

“Birds of Passage” and “Sojourners”: A Historical and Ethnographic Analysis of Chinese Migration to Prato, Italy



Figure 1: Piazza Wall in Prato's Chinatown. Postings and advertisements written in Chinese characters cover the walls of this piazza in the heart of Chinatown.

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¹ All photographs were taken by the author in Prato, Italy between May 7, 2009 and June 3, 2009.

Preface

Italia. When I close my eyes and think back to my time in Italy, a rush of memories comes to the surface. I can taste the salty *prosciutto*, the earthy olive oil, and the crisp sweetness of lemon *gelato*. I can see the verdant valleys bathed in a symphony of colors as the sun sets beneath the red tiled roofs. I can hear the constant murmur of voices bargaining at the marketplace or exchanging gossip over an *espresso* at a corner café. I can feel the solid cobblestones beneath my feet as I walk past *palazzi* and businesses older than my native country.



Figure 2: Rooftop View of Prato

By the time I turned twenty-one, I had spent five months in *Toscana*. The province of Tuscany is one of the most desired tourist locations in the world, where food and wine go hand in hand with history and culture. This is where the masters of the Renaissance created their works of art, where poets and philosophers championed the Italian vernacular, where statesmen and ecclesiastics battled for political and economic control. Whenever anyone learns that I have

studied in Italy, they give cries of envy and tell me how fortunate I am to have had that opportunity, how amazing it all must have been. I can only give a wry smile and respond in the affirmative. Sometimes, if it is a closer acquaintance, I will admit that living in Italy was quite challenging and that while I had very memorable experiences I was not always carefree. In response people often look at me incredulously, wondering how I could have experienced anything negative in sun-kissed Tuscany. Homesickness and cultural shock are easy answers to give, but they are not the whole truth.

I often wonder how the situations I found myself in would have developed if someone else had taken my place. I am a Chinese-American female just on the brink of womanhood. I am introverted and naïve but also slightly cynical and cosmopolitan. I am not perfect by any means, but I try to see the goodness inherent in every person and the silver lining in every situation. I am also capable of growth and metamorphosis, and Italy was a living, breathing laboratory. I find it slightly ironic that people gush over Italy just as they enthuse over my time in Italy, for their impression of both is never wholly accurate. Italy is steeped in a rich culture of sensual experiences, but it too undergoes growing pains; while history lives on in Tuscany, it is not the only thing that sustains the people living there. However, without a clear understanding of the past, the future remains a perplexing prospect, and this caveat applies equally to both Italy and to me.

Italy: Take One

Since I can remember, my mother has repeatedly told me: “You are Chinese. You must never forget who you are.” Out of a strong desire to help her family financially, my mother left her university studies behind in China in exchange for an arranged marriage and long hours in a restaurant in New York. I was born soon after. Growing up in a Chinese-American household, I

found it difficult to maintain a delicate balance between two very different worlds. While she asserted strong family values, my mother was the first to divorce in her family. While she emphasized commitment to academics, my mother also expected me to spend weekends and holidays at the family restaurant. While she stressed Chinese language and culture, our lifestyle became increasingly Westernized. I never resisted being Chinese, but the more pressure I felt to learn about and adhere to my heritage, the more I wanted to run away from it.

American and European history became my escape. Upon entering Duke University, I immersed myself in a freshman seminar program focusing on Medieval & Renaissance studies and began studying Italian. My parents were less than pleased – vexed was more like it. In order to maintain harmony at home, I agreed to give Chinese studies a chance. A research paper on Singapore revealed a centuries-long Chinese migration into Southeast Asia. A Chinese language course for heritage speakers addressed many of the issues Chinese-American students face and showed me that I was not alone. My interest in China grew, but I was now torn between my new curiosity for China and a longstanding passion for Europe. How could they be reconciled? My answer came in the form of Dr. Dominic Sachsenmaier and a course on Modern Political Thought: China/Europe. I was ecstatic at the possibility of bridging the gap between these two areas and discovered that an interdisciplinary major in International & Comparative Studies would allow me to do so.

