

# Secret Agent for International Maoism:

José Venturelli, Chinese Informal Diplomacy and Latin American Maoism

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## Abstract

The Chilean artist José Venturelli was a supporter of Maoist China. This article, a brief political biography of Venturelli, shows how he acted on behalf of the People's Republic of China's informal diplomacy among Latin Americans and worked to promote Maoist politics among Latin American revolutionaries. The article also advances the hypothesis that Venturelli represents an archetype of the sort of international actor who was key to the globalization of revolutionary politics during the long 1960s.

## Introduction

When Salvador Allende first met the Chilean artist José Venturelli in 1954 they were both in Beijing. Allende had been on a trip to the Soviet Union and at the last minute added a side trip to China to his itinerary. Venturelli, resident as an artist in China since 1952, formed part of the welcoming party for his compatriot. Despite their serious political differences (Allende was to emerge as a global representative of the possibility of a peaceful road to socialism, while Venturelli quietly advocated armed struggle) they quickly struck up a friendship, which they would renew as their paths continued to cross in Chile and Cuba over the next two decades. Allende's burgeoning sinophilia and continuing ties with Venturelli eventually led him to become an honorary president of the Chile–China Cultural Association (founded

in 1952 by Venturelli and the poet Pablo Neruda) and, as President of Chile, to offer Venturelli the ambassadorship to China. Venturelli had to decline. He was too busy preparing for armed struggle in Chile and in any case, unbeknownst to Allende and all other Chileans (aside from the top leadership of the Maoist Partido Revolucionario Comunista), he was a member of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>1</sup>

José Venturelli, as an acclaimed artist, international promoter of Maoism and advocate of armed revolution in Chile, is both a fascinating figure in his own right and illustrative of a type of person who played a key role in globalizing revolutionary ideologies during the 1950s, '60s and '70s.<sup>2</sup> Without the international circulation of key figures who worked to promote ideas originating in one place (China, Cuba, the Soviet Union, the USA etc.) in the hopefully fertile soil of other places, the ideological and cultural aspects of the Cold War and the 1960s would have been decisively less global. Venturelli worked hard at promoting Maoism in Latin America over the course of two decades, but in this he was not unique. As I show in *Transpacific Revolutionaries*, there were surprisingly large numbers of Latin Americans who travelled to China and worked to domesticate Maoist ideas in their local contexts during the 1949–1976 period of Maoist rule in China.<sup>3</sup> And the Maoists were not unique in this regard. Various stripes of communist and radical crisscrossed the globe in order to learn from others, share ideas with them and disseminate ideas. The most famous of these figures is the swashbuckling motorcycle enthusiast and guerrilla leader Ernesto Guevara.<sup>4</sup> The case of the Mexican Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria guerrillas trained by North Korea is well known.<sup>5</sup> Their origins as students at Moscow's Patrice Lumumba University are less well known.<sup>6</sup> The Guatemalan José María Ortiz Vides participated in military training in Cuba in 1962 along with other Guatemalans, and then went to Vietnam to learn from the National Liberation Front with the Vietnam War in full swing. Ortiz later went to Mexico and helped to found the Unión del Pueblo guerrilla organization.<sup>7</sup> This list could go on much longer, but suffice it to say that the globetrotting revolutionary leader was an important category of person for the formation of Latin America's New Left, and certainly for the armed wing of the New Left. Venturelli was in this respect representative of a type.

But Venturelli was also unique. He was principally known as an artist and his works achieved international recognition, especially in Latin America and the socialist bloc.<sup>8</sup> Despite the embrace of his work by the socialist bloc, he was a vocal critic of socialist realism. He mixed easily with many different classes of people, as artists often must in

order to support their work. Venturelli's engagement with the People's Republic of China was sustained from his first visit in 1952 until his death in Beijing in 1988. During this time his political commitments led him to secretly join the Chinese Communist Party and to work to promote Maoist ideas within the milieu of the revolutionary left. Venturelli's work to advance China's cause internationally brought him into a close political relationship with Zhou Enlai and led to his expulsion from Cuba and denunciation by Castro during the Sino-Soviet split. His international reputation was great enough, however, that Castro later recanted his stinging denunciation of Venturelli. Despite enjoying ties of friendship with Allende, Venturelli played an important background role in the development of the Maoist trend in Chile and in preparations for popular armed struggle in the event of a coup against Allende's government (preparations which bore no fruit when the time came).<sup>9</sup>

These unique characteristics of Venturelli, combined with his representative character as one of the influential world travellers of the revolutionary left, at once make him an interesting historical figure in his own right and also allow his biography to serve as a window on transnational Cold War revolutionary connections that have been deliberately occluded due to the security culture surrounding revolutionary left politics in Latin America during this period. While the deliberately sparse documentary record of the political side of Venturelli's life means that many interesting details are probably lost forever, a combination of documents held by the Fundación José Venturelli in Santiago, several oral histories and two short biographies of Venturelli's artistic life allow us to reconstruct key aspects of Venturelli's political life in a way that deepens our understanding of the complex, transnational character of Latin America during the Cold War.

