *The Read Thread*, when Shen evaluates the antiques brought in by Old Weng, Jose so writes:

From even more layers of paper the next parcel revealed an unblemished piece of *blanc de chine*. It was a small figure of a woman, slender and turning, her eyes downcast, with one hand nestling a pearl in her lap and the other held against her heart in a gesture of blessing. The glaze was pearly, white as snow yet shimmering like gauzy sunlight.

'Guanyin,' said Shen, identifying her as the Goddess of Compassion. One bare foot poked forward from where she stood in the heart of a lotus that floated like a boat in curling wavelets.

'Dehua-ware,' confirmed the old man with a nod, locating the kiln and by inference the dynasty, Ming, from which the piece came.⁴⁹

Jose's very fine description of the exquisite piece denotes his deep knowledge, but also his concern in 'helping' the reader orientate by proposing intra-textual explanations as in the case of "the Goddess of Compassion" or "locating the kiln and by inference the dynasty, Ming".

In *Five Bells*, to describe the feeling arising in Pei Xing when watching the Opera House, Jones writes:

There it was, jade-white, lifting above the water. She never tired of seeing this form. It was a fixture she relied on. The shapes rested, like porcelain bowls, staked one upon the other, fragile, tipped, in an unexpected harmony.

'He': *harmony*.

She saw the Chinese character, wheat and a mouth; she saw the flourish of eight strokes of the wolf-hair brush. She felt her father's hand on hers back correcting her posture, as he taught her calligraphy. Sometimes he corrected the angle of her chin, with the slightest of touches, with just the tip of one finger, then watched as she dipped, caught the ink, tried a difficult character.⁵⁰

The details about learning how to write Chinese characters denotes the care for research by the Author, as well as her concern for the reader to whom she explains how the Chinese character for 'harmony' is composed by indicating its specific components "wheat and a mouth".

In the first part of Isaia Iannaccone's *Il dio dell'I-Ching* it is possible to read:

Lao Zhang breathed hard, then went on: I understood what he wanted to tell me, and I wrote it down to entrust the terrible prediction not only to my fragile memory. Anyhow, whatever happens, no matter how terrifying it is, we must accept it with the necessary detachment, because the movement is inherent in beings. The movement is the beginning of everything. Remember the words that Wang Bi used to comment on the first hexagram: *dynamism is essential, it is an active power of transformation*. We must take note of the changes that will happen: even if in a painful way, situations change, the world is transformed,

it evolves into a different form where we will no longer be contemplated. We must accept it.⁵¹

Here, too, the reader is taken into a Far Eastern philosophical dimension, but the Author offers his help by 'informing' that "Wang Bi" is actually a commentator of the *Book of Changes*.

Concerning the second aspect of the precision of the language, the Authors' deep knowledge of things Chinese is also noticeable in their use of very specific Chinese words. For instance, Jose reports a whole Confucius saying:

'How old are you?' the old man asked.

'Thirty this year,' Shen replied.

'*San shi er li*,' commented Old Weng. 'The age Confucius says a person should settle their affairs.'⁵²

Naturally, following his reader-friendly approach, Jose also gives the translation of the saying.

For her part, while describing domestic aspects of Pei Xing's life, Jones introduces the reader to very specific elements:

She thought of food as she trod the lit footpaths to her apartment block. *Xiaolongbao*: steamed dumplings. Bamboo shoots. Moon-cake. Peking duck. [...]

In her apartment Pei Xing brewed herself tea. She selected and played a favourite CD: Liu Fang's pipa solo, '*Fei Hua Dian Cui*' ('Falling Snow decorates the Evergreen').⁵³

In both cases, she produces explanations for the reader: "steamed dumplings" and the translation of the title of the pipa solo, that the reader also learns is played by Liu Fang.