The summer after sophomore year, I studied abroad in Beijing where I developed a deeper understanding of the culture that was at once both foreign and familiar. I fell in love with the language and thoroughly appreciated the opportunities I was given to go into the city and use my skills to interview, explore, and have fun. It was also the year of the Olympics, and I embraced the opportunity to watch as China prepared for its coming-out party to the world. I

returned home bubbling over with excitement for China, but I was about to embark on another adventure – Italy. While I appreciated the amenities of the Duke in Florence program, I regretted not attending a program that would allow me to live among the Italian people and immerse myself in their language and culture as I had in China. The program kept us sequestered away, and my shyness prevented me from breaking free. Close living quarters with fellow Americans of vastly different personalities and values also required a heroic effort of tact and maturity on my part. I yearned for the same type of personal connection I had experienced during my time in China.

My extended experience as a “foreigner” in Europe allowed insight into some of the cultural challenges immigrants face. Traveling throughout Europe, I noticed a sizeable Chinese presence, and I thought that these workers, students, and tourists must have had their own particular reasons for coming to Europe, just as I had myself. My happiness at seeing a “familiar” face and conversing in a “familiar” Chinese language reinforced what I had often heard before: regardless of where you are and where you are from, there is an innate bond formed between Chinese, even those that you have never met before. Nonetheless, it was always a surprise when both the European citizens and the Chinese residents with which I interacted considered me first and foremost Chinese, not American. At the end of four months, I had traveled a great deal of Italy – and Europe, but could I say that I was *in love* with Italy as some of my peers seemed to be? No. I had many questions about contemporary Italy but no immediate personal connection to the land and its people. It was time to go home.

Upon returning to Duke, I sought different ways to incorporate my knowledge and experiences into a cohesive purpose. What I had seen in Italy and of the Chinese in Europe stirred a deep intellectual curiosity within me to understand not only what I had seen, but also my

own background and experience with immigration. Why were the Chinese moving to Europe and not the United States? After all, was America not the land of immigration? What did this mean for the European Union's goal of a pan-European identity? I was ambivalent at the idea of returning to Italy, a place of tears and bittersweet memories. But ultimately, my inquisitiveness won out, and I found myself making the multitude of preparations necessary to conduct research back in Italy. The dates were set, May 6, 2009 to June 4, 2009, and there was no turning back. This time I would be almost completely on my own, and I was optimistic that when forced outside of my comfort zone, I could accomplish what I had not done the semester before. I hoped that I could immerse myself in the local community and create the longed-for relationships with the local populace. On May 6, I found myself flying eastward across the Atlantic, through the very terminals which had shuttled me to Europe the first time.

Italy: Take Two

When I was younger, I once asked my mother how she found life in America when she first came, and of the many things she said, one has stuck with me: "I was a mute for two years." Although she studied some English in China, it had been British English, and in Queens, New York, my mother discovered that no one could understand her, nor could she understand them. During my first few days in Prato, I encounter a similar situation. I find that being a Chinese-American who speaks stilted Italian and comprehends none of the Wenzhou dialect of the local Chinese populace puts me in a "no-man's land" between the two groups. I walk the streets alone, something I see few Chinese women doing, and I enter Italian-run establishments that few Chinese enter.

On one of my first evenings in Prato, I decide to explore a marvelous bookstore along Via Riascoli. I notice a young Italian man in a purple t-shirt and jeans reading a book at one of

the tables. Since I am trying and needing to get outside of my comfort zone in Prato, I do something very out of character – I initiate a conversation with a complete stranger. I discover that Johannes is twenty-two and that he is actually an international student from Argentina studying philosophy at the University of Florence. He is currently visiting his aunt, who lives in Prato, and is having a look around town. Eventually, Johannes asks if I would like to take a walk with him. I am flattered as I have never had much experience with potential male suitors. Although my advisor, Dr. Mazumdar, had drilled safety protocols into my head before I left, it seems like a harmless offer. The night is young, the streets well lit, and there are people milling about. However, as we walk, I find myself instinctively vigilant, steering us away from any dark streets or quiet areas, giving vague answers when Johannes asks where I am staying, and providing an email address instead when he asks for my number. After we bid goodnight, I circle the busy streets several times as an extra preventative measure before making my way back to the apartment.