## Anarchy and childhood

Balilla Venturelli, José's father, arrived in Chile in 1920, having left Italy one step ahead of the law. He had been jailed for his anarchist political activities and sought greener pastures in the Southern Cone, like so many other Italian immigrants of the period. In Chile, Balilla Venturelli joined the Chilean branch of the Industrial Workers of the World. Unlike in Italy, his political work did not prevent him from finding work as a civil engineer and settling down, and José Venturelli was born in 1924 into a household which doubled as a neighbourhood radical salon and

library. Because Balilla died in 1933, José did not undergo much of a political apprenticeship under his father's direction.<sup>10</sup>

What effect did growing up in an anarchist household have on Venturelli's later political commitments? In 1984 Venturelli described a process of sorting through his father's library and discovering the political ideas and commitments of his father that way.<sup>11</sup> Aside from this statement, we know that while José's mother, Carmela Eade, did not engage in as much activism as Balilla, she did share his ideals. Anarchists in the early twentieth century sometimes held novel ideas about child-rearing, and tended to be much more liberal than the social norm in child-rearing practices. For example, prominent contemporary anarchist Emma Goldman stated that child-rearing should emphasize 'the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child. In this way alone can we hope for the free individual and eventually also for a free community, which shall make interference and coercion of human growth impossible'.<sup>12</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, one of anarchism's founding fathers, wrote that 'children belong neither to their parents nor to society. They belong to themselves and to their own future liberty'.<sup>13</sup> While the anarchist rank and file often did not fully share the ideas of leading anarchist thinkers on issues such as family life, free love and gender roles, it is almost certain that any middle-class anarchist family with a large library of anarchist books would have seriously considered at least partially implementing libertarian child-rearing practices.

## Friend of Siqueiros and Neruda

When he was thirteen years old, Venturelli joined the cell of the Juventud Comunista at his school,<sup>14</sup> the Instituto Nacional, and became a founding member of the Alianza de Intelectuales para la Defensa de la Cultura. Pablo Neruda founded the Alianza upon his return from Europe, where he had been Chilean consul in Spain and had sided with the Republicans in the Civil War. Upon his return to Chile in late 1937 Neruda worked with the Communist Party (he did not formally join until 1945), although in Spain he had already allied with the communist faction of the Republican forces. Neruda was appalled by the massive support he found for fascism in Chile, especially among German immigrant communities. In his autobiography, he describes walking through a village in southern Chile 'under forests of flags bearing the swastika'.<sup>15</sup> The Alianza was formed as part of a cultural

counter-offensive 'against fascism and war'. For young communists like Venturelli, however, the counter-offensive was not merely cultural. Street battles with Chilean Nazis were a regular feature of communist youth activism, necessitated by Nazi assaults on buildings associated with the left, such as the headquarters of the Federación de Estudiantes (FECH). Combat with Nazis was an extension of a wave of street violence between pro-Falangist and pro-Republican Chileans. The Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism in Europe, and World War II were central aspects of Venturelli's early politicization.<sup>16</sup>

Political radicalism also influenced the student body at the Escuela de Bellas Artes, where Venturelli began taking night classes when he was fourteen and later became a full-time student (and, eventually, delegate from the school to the FECH). The traditional curriculum of the school emphasized the importance of European and particularly French (it was called the 'Escuela de París') art and derided the idea of rooting art in Latin American themes. Influenced by the radicalized political climate and Mexican muralism, the student body divided between defenders of the traditional curriculum and those inspired by muralism who wanted art to be both politically engaged and rooted in domestic themes and aesthetics. Venturelli's study of muralism advanced greatly during a nearly year-long apprenticeship with David Alfaro Siqueiros, the Mexican muralist, in the southern Chilean city of Chillán. In 1939 Chillán had suffered a major earthquake, and as part of the relief effort Mexico funded the rebuilding of a school. Siqueiros had been jailed in Mexico for his participation in the assassination of the exiled Leon Trotsky in 1940. Neruda, in his capacity as consul general in Mexico City, arranged for Siqueiros to be given a visa and released from prison in order to paint a mural at the rebuilt school. Venturelli was one of two assistants for Siqueiros (the other being the Colombian Alipio Jaramillo) during the project. The experience of working closely with Siqueiros (who was a communist and veteran of the Spanish Civil War) elevated the status of the seventeen-year-old Venturelli, both as an artist and as an emerging member of a global network of intellectuals aligned with international communism.<sup>17</sup>

During the years between 1942 (when the mural in Chillán was finished) and 1950 Venturelli's reputation as an artist grew, with international exhibitions in various Latin American countries. His best-known works from this period are his illustrations for the 1946 edition of Pablo Neruda's 'Alturas de Machu Picchu' section of his *Canto General* epic. Having established his reputation in Latin America, at the end of 1950 Venturelli travelled to Paris where he hoped to arrange an exhibition of

his work with the aid of Neruda, who had established himself there in exile after González Videla banned the Communist Party. Venturelli's hopes were disappointed, however. Fearing expulsion at any moment, Neruda left France not long after Venturelli's arrival, leaving Venturelli as the caretaker for his house. Although Venturelli's hopes for furthering his artistic career in Europe were frustrated, the moment was propitious for his further involvement in the cause of international communism.<sup>18</sup>