In *Il dio dell'I-Ching*, as already pointed out, Iannaccone indicates the Chinese name and its translation into Italian of each of the hexagram at the beginning of each part, as well as he offers, all through the text, words of the Chinese language concerning various aspects of the Chinese culture. When Xiao Sun remembers what he has learnt from Lao Zhang, Iannaccone seems to enjoy the possibility to insert a long list of Chinese words:

What Xiao Sun had learned from the superior! In a moment, in his mind the primordial concepts, the ecumenical numbers that are at the base of existence, have been affixed. The universal Ying-Yang couple... The *Wu Xing*, the five agents according to which everything that falls under the senses, flavors, smells, minerals, planets, animals, viscera can be divided into five categories... The ten *Tian Gan*, the celestial trunks... The twelve *Di Zhi*, the terrestrial branches... *Gan Zhi*, the sexagesimal numbering... *He Tu*, the map of the river, and the amount that leads to the number 20... The *Luo Shu*, the Lo diagram, and the magic square that leads to the number 15... The twenty-eight *Xiu*, the areas of the celestial sphere... The twenty-four *Jieqi*, the solar periods... The *Ba gua*, the eight trigrams... I *Liushisi gua*, the sixty four hexagrams... The Sky is 1, the Earth is 2...⁵⁴

While he, too, never forgets to give the reader the necessary intra-textual explanations.

What derives from the reading of the three novels is, therefore, first of all, the consciousness of the proposal by the side of the Authors of a deeply cultivated approach to their narration, and on the side of the reader, the necessity of an equally cultivated approach to China if the reader is willing to come closer to her culture. As a result of the above described devices in the narrative, the reader experiences a slowed-down pace of reading, a pace that stops over the Chinese elements in order to better understand and place them; a consequence of which is the impossibility for the reader to enact a process of identifying oneself in the characters. Because an estrangement from the text comes into play, there is always a distance between the reader and the text itself. A distance that allows a more objective reading of what happens.

Connected to this distance and shared by the three stories is another remarkable aspect that has its strongest evidence on the narrative ground. The choice of the Authors to place the stories on backgrounds that include China allows them to enrich the stories themselves of a very peculiar kind of 'magic realism'. In fact, confronted with the specific elements derived from the Chinese culture, 'compelled' to keep a distance due to the multifarious references to a different culture, the reader finds him/herself 'transported', or 'translated', into a world that seems to be a daily life world, but which as a matter of fact does not 'belong' to the reader.

The love story between Shen and Ruth, in *The Red Thread*, with its connection to a love story in an ancient book, seems in fact hardly imaginable if seen within the background of a contemporary reader grown outside China, especially in its component of identification with the literary couple. It is necessary to get back to Yukio Mishima's tetralogy to find in narrative such a process of 'reincarnation',⁵⁵ but taking this process into consideration is definitely far removed from a more 'Western' mind. To better understand, it would be of help to review a passages such as the following:

He rinsed the two cups and poured fresh green tea. They sat on either side of the table raising the cups to their lips, already with a sense of repetition, of time moving in a circular pattern. They might have been drinking from the same stem-cups the bride and groom had drunk from in the book.⁵⁶

Even if it can be read as expression of a highly romantic moment, at the same time, by the use of "sense of repetition", "time moving in a circular pattern" and of the last whole sentence, it requires the reader to slow down and come to terms with a possible other way of relating to life. In *The Red Thread*, anything that concerns Shen and Ruth is characterized by this same halo. In this sense, it is particularly dense the last part of the novel that focuses on Ruth's sickness. In the fifth part of *Beautiful Gleanings*, the sixth and conclusive section of the novel, there is to be found an even more intense atmosphere:

We had hung on as long as we could, each of us, tenaciously, with all our human longing. We had returned to the world to complete our story. Now was the time for us to be released at last. The current of feeling between us that joined us to the pulse of life itself had survived all the cycles of our restless roaming. Now was the time to cut the thread.

Broken Gate saw that Ruth understood this thoroughly so he was willing to help with her

request. He arranged for her to travel further inland, up into the mountains, around Jiuhuashan, I believe, where there is a temple that provided her with a temporary home. She moved on again then, apparently, further into those clouded peaks and misty valleys where time and the world dissolve. That's where she disappeared at last.⁵⁷

Even if the words used in the two passages are fairly plain, nevertheless the situation described goes beyond any plain imagination if read from a 'Western' point of view and therefore it 'transports' the reader towards a 'magic' reality that has, in fact, to be 'imagined' as being so far from plain.