A few days later, the drums and cymbals of the Mother's Day festivities awaken me in time for Mass, and I fling open the windows and curtains so that the sounds and light can filter into my room. Passing through the streets, I enjoy the sight of families celebrating the occasion, but as soon as the midday meal approaches, the streets become deserted. I settle down on some steps in the Piazza del Duomo to rest and catch up on journal writing. As I turn my head to begin writing, a Chinese man crosses the relatively empty piazza before he changes course and walks towards me. He looks to be in his 50s or 60s and of a rather robust figure. Dressed in a pink shirt, white wife beater, dark slacks, and Chinese style black cloth shoes, he reminds me a lot of my grandfather. When he finds out why I am in Prato, he seems rather amused but willing to talk. The man sits down on the steps with me, and we proceed to have an engaging

conversation in Chinese. Overall, he tells me, life in Italy is not bad, but when someone is as old as he is, it is time to go home: “回老家，见识见识，旅游旅游。”² He then asks if I have eaten lunch yet, to which I respond in the negative. The man explains that he is on his way home to lunch, and while his family does not have much, they can at least offer me rice and some company.

I am surprised by the invitation, but it does not seem unusual since food, in the Chinese tradition that I grew up with, is a vital way of showing one's hospitality and care. We have been speaking for some time, and I feel that I can trust him. “After all,” I reason, “his family will be there, and he seems like a kind uncle or grandfather figure. Perhaps they will become the host family that Dr. Mazumdar had suggested I find.” We enter a deserted Via Riascoli, and I have to jog to keep up. Then, suddenly, he stops in front of a large wooden door that I have become accustomed to seeing multiple times a day, for it is the door that I face when I enter Via Riascoli from my apartment some fifteen feet away. “Strange,” I think, “what a coincidence.” The man tells me to wait outside for a few minutes while he goes upstairs to check and see if anyone is home. I believe he is trying to be proper and ensure that we do not go in alone.

A few moments later, the man returns, motions me inside, and quickly shuts the door. I find myself in a darkened entryway and can barely see the stairs in the dim lighting. He turns to me with a face full of sadness informing me that there are too many people home so I cannot come up. I am confused why he has motioned me in, but I believe that he is ashamed that there is not enough to eat. As gently as possible, I tell him that it is okay, that I can eat elsewhere, but when I make motions to turn and leave, the man blocks my path. I become alarmed and ask him to let me out. When I reach for the chain lock, he uses his body to push me against the corner of

² “Return to the home village, reacquaint oneself, and travel and tour a little.”

the wall. Trapped, I cannot move my arms as I feel his arms running up and down the length of my body, groping me in areas that I have never permitted anyone to touch. He leans in to kiss me, and all I can do is avoid his face and plead for him to let me go. Over and over he tells me that he is sorry that I can not come upstairs to play and that I should come back next time to “play” with him. I am terrified of what will happen. Finally the door opens slightly, still latched, and I can see the street outside. The man fumbles with the lock and opens the door to let me out with one final entreaty to come back and play.

I stumble out into the street, my eyes blinded by the sunlight. I have forgotten that it is still early afternoon. I turn and see the door to my apartment, but I know that I cannot go straight in. What if he sees me? What if he *has* seen me before? Clutching my bag, I head down the street, and walk blindly onward. Two older Pakistani men pass by me on the right, and one of them asks if I would like to have a *cappuccino*. When I do not respond, the man who asked begins to follow me. “Not now!” I desperately think. He continues to follow me for some time as I wind through the streets trying to find the most populated areas. After a while, he gives up, and breathing deeply I walk up Via Riascoli, past that large wooden door, and enter the door into my own apartment complex. Opening the door to my room, I realize that the windows have been left open. When I move to close them my heart stops. My windows give the opposing building with the large wooden door a clear view into the apartment.