In the summer of 1951 Venturelli was invited to join the Chilean delegation to the World Youth Festival in East Berlin. The World Youth Festivals, held every few years beginning in 1947, began as a celebration of internationalist unity among communists and fellow travellers, mainly youth, from around the world. Especially in the aftermath of the World War, the festivals had the character of celebrating the massive expansion of the socialist world (from just the Soviet Union and Mongolia to encompassing a large portion of the Earth's surface) and were infused with a tremendous optimism about defeating imperialism and attaining a communist future. The presence of artists and intellectuals aligned with the Socialist bloc was a major feature of these festivals. Notable guests at the Berlin festival included Neruda, Jorge Amado, Nicolás Guillén, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Carlos Luis Fallas, Paul Robeson, Bertolt Brecht, John Heartfield, Cándido Portinari and Nazim Hikmet.<sup>19</sup> Neruda was personally acquainted with many leading artistic and political figures, and Venturelli remembered Neruda as being generous in introducing him around and sharing personal connections: 'Neruda was in contact with the great intellectuals and he was very generous with his person, his time and also his friends; he didn't keep friendships secret, like his own personal property.'<sup>20</sup>

## **A Maoist peace activist?**

The Youth Festival in Berlin was followed up by a meeting of the World Peace Council in Vienna in November 1951. Many of the prominent intellectuals who had attended the festival were invited to Vienna, including Venturelli. The conference in Vienna and the activities of the World Peace Council more generally were part of the 'peace offensive' of the socialist bloc. The 'peace offensive' was a strategic initiative initiated by the Cominform<sup>21</sup> in 1949 in order to build global political resistance to US aggression against the socialist countries during the early years of the Cold War. It was conceived of in the following terms:

There are now large scale, powerful peace campaigns in capitalist countries. Those participating in these campaigns represent all kinds of people, including petty-bourgeoisie and even capitalist elements. Although such campaigns are not socialistic in nature, they are against imperialism, the deadly enemy of the working class. The development of such campaigns is undoubtedly helpful to the liberation of the working class. Therefore, the Communist Party must participate in and lead such peace campaigns.<sup>22</sup>

For the Soviet Union, this effort was meant to slow down the development of the US atomic programme and gain time to build up its own nuclear programme. For the People's Republic of China, the peace slogan also implied acknowledgement of the Chinese Communist Party as the legitimate government of China by the capitalist countries, because the contention by the United States that the Taiwan-based Republic of China was the legitimate government of all of China implicitly carried a threat of war.<sup>23</sup>

In Vienna, delegates from the Chinese People's Committee for Defending World Peace extended an invitation to Venturelli to visit China and participate in the preparations for the upcoming Asia Pacific Peace Festival, to be held in Beijing in October 1952. Venturelli arrived in China in March, and something clicked. In fact, it was a confluence of factors: artistic, political and personal. Artistically, Venturelli was aesthetically drawn to traditional Chinese art forms, but he was also attracted to the artistic freedom that he found in China. During the months that Venturelli spent in the Soviet Union before coming to China, and during a second visit in 1954, he was disappointed by the stagnant art scene that he found. He met with talented painters, refugees and Soviet citizens alike, who either could not produce art because it did not fit within the confines of acceptable socialist realist doctrine, or produced socialist realist art in order to survive instead of pursuing their artistic visions. When one thinks of Chinese art during the Maoist period of 1949–76, artistic freedom is not usually the first thing that comes to mind. Yet, while art was heavily politicized and individual artistic freedom was certainly restricted, traditional Chinese art forms were not entirely suppressed except during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957–8 and part of the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution. Indeed, one line of thought in the Communist Party sought to identify the communist state with China's rich cultural history and consequently supported traditional art forms. Venturelli was given a studio and resources to pursue the study of Chinese art, and he experienced a form

of artistic freedom that foreign communists in the Soviet Union would have been envious of.<sup>24</sup>

China appealed to Venturelli politically for the same reason that many Marxists and revolutionary nationalists from Third World countries were initially drawn to China. They saw the Chinese experience of armed revolution and economic modernization as holding lessons that were relevant for their home countries because of perceived similarities (or, for the more doctrinaire, universal characteristics) shared by all countries categorized as semi-feudal and semi-colonial. Additionally, arriving in China in the early 1950s it would have been hard for a communist to be unaffected by the enthusiasm and mass action that surrounded the early years after the revolutionary triumph of 1949.<sup>25</sup> Finally, on a personal level, China was very good for Venturelli's health. He suffered from chronic lung disease, and the acupuncture treatments that he received in China worked wonders for him, leading him to prefer Chinese medicine to Western medicine for the rest of his life.

Whatever the relative weight of the artistic, political and personal factors that led Venturelli to become an instant sinophile, he accepted a position as 'permanent guest of the Peace Committee' and in 1954 was given a professorship in fine arts at Beijing University. In his capacity as an activist for the World Peace Council in Beijing, Venturelli often played the role of unofficial Chinese diplomat to visiting Latin Americans. It was in this capacity that he met Salvador Allende in 1954. Venturelli returned to Latin America at the end of 1952 (returning to China in early 1953) and again in 1956 (returning to China that same year). During both of these trips to Latin America Venturelli was occupied with major tasks on behalf of China's informal diplomacy. In 1952 he founded the Chile–China Cultural Association, the first of a number of 'friendship societies' that China helped Latin American sinophiles and Maoists to form in order to advance the aims of Chinese informal diplomacy and, in some cases, propagation of Maoist doctrine.<sup>26</sup>

During the 1956 trip Venturelli gave a series of three talks on Chinese art and the Chinese Revolution at the Casa Nacional de Teatro and the Mutualidad de Egresados de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires: 'La pintura china de ayer y de hoy', 'Experiencias de un pintor chileno en China' and 'Algunos problemas del lenguaje chino'. These talks focused on basic aspects of Chinese history and culture, emphasizing the unparalleled popularization and accessibility of culture for the majority of the Chinese people since the victory of the revolution. Venturelli discussed the shared histories of Latin America and China in being oppressed by imperialism, and repeatedly implied the universality

of various lessons of the Chinese Revolution as a revolution against imperialism and semi-feudalism for countries that could be similarly characterized. He characterized the revolutionary process itself as an impetus to culture:

Some years ago I was accompanying a Latin American intellectual visiting the house of a great Chinese scholar. Inevitably, the conversation turned to general questions and my friend asked: 'What has been the greatest contribution of the Chinese people to culture?'