In *Five Bells*, the 'magic' as well as mysterious component of the narration arises at first and not oddly with the character of Pei Xing, the Chinese woman. When she buys an ice-cream from her Greek friend Aristos, Jones so writes: "When Pei Xing reached up over the counter, she saw the future. Aristos looked vulnerable. Death was swooping towards him."⁵⁸ It happens to everyone to pay attention to the fact that somebody's complexion looks pale, this is in everyone's experience, but writing "she saw the future" or "death was swooping towards him" brings reality to a further level of perception. Jones' novel is densely characterized by similar multi-layer passages. They are to be found especially in connection to James, but they are also arising all throughout the novel. With reference to Pei Xing, another example is the one that refers to her experience in taking care of Hua, the woman who during the Cultural Revolution had been her enemy, to whom she now reads *Doctor Zhivago*:

After five minutes or so they had entered their rhythm: the reader's voice in a steady current, the tone even, firm, and Russia, textual Russia, entered the room, seeping under the door, flying through the window, infusing the summer air, bringing to North Sydney the Red Army and the spring of 1922.⁵⁹

In the above passage, Russia is made alive, able to move, this description once again suggesting a difference in layers of perception. By attributing life to things that do not have life, Jones creates a 'magic' reality that does not exist except than in the mind of the Author, who transmits it on to the reader.

In *Il dio dell'I-Ching*, Iannaccone brings to the foreground habits typically 'oriental' and describes them as if something from everyone's daily life, by this producing in the reader an estrangement that takes him/her into another further imaginary and magic reality, as can be observed in the following paragraph:

'God of the I-Ching,' Xiao Sun muttered to himself, he joined his hands and put them on his forehead. He closed his eyes. «Send a sign, you who know, you who can». He opened his eyes, the moment of recollection had ended, it was necessary to put reality and non-reality together again, life and death, action and thought, only by relating the opposites could it be possible to hope for a harmonious development and fruitfully advance the situation. *When the opposites communicate, the development is harmonious*, said Wang Bi on the eleventh hexagram. And Xiao Sun clung to this gloss to find the strength to continue acting.⁶⁰

Besides, Iannaccone 'transfers' ways of expressing oneself that belong to the Chinese language directly into the Italian one and this makes the estrangement even deeper such as in the following sentence: "Il fuoco e il sangue si sposarono."⁶¹ The expression "fire and blood got married" does not belong to the Italian language though its metaphorical meaning comes immediately to mind, but in Italian the use of the verb "to get married" in a sentence like this makes the sentence very strongly diverse and 'magical'. Similarly, the effect is the same in the following sentence: "Lao Zhang fece una breve pausa poi, pose una mano sul cuore come a trattenerne la fuga dal petto [...]"⁶² The 'escape' of the heart from the chest is again a very strongly estranging image directly derived from the Chinese language, and in Iannaccone's novel this pattern is very frequently used.

As shown above, the Authors' deep knowledge of the Chinese culture allows them to introduce peculiarities of it in a narrative approach that is very 'natural' to them, acquainted as they are with China; on the other hand, it is exactly the 'nonchalant' narrative approach to Chinese peculiarities that results for the readers into the perception of a magic reality beyond reach.⁶³

5. Towards a conclusion

In relating to *The Red Thread*, *Five Bells* and *Il dio dell'I-Ching*, both times, either when considering the individual characteristics of each novel or when describing elements that seem to be shared by all of them, the attention has gone towards components which are recurring in the text and constitute therefore a stylistic pattern of each Author. Relevant examples from the three novels can be many more, but it is necessary to put a full-stop somewhere.

Reading the three novels results into a very stimulating activity that opens to a very broad spectrum of further considerations. While narrating their story, all the Authors, for instance, deal with the relation between classicism and modernity, the latter perceived by its speed and movement. In particular, Jose highlights the economic side of modernity in which money becomes important, and everything, including culture, can be labeled under it. Jones underlines the energetic component of modern life while leaving in the individual memories the melancholy of a past that is forever finished. Iannaccone depicts the contradictory relationship between elderly people and younger ones as a conflicting encounter between past times and modernity.

