



Fondazione
Agnelli

Press Release

Fondazione Agnelli Launches the Agnelli Chair of Italian Culture in Beijing: A Bridge with China to Showcase Italy and Foster Dialogue between the Two Countries. Romano Prodi Will Be the First Chairholder.

Today in Beijing, with President Sergio Mattarella in attendance, the *Agnelli Chair of Italian Culture* was officially inaugurated. It will be hosted and managed by the China-Europe Philanthropy Innovation Research Center (CEPIRC) at Peking University, which ranks among the top 15 universities globally in the QS rankings. The first chairholder will be Professor Romano Prodi.

The *Agnelli Chair of Italian Culture* was conceived and promoted by the Fondazione Agnelli, in collaboration with the TOChina Hub at the University of Turin.

John Elkann, President of Fondazione Agnelli, attended the inaugural ceremony and signed the agreement regulating the Chair alongside Peking University and CEPIRC leadership.

The *Agnelli Chair of Italian Culture*, set to become operational in spring 2025, aims to provide students and faculty at China's premier university with a deeper understanding of Italian culture in all its facets. It will introduce future Chinese leaders to the historical and contemporary contributions Italy has made, not only in the arts but also in creativity, scientific and technological knowledge, the economy, and society. At the same time, the Chair will promote cultural dialogue between Italy and China, enhancing mutual understanding.

"In recent years, Fondazione Agnelli has intensified its commitment to improving the quality of education and universities in Italy and will continue to do so with impactful new initiatives and projects," stated John Elkann. *"The Agnelli Chair inaugurated today in Beijing is the first of its kind initiated by a European non-profit institution in China. This Chair serves as a bridge to encourage mutual understanding and peaceful cooperation between our countries. It will proudly showcase the best of Italian culture, past and present, and simultaneously strengthen our dialogue with China in all its dimensions—an especially crucial objective in times of global uncertainty and tension."*

Fondazione Agnelli

Via Giuseppe Giacosa 38 – 10125 Torino
tel 0116500500 - fax 0116500512
fondazioneagnelli.it

Cultural Dialogue with China and the Structure of the Agnelli Chair in Beijing

The Chair is structured around an innovative concept: each academic semester, a distinguished chairholder will be appointed on a rotating basis. This individual will be selected from prestigious and accomplished scholars and experts—not necessarily only Italian—who can provide insights into both historical and contemporary Italian culture. They will analyze its key influences across a broad range of fields, including the humanities and arts, as well as natural, social, and applied sciences.

Each chairholder will reside in Beijing for a period of two and a half to four months, receiving a salary and expense coverage from Peking University, funded by a €2.5 million endowment from Fondazione Agnelli. Furthermore, each chairholder will serve as an ambassador of Italian culture, engaging with Chinese academic communities in their field and inspiring students' interest in Italy. Additionally, the Chair aims to establish and make permanent two-way dialogues between China and Italy, deepening mutual understanding.

For these reasons, the Agnelli Chair is positioned within CEPIRC, an independent entity within Peking University dedicated to fostering cultural ties with Europe, born from years of work by the Italy-China Philanthropic Forum. This forum has been led by Professor Romano Prodi and Professor Giovanni Andornino from the University of Turin, of which Fondazione Agnelli has been a member since its inception. The Department of Italian Studies at Peking University and the Italian Cultural Institute in China will also be involved in the Chair's activities.

Other Similar Initiatives in Higher Education

The Chair is part of a larger program that Fondazione Agnelli has promoted in Italy and globally for years. As part of its growing commitment to enhancing the educational system—from early childhood through the highest levels of higher education—Fondazione Agnelli annually supports research and studies, along with innovative teaching projects with and for schools. Several initiatives have also been developed in higher education:

- The first was the Agnelli-Serena Professorship of Italian Studies at Oxford University, founded over a century ago and revitalized by Avvocato Agnelli in the late 1980s. This chair focuses on Italian literature, history, and culture. The current chairholder is Professor Simon Gilson, a distinguished Dante scholar.

- In 2013, Fondazione Agnelli established a permanent chair for a junior associate professor at Bocconi University in Milan, the Avvocato Giovanni Agnelli Associate Professorship in Economics, which rotates to support emerging talents in research. The first two holders, now full professors at Bocconi, were Chiara Fumagalli and Francesco Decarolis; the current chairholder is Mara Squicciarini, an accomplished economic historian.
- In 2016, the Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor chair was established at the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. The Agnelli Professor is Professor Francis Gavin, a prominent expert in international security.
- Finally, it is worth noting the strong historical connection with the Politecnico di Torino, whose Board of Directors includes Fondazione Agnelli's Director, Andrea Gavosto. Since 1999, marking Fiat's centenary, the university has offered bachelor's and master's degrees in Automotive Engineering.

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For further information:

Marco Gioannini

Press Office of Fondazione Agnelli

+39 335 7373883

marco.gioannini@fondazioneagnelli.it