To which our scholarly friend answered without hesitation: 'The Chinese Revolution.'<sup>27</sup>

Venturelli's official status as a leader of the World Peace Council was a convenient reason for him to be in Beijing and to meet with visitors from abroad, particularly Latin Americans. It made it unnecessary to explain his presence and allowed his time spent with visitors to have an informal character, in contrast to the formal manner of official Chinese receptions. For the Chinese, Venturelli was an ideal person to fill this role: a gregarious intellectual with wide-ranging interests who had already established his own reputation and enjoyed his own broad set of contacts among progressive intellectuals in Europe and Latin America. Compared to his diplomatic duties and artistic production, the tasks that he actually performed for the Peace Council were not particularly time consuming. This was similarly the case for the other permanent guests of the Peace Committee, including Rewi Alley (from New Zealand), Ahmed Kheir (from Sudan) and Saionji Kinkazu (from Japan). While he was formally a peace activist, Venturelli is really most accurately conceived of as a part of China's informal diplomacy apparatus.<sup>28</sup>

## Cuban interlude

After the triumph of the Cuban Revolution at the beginning of 1959, Venturelli lost little time in arriving in Havana with his family. The Cuban government put him on salary and he began working at a prodigious pace, creating three major murals in Havana during the early 1960s and many smaller works. Despite a very active commitment to art at this time, Venturelli continued his early political activities as well, publicly functioning as an artist and peace activist, but advancing China's efforts at informal diplomacy. His household functioned as a

salon for Latin American intellectuals and even members of Cuba's government who supported the policy of spreading armed struggle throughout Latin America. Ernesto Guevara was a frequent guest in the Venturelli home.<sup>29</sup>

From the standpoint of Venturelli's political commitments, his time in Havana was a natural extension of the role that he had been playing in Beijing during the 1950s. This does not mean that his enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution in early 1960s was cynical; rather his enthusiasm was similar to that of the Chinese Communist Party in general. The party warmly welcomed the triumph of an armed, anti-imperialist revolution. The victory of the Cuban Revolution seemed to bear out Chinese theses about the validity of armed struggle as a path for revolution in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and was utilized as an ideological cudgel against the Soviet Union's advocacy of the peaceful transition to socialism in the escalating polemics surrounding the Sino-Soviet split (which began in 1956 and led to a full rupture in the alliance in 1964). Venturelli undoubtedly revelled in being at the centre of a vibrant scene in which revolutionary intellectuals flocked from around Latin America to Havana to check out what was going on and contribute to the revolutionary process. Yet within this context Venturelli also worked consciously and deliberately in conjunction with the Chinese embassy (established in 1960) to maximize the political gains for China and the international political trend that China represented within this context.

In his capacity as a member of the World Peace Council, Venturelli continued to travel to international peace conferences, including one in Mexico and another in Guinea. In Cuba, he arranged for the Chinese embassy to finance trips to China for Latin American intellectuals who became interested in China through their association with Venturelli. One example was the Mexican artist Andrea Gómez, who had won national recognition in Mexico during the 1950s for her linoleum prints 'La niña de la basura' ('The Girl of the Garbage') and 'Madre contra la guerra' ('Mother Against War'). In the early 1960s Gómez went to Cuba to paint murals. Venturelli communicated his enthusiasm for socialism in China and when Gómez asked about visiting China he passed along her request for an invitation to visit China to the Chinese embassy in Havana. This led to Gómez visiting China for two months and was a prelude to her later support for Maoists in Mexico.<sup>30</sup>

During the early 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split was coming more and more into the open. By 1959 the Chinese party had begun to systematically work to win over foreign comrades, particularly those from Third World countries, to its political line by institutionalizing six-month-long

study and travel programmes meant to train foreign communists in China's political line. One of the main bones of contention between China and the Soviet Union was the idea of a 'peaceful transition to socialism', advocated by the Soviet party beginning in 1956. While this was not the only point of dispute, this was a particular focus for Latin American communists for whom the strategic question of armed struggle was of immense immediate practical concern if that was the path they were going to take. Initially, there seemed to be congruence between the Chinese and Cuban positions on armed struggle, as Cuba almost immediately began aiding armed revolutionary efforts, first in the Caribbean and later further afield in Latin America and Africa after the victory of the 1959 revolution.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to working to influence Latin Americans from outside Cuba who had travelled to the country, José Venturelli also played an active role in Chinese efforts to win over the Cuban government to its side in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Apart from the informal way in which his home functioned as a salon, Venturelli also returned to China at least twice in the early 1960s (in 1960 and 1962) and was reported by *Peking Review* to be present at a banquet for a visiting Cuban delegation. It seems likely that Venturelli was back in China to help in Chinese diplomatic efforts in Latin America. Venturelli's late 1962 return to China was particularly urgent as the Brazilian Maoists had already formed their own, separate party from the pro-Soviet communists and China was on the verge of encouraging other Maoists to follow suit. Venturelli's closeness with the embassy staff in Havana is attested to by a personal letter written to Venturelli in 1985 by a former diplomat, which makes clear that their families knew each other well while they were all living in Havana.<sup>32</sup>