The diversity of China becomes, in the narration of the story, a perfect contrastive background to the story itself, by which the story and the background are not only both underlined, but they also compensate each other. Because the three novels involve China, the three Authors cannot avoid offering descriptions of the country which are descriptions of attraction, of refusal, of longing, in a way also giving room to the Authors' feelings for China. But besides China, the three stories are a geographical kaleidoscopic recount for the many references to countries in the world and their characteristics. Australia is in there, Italy is in there, Belgium, Ireland and many more countries are all in there, all mixed in each novel. For which, the feeling is that the Authors themselves are representatives of today's liquid reality, in the sense of Zygmunt Bauman, where boundaries, whether geographical or cultural, tend to fade, and where what counts more is the human experience of feelings and what is connected to them in a multi-ethnic perspective. Besides, it is not awkward, then, to have to underline that in the three stories of emancipation from sorrow,

the main 'motor' is once again 'love'. If for whatever reason it has gone lost, the human tendency seems to be the one of recovering it, of finding it anew, restoring a place for it. In turn, forgiveness becomes a possible path to recovering it, as often suggested also by contemporary philosophical thought.⁶⁴

Finally, whether by their profound interaction with the Chinese culture, it is possible to state that the three Authors have introjected the Chinese way of thinking and of interpreting the world, but there are not enough elements to prove. If strictly relating to the stories they narrate, these stories appear to be representative of the contemporary openness of the world to other cultures, the Chinese one coming to the foreground due also to its actual influence on the global scene. Concerning China in particular, the stories also tell that it is not possible to deal with its culture on a superficial level, being that China is very ancient. It requires people to learn about anything Chinese, in a way recalling Confucian thought: it is necessary to study to become a *junzi*, a gentleman. A fact that also needs to be underlined is that Jose, Jones and Iannaccone all give an account of China by rendering it from inside, from their direct encounter with the Chinese culture.

Nowadays, outside China there is lots of curiosity about the 'Eastern' way of thinking. Newspapers publish many more articles than in the past, fashion derives inspiration from the 'East', people consume goods and food sold in so-called 'ethnic shops' and so, once again as in Marco Polo times, there is a new wave, a hot fever, for what arrives from that part of the world.

On an even more popular level, this trend of Easternization of the West continues to flourish, as witnessed during the latest edition of the "Festival di Sanremo", the Italian national song contest, the title of the winning song was "Occidentali's Karma" by Francesco Gabbani. It is enough to watch the official video⁶⁵ on the internet and to listen to the lyrics of the song⁶⁶ to realize how in fashion China and the 'Far East' nowadays are. This, though, tells a different story that deserves further study.

The recognition of China's ever increasing influence in the world, viewed through *The Red Thread*, *Five Bells* and *Il dio dell'I-ching*, shows the multiplicity of forms of interest towards China that contemporary outsiders, in the sense of people living outside China, can have. They also demonstrate the literary fascination with China that Nicholas Jose, Gail Jones and Isaia Iannaccone feel, though they are Authors from very different backgrounds. Reading their novels is a cultural challenge worth undergoing.

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Notes

1. Colin Campbell, *The Easternization of the West – A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era*, Boulder, London, Paradigm Publishers, 2007.
2. As above, p. 3.

3. As above, p. 11.
4. In 2017, Professor Nicholas Jose invited me as speaker to the International Workshop "Antipodean China – Other Worlds" that was held in November, starting from the 23rd, at The University of Adelaide and at Western Sydney University. The workshop was an amazing chance to meet wonderful people like Melinda Jewell, Gail Jones, Xi Chuan, Alexis Write, John Minford, Brian Castro, J.M. Coetzee, Samantha Trayhurn, Ben Etherington, Jocelyn Chey, Claire Roberts and many many more, and to exchange an astonishing amount of ideas and opinions. I am extremely grateful to Professor Nicholas Jose. This paper finds its roots in the Antipodean China Workshop.
5. Nicholas Jose, *The Red Thread*, London, Faber and Faber Lmt, 2000, p. 1. From now on, in the footnotes, the reference to this text will be made by using 'TRT'.
6. TRT, p. 9
7. TRT, p. 2
8. TRT, p. 4
9. TRT, p. 6
10. As above.
11. TRT, p. 7
12. TRT, p. 5. In the *Acknowledgements*, p. 193, Jose explains that the memoir of Shen Fu was written in 1808 and was published in 1877 without the last two chapters. *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is the title of Lin Yutang's translation published in 1935-36 in Shanghai.
13. TRT, p. 6
14. TRT, see dialogue at p. 5
15. TRT, p. 31
16. TRT, see pp. 41- 44
17. TRT, p. 42-43
18. TRT, p. 57
19. TRT, see p. 77
20. TRT, p. 82
21. TRT, p. 81
22. Gail Jones, *Five Bells*, North Sydney, Vintage, 2011, p. 1. From now on, in the footnotes, the reference to this text will be made by using 'FBs'.
23. FBs, p. 1
24. FBs, p. 114
25. FBs, p. 2
26. FBs, p. 3
27. FBs, p. 1
28. Cfr. FBs, pp. 207-208
29. FBs, p. 85
30. Cfr. FBs, p. 82
31. FBs, p. 10
32. FBs, p. 39
33. FBs, p. 194
34. Cfr. FBs, p. 38, p. 39, p. 131.
35. According to the official Chinese system of transcription of the Chinese characters' pronunciation in Latin letters called *pinyin*, also the tone of the characters is indicated. Nevertheless, depending on the need of a more or less specialized use of the *pinyin*, at times the tones are omitted.
36. Isaia Iannaccone, *Il dio dell'I-Ching*, Roma, Libreria Editrice Orientalia, 2017, p. 7. From now on,