Cuba initially attempted to take a middle path between China and the Soviet Union during the Sino-Soviet dispute. However, with the resolution of factional struggles in Cuba favouring pro-Soviet elements and the not-unrelated greater ability of the Soviet Union to aid Cuba economically, Cuba swung decisively to the Soviet side in 1964. In mid-1964 the Cuban government requested that China stop all propaganda activities in Cuba. Chinese propaganda in Cuba had been quite aggressive. In addition to José Venturelli's efforts, the Chinese embassy often sent propaganda materials directly to the homes of Cuban government cadres and officers in the armed forces. China refused to stop its propaganda and Cuban polemics against China sharpened in tone, culminating in a speech on March 13, 1966 in which Castro denounced the Chinese Communist Party, accusing Mao Zedong of senility. During this process, in 1965, Venturelli was asked to leave Cuba.<sup>33</sup>

## Chilean revolutionary

Venturelli learned of his expulsion from the Chilean Communist Party in November 1964 by reading about it in the newspaper *El Siglo* while he was in Havana.<sup>34</sup> Between his 1965 expulsion from Havana and the 1973 coup in Chile, Venturelli split his time between China and Chile, dedicating himself to his art and to the promotion of Maoist politics in Chile. By November 1965 Venturelli was back in China and was present in Shanghai for a series of events marking the eightieth birthday of American communist Anna Louise Strong. At one of these events, Mao Zedong and his wife, Jiang Qing, presided over a dinner where Mao discussed the importance of Yao Wenyuan's recently published criticism of the play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, which was the opening salvo of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR). A central theme of Mao's informal talk with the foreign friends of China who made up most of the audience present at this birthday dinner was the importance of China taking up the mantle of global leadership in the international communist movement and how the factional disputes between pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet factions within the world's communist parties had not gone favourably for the Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

In 1965 Venturelli had moved back to Beijing with his wife Delia and his fourteen-year-old daughter Paz. It seems that at least initially, the assumption was that Venturelli would return to his former tasks as an informal diplomat and art professor. His daughter was enrolled in school (and became a Red Guard with the launch of the GPCR)<sup>36</sup> and he had begun functioning as an art professor again. Yet in 1966 plans changed. Perhaps it was due to the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Peking University was an early centre of student activism and the operation of the university was disrupted in 1966. Or perhaps a decision was made that Venturelli should return to Chile to help the nascent Chilean Maoist party (the Partido Comunista Revolucionario).<sup>37</sup> Whatever the reason, the Venturelli family returned to Chile in 1966 and Venturelli became involved in Chilean revolutionary politics on a day-to-day basis for the first time since 1951.

The Chilean Maoists had begun to operate informally as a faction within the Communist Party during the early 1960s. In most cities, a small nucleus of communist cadres favoured the Chinese positions and many of these cadres were able to make contact with each other. In 1964 these Maoists were expelled from the party and most of them came together to form the Grupo Espartaco, which went on to constitute itself as the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (PCR) in 1966. Made up

almost entirely of urban communist activists and intellectuals who sympathized with Chinese positions but who commanded no significant mass base in their own right, the PCR struggled to establish areas of work in the *poblaciones callampas* (shantytowns) of Santiago and in the countryside, to which it gave great weight in line with Maoist doctrine promoting a rural-based revolution in Third World countries. Among the radical groups advocating armed struggle, it was overshadowed by the Guevarist Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR).<sup>38</sup>

Before the election of Salvador Allende in 1970, the PCR's strategy for revolution had been fairly conventional for Maoist parties in Third World countries: prepare to launch armed struggle in the countryside with the orientation of waging a protracted people's war to surround the cities. The election of Allende complicated matters. Allende was indisputably a president of the left and had the support of the workers and peasants who the PCR saw as a base for revolution. The leading intellectuals of the PCR had long-standing comradely relations with Allende. Yet one of the fundamental principles to which the PCR adhered was that a peaceful transition to socialism would be impossible. It is testament to Allende's patience and character as a unifying figure on the Chilean left that he maintained comradely ties with the PCR despite constant, often shrill, denunciations of his 'peaceful road' in the PCR's press. The adjustment that the PCR made in its revolutionary strategy was to declare that a counter-revolutionary coup was inevitable and therefore it agitated for Allende to arm the masses who supported him. As Allende did not do this, the PCR also went ahead and tried to organize its own forces and what small mass base it worked with to arm themselves to defend the regime in the event of a coup. Despite these preparations, armed resistance did not materialize on any significant scale when the time came.<sup>39</sup>

So what was Venturelli's involvement in all this? Apparently, he was a central player, but also prone to major absences from the scene. He had been in Cuba during the formative struggles that gave rise to Chilean Maoism, but on arrival in Chile he was made part of the leading secretariat of the PCR. In that capacity, he played an active role in propagating the PCR's line and in preparations for armed struggle in Chile, as well as efforts to extend aid to armed groups in other Latin American countries. Because of the nature of this sort of activity it is hard to elaborate on day-to-day details of the work. Still, we have reliable testimony that Venturelli was an active participant. Certainly, his artistic productivity, always prodigious, fell off during this time due to his political commitments, which must have been more hands-on and

practical than the sort of informal diplomatic tasks he had been used to in China and Cuba.<sup>40</sup>

Despite his role on the PCR secretariat, he was also prone to absences that would not have been tolerated from most other militants. He was an artist, after all, and he had exhibitions in Mexico, China and Oceania in 1970, 1972 and 1973. He also spent time in China in 1971. It seems highly coincidental that he began travelling back to China regularly in 1970, the year that Allende was elected and Chile gave diplomatic recognition to China. Jorge Palacios, a leading member of the PCR, claims that Venturelli was a member of the Chinese Communist Party as well as a member of the PCR, a secret known only to the highest leadership of the PCR. Palacios feels that Venturelli's loyalty to the Chinese Party was greater than to the PCR, although there was no conflict between the two until 1973. Paz Venturelli vehemently denies that José was a member of the Chinese Party. Whatever the truth, it is clear that José Venturelli had worked very closely with parts of the Chinese Foreign Ministry for many years and, whether formally a party member or not, he was a close collaborator of the party. While it was rare for foreigners to join the Chinese party, it was not unknown. The Lebanese-American doctor George Hatem (known also by his adopted Chinese name Ma Haide), a close associate of Venturelli as a fellow host of foreign delegations in Beijing, was the first foreigner to join the CCP. As a party member or just a close friend of the CCP, Venturelli seems to have had tasks to perform for the Chinese Party as well as for the PCR in the early 1970s. Tellingly, his studio and home in Beijing had not been given to anyone else during his long absence from Beijing.<sup>41</sup>

When the September 11, 1973 coup struck, Venturelli was in the Gobi Desert with his family, in China at least ostensibly for a major exhibition of his art. The Chinese government gave immediate diplomatic recognition to the Pinochet regime. Chinese foreign policy in the early 1970s was guided by the belief that the Soviet Union was a major military threat to China, and the alignment of Allende's government with pro-Soviet forces meant that China had few qualms about recognizing the legitimacy of Pinochet's regime. This was a devastating blow for Chilean Maoists. However, once he was established in exile in Geneva in 1974, Venturelli made a public statement explaining that the Chinese government had to recognize Pinochet for reasons of state. A statement of this sort is inexplicable had Venturelli not been under some sort of party discipline or felt compelled for some reason to make a statement that he must have found difficult. A delegation from the PCR which did not include Venturelli held a bitter meeting with representatives of the

CCP in Beijing in 1975, and in 1977 released a public letter denouncing the Chinese government for recognizing Pinochet.<sup>42</sup>

Venturelli returned to China briefly in 1975 for medical treatment to find that his home and studio had been ransacked by Red Guards. When Venturelli returned to Geneva he rededicated himself to his art full time. He maintained a correspondence with political friends around the world, many of whom he had met in China, and was regularly invited to the Chinese embassy in Switzerland for major anniversaries, but one gets the impression that politically he was exhausted.<sup>43</sup> He returned to China for medical treatment and the Chinese government even sent his acupuncturist to Geneva to treat him. His commitment to China remained until the end, when he died in Beijing undergoing medical treatment for his lung condition in 1988.

## **The centrality of the global revolutionary in the twentieth-century Latin American left**

While Venturelli's role as a revolutionary expatriate and member (or close collaborator) of the Chinese Communist Party was exceptional, his life serves to illustrate the importance of international events to the Latin American left as a whole during the twentieth century. His life is punctuated by the centrality of a succession of events originating outside of Chile: Mexican muralism, the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism and World War II, the emergence of a large Socialist bloc, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution and the Sino-Soviet split all marked his life profoundly. While most Latin American leftists did not spend the lengths of time away from home that Venturelli did, there was a good chance that he was there to meet them if they went to Beijing or, to a lesser degree, Havana, when he was there. In this capacity he played a key role in Chinese efforts to transmit Maoism to Latin America.

Even though most Latin American leftists did not travel to China (or to Cuba or the Soviet Union), and spent their activist careers dedicated to tasks that might appear on the surface unconnected to international events, mainly organizing tasks related to the day-to-day lives and well-being of workers and peasants, the existence of a life like Venturelli's and the larger numbers of Latin American visitors to China whom he hosted in Beijing highlights the centrality of international affairs and internationalism to the whole project of the revolutionary left in Latin America during the twentieth century. If, as Joachim Häberlen has argued, 'local internationalism' has been central to how

rank-and-file communists have viewed their own activism as organically a part of both local and global struggles, that internationalism required the existence of people like José Venturelli and other globetrotting communist figures in order to concretely enact the internationalist commitments of the parties to which the rank and file belonged.<sup>44</sup> And as multiple, competing internationalist radicalisms came into play during the 1960s, the role of international figures like Venturelli became central to the international contention between the various radical ideologies that formed such a central part of the long and global 1960s.

In conclusion, Venturelli's life suggests a point of particular relevance for the study of the long and global 1960s. The example of Venturelli's political life suggests the existence of other internationalist figures who might be even harder to pin down in the historical record because they, like Venturelli, were involved in secret political activities but, unlike Venturelli, were not well-known figures in some other field (it is important to remember that Venturelli is remembered above all as an artist, not as a communist political figure). I would like to advance the hypothesis that, while these figures were relatively few in number, they played key roles in forging international connections and in the transnational movement of ideas which were central to globalizing the bundle of phenomena which we find it convenient to refer to as the 1960s.