in the footnotes, the reference to this text will be made by using 'IDDI'.

37. 潘绍中 Pan Shaozhong (ed.), 新时代汉英大词典 *New Age Chinese-English Dictionary*, Beijing, The Commercial Press, 2017, p. 1445.
38. IDDI, p. 7
39. IDDI, p. 8
40. Cfr. IDDI, pp. 165-190
41. IDDI, p. 165. "Fu Maria Moreno ad accoglierlo. Spalancò la porta ed esclamo ad alta voce: «Oh, il professor D'Ortica!». Aggiunse subito: «Si accomodi, la prego... Molto lieta...». Era vestita con un sobrio abito violaceo, non scollato, dal quale emergeva il viso dai lineamenti tesi; un velo impercettibile di trucco metteva in risalto i grandi e lucidi occhi neri. Unici monili, il pesante bracciale e l'orologio d'oro che, urtandosi, tintinnavano a ogni movimento."
42. IDDI, p. 178
43. IDDI, pp. 183-184. Manuel aveva i capelli corvini, portati con un taglio che gli lasciava cadere sulla fronte un lungo ciuffo asimmetrico tinto in colore rosa shocking. La sua carnagione leggermente bruna, denunciava l'apporto ereditario di qualche lontano antenato moresco ma il volto, pur regolare, i cui tratti avevano una forte somiglianza con quelli della sorella, era quello di una persona che pativa: profonde occhiaie scure bordavano gli occhi dello stesso verde di quelli di Sophie ma dai quali la luce doveva essere scomparsa da tempo; gli zigomi erano flosci, la rada peluria sopra il labbro era imperlata di minuscole goccioline, gli angoli della bocca avevano una piega amara verso il basso, le mani, dalle lunghe dita affusolate su cui le unghie si disegnavano ben delimitate, erano in preda a un leggero tremito. L'unico lampo di luce – se così si può chiamare – che gli si rifletteva in viso, era dovuto al riverbero argentino di un anellino che portava infisso nel labbro inferiore. Vestiva così come era apparso fuggacemente in chiesa: i jeans che portava senza cintura e una T-shirt che non riusciva a coprire del tutto la consistente porzione dei boxer che fuoriuscivano dai pantaloni abbandonati in modo sciatto sui fianchi; ai piedi, scarpe da ginnastica con i lacci che si trascinavano sul pavimento; due larghi bracciali di cuoio ricolmi di borchie d'acciaio gli decoravano i polsi.
44. IDDI, p. 87. "Matteo D'Ortica salvò la propria vita grazie a un ammasso di escrementi di uno di quei cani che i padroni lasciano liberamente defecare sui marciapiedi pubblici. Il professore salvò la propria vita, dunque, perché si trovava sul marciapiede giusto al momento giusto."
45. Cfr. IDDI, pp. 206-215.
46. Cfr. <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/directory/nicholas.jose#>, visited on Oct. 20, 2018
47. Cfr. FBs, 'Acknowledgements', p. 217
48. Cfr. <https://be.linkedin.com/in/isaia-iannaccone-79471a4>, visited on Oct. 20, 2018
49. TRT, p. 3-4
50. FBs, p. 12
51. IDDI, p. 8. "Lao Zhang respirò a fatica, poi proseguì: «Io ho compreso cosa voleva dirmi, e l'ho scritto per non affidare soltanto alla mia fragile memoria il terribile pronostico. Ma qualunque cosa succederà, per quanto terrificante sia, dobbiamo accettarla con il distacco necessario, perché il movimento è connaturato agli esseri. Il movimento è l'inizio di tutto. Ricorda le parole che Wang Bi usò per commentare il primo esagramma: *Il dinamismo è essenziale, è un'attiva potenza di trasformazione*. Noi dobbiamo prendere atto dei cambiamenti che avverranno: anche se in modo doloroso, le situazioni mutano, il mondo si trasforma, evolve verso una forma diversa dove noi non saremo più contemplati. Dobbiamo accettarlo".
52. TRT, p. 3
53. FBs, p. 189
54. IDDI, pp. 39-40. "Quanto aveva appreso Xiao Sun dal superiore! In un attimo, nella sua mente si