## Notes

- 1 For Venturelli's memories of meeting Allende in China and later being offered the ambassadorship to China (on more than one occasion), see the document "Memorias III: Allende" held by the Fundación José Venturelli in Santiago (hereafter FJV). Documents held by the FJV are not archived according to a system of numbered boxes and files, but can be located by name and subject by the foundation staff. On Allende's presidency of the Chile–China Cultural Association see *New China News Agency*, Santiago, March 15, 1959. On Venturelli's preparations for armed struggle in Chile see discussion in this article. It merits mention that while there is some question about Venturelli's formal membership in the Chinese Communist Party, the author believes that the weight of the evidence favours those contending that Venturelli was in fact a member. See discussion in this article.
- 2 On Latin America in the global Cold War/1960s as a scholarly field, see Eric Zolov, "Introduction: Latin America in the Global Sixties," *The Americas* 70, no. 3 (January 2014): 349–62.
- 3 Matthew Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- 4 See *inter alia* Eric Zolov, "Expanding Our Conceptual Horizons: The Shift from an 'Old' to a 'New' Left in Latin America," *A Contracorriente* 5, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 47–73 and Paulo Drinot, ed., *Che's Travels: The Making of a Revolutionary in 1950s Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
- 5 Among the many sources, see for example Alberto Ulloa Bornemann,

- Surviving Mexico's Dirty War: A Political Prisoner's Memoir*, ed. and trans. Arthur Schmidt and Aurora Camacho de Schmidt (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2007), 53–4.
- 6 See Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado, “La guerrilla se extiende por todo el país,” National Security Archive at George Washington University, [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB180/070-Grupos%20armados.pdf](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB180/070-Grupos%20armados.pdf) (accessed November 14, 2013), 15–17.
  - 7 Jesús Zamora García, “Sonámbulo: Historia de la Unión del Pueblo en Guadalajara (1973–1978)” (PhD diss., Universidad de Guadalajara, 2005), 28–9, 32.
  - 8 Venturelli worked in many different art styles, with well-known works including murals, woodcuts and stained glass.
  - 9 There are two biographical treatments of Venturelli’s life, both of which focus almost entirely on his artistic production: Luis Alberto Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía: José Venturelli, una biografía* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003) and Jorge Montoya Véliz, “José Venturelli. En alguna parte todo el tiempo,” *Aisthesis* 39 (2006): 97–114.
  - 10 Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 7–13; Montoya, “José Venturelli,” 100–1.
  - 11 Quoted in Montoya, “José Venturelli,” 101.
  - 12 Emma Goldman, “The Child and Its Enemies,” *Mother Earth* 1, no. 2 (April 1906): 13–14.
  - 13 Mikhail Bakunin, “Revolutionary Catechism,” in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), 94.
  - 14 Cells were the basic unit of organization of the Communist Party and its affiliated organizations.
  - 15 Pablo Neruda, *Memoirs* (New York: Penguin, 1978), 138.
  - 16 On Venturelli’s participation in the Alianza, the Communist Party and street-fighting, see Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 20–1, 27–9; Montoya, “José Venturelli,” 102. On Neruda’s experience of the Spanish Civil War as central to his becoming a Communist and his efforts on his return to Chile in 1937, see Neruda, *Memoirs*, 135–9, 171. On the importance of international events and internationalism to rank-and-file communists during the inter-war years, see Joachim Häberlen, “Between Global Aspirations and Local Realities: The Global Dimensions of Interwar Communism,” *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 3 (November 2012): 415–37.
  - 17 Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 25–8; Montoya, “José Venturelli,” 102–13; Neruda, *Memoirs*, 153–5; David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Me llamaban el Coronelazo* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1977), 397.
  - 18 Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 39, 48–52; Neruda, *Memoirs*, 188.
  - 19 Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 56.
  - 20 “Memorias IV: Neruda.” 10, FJV. Translation by the author.
  - 21 The Cominform, short for Communist Information Bureau, was founded in 1947 and was a vehicle for coordinating policy among communist parties internationally.
  - 22 This quote from a 1952 internal Chinese Communist Party lecture explaining the party’s participation in the global peace movement is in Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 90.
  - 23 Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 89.
  - 24 On Venturelli’s experience in the Soviet Union and criticism of Soviet art, see Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 70–3. On art in China during the Mao years, see Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian, *Art and China’s Revolution* (New York: Asia Society, 2008) and Julia F. Andrews, “Traditional Painting in New China: Guohua and the Anti-Rightist Campaign,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (Aug. 1990): 555–77.
  - 25 The political appeal of China to Latin American communists and revolutionary nationalists is a major theme of my book, *Transpacific Revolutionaries*.
  - 26 The main aim of Chinese efforts was initially to gain diplomatic recognition for the People’s Republic of China through building public opinion around the cultural and economic advances being made in socialist China. Some Latin American members of these societies, however, saw them as vehicles for promoting Maoist ideas in Latin America. These radicals were supported by some, but not all, members of the Chinese foreign affairs apparatus. See

- Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries*. On the founding of the Chile–China Cultural Association see Leonardo Ruilova, *China popular en América Latina* (Quito: Ediciones Internacionales, 1978), 99–100; R. Evan Ellis, *China in Latin America: The Whats and Wherefores* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 35.
- 27 “Algunos problemas del lenguaje chino”, 16. The texts of the three talks are held by the FJV. Translation by the author.
- 28 On the other permanent guests of the Peace Committee and the light workload associated with Peace Council activities per se, see Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 111 and Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China: The Myth of Rewi Alley* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 67–78.
- 29 On the political sociability of Venturelli’s household in Havana, see Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 85, 87.
- 30 On Venturelli’s trips to Mexico and Conakry, see Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 83; *José Venturelli: 45 años de pintura, 1943–1988. Muestra retrospectiva* (Santiago: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1990), 8. Exhibition catalogue. On Gómez, see interview with Andrea Gómez in Cuernavaca on March 12, 2006.
- 31 On the Cuban export of revolution see Jonathan C. Brown, “Exporting Revolution with Fidel and Che” (paper presented at the Radical Americas Conference, University College London, January 28–29, 2013); Jorge Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba’s Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Ernesto F. Betancourt, “Exporting the Revolution to Latin America,” in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, ed. Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 105–26; Tad Szulc, “Exporting the Cuban Revolution,” in *Cuba and the United States: Long-Range Perspectives*, ed. John Plank (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1967), 69–97; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1972* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). On Chinese efforts to win over Latin Americans to their side of the Sino–Soviet split, see Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries*. On the Sino–Soviet split in general, see Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 32 The editions of *Peking Review* that place Venturelli in Beijing are dated August 30, 1960; September 6, 1960; and November 9, 1962. It is possible that Venturelli made other trips to China during the early 1960s that were not reported on by *Peking Review*. The four biographical timelines I have for Venturelli (the two biographies and exhibition catalogue already cited, and a manuscript biographical article held by the FJV which was prepared for an exhibition catalogue at the Museo Rath in Geneva in 1979) all place him in Cuba during this time period except for travel to conferences and exhibitions. It is not surprising, however, that Venturelli’s movements would become harder to track as he became an active proponent of armed struggle in Latin America. Interestingly, the November 9, 1962 *Peking Review* described Venturelli as “representing Latin Americans in Peking” rather than as being back on a return visit. The letter, part of the small collection of Venturelli’s surviving correspondence held by the FJV, is from Fang Biying to José Venturelli, August 25, 1985.
- 33 On Chinese–Cuba relations from 1959–66, see Yinghong Cheng, “Sino-Cuban Relations during the Early Years of the Castro Regime, 1959–1966,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 78–114. According to Paz Venturelli, José’s daughter, his expulsion from Cuba wounded him deeply, and Fidel Castro later attempted to repair relations by making positive public comments about Venturelli at some point during the 1980s. Interview with Paz Venturelli in Santiago on May 31, 2013.
- 34 This was the newspaper of the Chilean Communist Party.
- 35 On Venturelli’s expulsion from the Chilean Communist Party, see Mansilla, *Hoy es todavía*, 91–6. On events surrounding Anna Louise Strong’s birthday in Shanghai, see David Milton and Nancy Dall Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside: Years in Revolutionary China, 1964–1969* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 98–108. On Venturelli’s presence at these events, see Brady, *Friend of China*, 105–6. On the beginnings of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai at this time see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 14–31.

- 36 Paz spoke fluent Chinese from her years living in China. In fact, as she was born in Berlin in 1951 and the family lived in Beijing from 1952 to 1959, Mandarin was essentially her first language, although she did speak Spanish at home. Interview with Paz Venturelli in Santiago on May 31, 2013.
- 37 The term formally used at the time was Marxist-Leninist, although the term Maoist was used informally for the pro-Chinese political trend and later came into more formal usage. I prefer the term for its brevity and accuracy, and also because the term Marxist-Leninist has an implicitly polemical character (because it implies that the pro-Soviets were not followers of Marx and Lenin).
- 38 “Informe de organización” from the PCR founding congress, held at FJV. Interview with Jorge Palacios in Las Cascadas on May 27, 2013. Palacios was one of the founders and main leaders of the PCR.
- 39 Interview with Jorge Palacios in Las Cascadas on May 27, 2013; interview with Paz Venturelli in Santiago on May 31, 2013; Jorge Palacios, *Chile, An Attempt at “Historic Compromise:” The Real Story of the Allende Years* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1979), 486–94; Jorge Palacios, *Del Mapocho al Sena* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2001), 134–7. While *Del Mapocho al Sena* is a fictionalized account of his exile in France, Palacios assured me that it is essentially an autobiography with a few names changed.
- 40 Interview with Jorge Palacios in Las Cascadas on May 27, 2013; interview with Paz Venturelli in Santiago on May 31, 2013.
- 41 On George Hatem’s party membership, see Edgar A. Porter, *The People’s Doctor: George Hatem and China’s Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 99. Agnes Smedley attempted to join shortly after Hatem did, but her membership request was denied. On Venturelli’s travels in the early 1970s, see *José Venturelli: 45 años de pintura, 1943–1988. Muestra retrospectiva* (Santiago: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1990), 9; *Peking Review* 14, no. 15 (April 9, 1971): 3. In *Peking Review* issues from the 1960s Venturelli had been referred to as a Beijing-based peace activist, despite his residence in Cuba. In 1971, *Peking Review* referred to him as Vice-President of the Chile–China Cultural Association, recognizing the geographical shift in his activities to Chile. For the contending views on Venturelli’s party membership see interview with Jorge Palacios in Las Cascadas on May 27, 2013; interview with Paz Venturelli in Santiago on May 31, 2013.
- 42 Palacios, *Del Mapocho al Sena*, 33–6. “Carta abierta del Partido Comunista Revolucionario de Chile al Partido Comunista de China” (Nov. 1977) in FJV.
- 43 See the correspondence files at the FJV.
- 44 Häberlen, “Global Aspirations and Local Realities.”