affastellarono i concetti primordiali, i numeri ecumenici che sono alla base dell'esistenza. La coppia universale Ying-Yang... I *wu jing*, i cinque agenti secondo i quali si può suddividere in cinque categorie ogni cosa che cada sotto i sensi, dai sapori, agli odori, ai minerali, ai pianeti, agli animali, ai visceri... I dieci *tian gan*, i tronchi celesti... I dodici *di zhi*, i rami terrestri... *Gan Zhi*, la numerazione sessagesimale... *He Tu*, la mappa del fiume, e la somma che porta al numero 20... Il *Luo Shu*, il diagramma del Lo, e il quadrato magico che porta al numero 15... I ventotto *xiu*, i settori della sfera celeste... I ventiquattro *jieqi*, i periodi solari... I *ba gua*, gli otto trigrammi... I *liushisi gua*, i sessantaquattro esagrammi..." Il Cielo è 1, la Terra è 2...

55. Cfr. Yukio Mishima's four books composing the tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility* (Hōjō no Umi), 1965.
56. TRT, pp. 42-43.
57. TRT, p. 189
58. FBs, p. 10
59. FBs, p. 117
60. IDDI, p. 38. «Dio dell'*I-Ching*» mormorò fra sé e sé Xiao Sun, giunse le mani e se le pose sulla fronte. Chiuse gli occhi. «Manda un segno, tu che sai, tu che puoi». Riaprì gli occhi, il momento di raccoglimento era terminato, bisognava rimettere assieme realtà e non-realtà, vita e morte, azione e pensiero, soltanto mettendo in relazione i contrari si poteva sperare in uno sviluppo armonioso e fare progredire fecondamente la situazione. *Quando i contrari comunicano, lo sviluppo è armonioso* diceva Wang Bi sull'undicesimo esagramma. E Xiao Sun si aggrappò a questa chiosa per trovare la forza di continuare ad agire.
61. IDDI, p. 7. "Fire and blood got married."
62. IDDI, p. 9. "Lao Zhang paused briefly then he placed a hand on his heart as if to restrain its escape from his chest [...]."
63. Concerning 'magic realism', Alejo Carpentier has underlined how describing lands full of marvels like Latin America produces automatically a literature of marvelous reality. The observation could also be applied differently: is it the case that writers from marvelous lands are able to catch the 'marvelous aspect' and translate it into literature? As European travelling for the first time to Australia on the occasion of the invitation to the International Workshop "Antipodean China - Others Worlds", I was struck by wonders such as the vast space or the shade of blue of the immense sky of Australia. In such a context, it is easy to think about an 'Australian' magic realism in literature. As well as it is fascinating to consider about the idea of a narrative connection existing between the different 'Souths' in the world, as suggested during the same workshop by Ben Etherington in his presentation. Awkwardly enough, the Authors included in this paper are all from 'a' South, Isaia Iannaccone being born in Naples.
64. See: Massimo Recalcati, *Non è più come prima. Elogio del perdono nella vita amorosa* (It is no longer as it used to be. Praise of forgiveness in love life), Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2014.
65. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OnRxfhbHB4>, visited on Sept. 27th, 2018
66. <http://www.metrolyrics.com/occidentalis-karma-lyrics-francesco-gabbani.html>, visited on Oct. 23rd, 2018. For an English translation of the lyrics, see: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/occidentalis-karma-westerners-karma.html> visited on Oct. 23rd, 2018