My friend Luisa takes me to the *questura*³ to make a report that evening. After admonishing me for not coming earlier, the detective tells me to come in the morning when there is a translator present since I must recount the story in my own words. That night I stay with Luisa, and there are nightmares. Early the next morning, Luisa drops me off at the *questura* before work. I walk past a long line of Chinese waiting outside against the fence to apply for a

³ Police headquarters.

permesso di soggiorno.⁴ At the top of the steps, I see a new police officer manning the entryway. I am unable to clearly explain what happened the night before, and he thinks that I am here to apply for a *permesso* as well, motioning me to the line. Finally, I remember a phrase from last evening, “*fare una denuncia*,”⁵ and he lets me in. I am granted a visit with a detective after a long wait. The detective from the night before has not communicated anything with the following shift, nor can they find him, and I am left to explain everything once again. While a translator is present, she cannot understand my English, and I hear my sentences misconstrued in Italian. Out of frustration, I decide to try in Italian, finding that, in a desperate situation, a language really does come back. The police report is stamped and signed, and the detective recommends that I find another place to live. I exit the front doors of the *questura* and walk past the line of Chinese which has grown during my time inside. Where do I go? What do I do? Questions crowd my mind. My sense of security is gone.

What Next?

In the end, I decided to stay. I had devoted too much time and effort, and the efforts of many others, to turn back within days of arriving. I still wanted the answers to those constant questions in the back of my mind. Staying, however, meant a readjustment of my plans. I found another place to stay, which meant I would have to commute from a different city. I was highly uncomfortable around older males and introducing myself to strangers became even more unnerving. Most stressful for me, though, was the fact that, since Via Riascoli is the main road in the city, I had to walk by that large wooden door every single day.

Thinking back on my time in Prato, especially that first week, I wonder what it would have been like had I been someone else. Would any of this have happened if I had been a

⁴ Italian permit of residence.

⁵ “to make a report”

Caucasian-American student? An African-American student? Both Luisa and the police were shocked to hear that the assailant had been Chinese, an unthinkable possibility. I was a young Chinese-American student, and he an elderly Chinese man. If anything, he should have looked out for me. I had trusted the man implicitly. He was Chinese. He reminded me of my grandfather. He had invited me to meet his family at midday. My faith in the oft-repeated saying about kinship bonds between the Chinese had been broken. With Johannes, even though he had remained extremely respectful, I remained constantly on guard. He was Italian-Argentinean. He was a young university student. He had invited me on a walk at night. If it had been anybody to make the attack, should it not have been Johannes, a young man alone at night with a female? What about the Pakistani – would he have dared to follow me if I were not Chinese? As a single Chinese female in male-dominant Italy, I found that I was a prime target for the male gaze.

Each person I encountered had his/her own stereotypes and expectations of me, and I was uniquely situated to confound everyone's expectations. I had come to Prato to observe, but the local residents were not the only ones under scrutiny. I realized that observing without becoming involved, taking without giving, meant that I would not gain the whole picture. My early experiences that summer forever intertwined me and my identity with my subjects; who I am cannot be divorced from my research. I need to reevaluate the many different facets of my experiences and use what I have learned in the past to understand the present and future. I began this journey with both intellectual and personal reasons, and, after my time in Italy, this thesis is an attempt to examine, repair, and reassemble both me and my research.

Introduction

Today's Europe is at a crossroads. Although Europe attracted a number of immigrants throughout its history, it has traditionally been seen as a point of emigration. The constant search for a better life, the discovery of the Americas, and the dreams of colonial empire all contributed to a mass movement of people both within and away from Europe. However, Europe is currently facing a phenomenal reversal of its historical migration trajectory, becoming a primary destination for immigrants rather than just a sending source. This international migratory trend comes at a critical point in Europe's history when the European Union (EU) is seeking to form a united European identity in part through the formulation of new migration policies.

How have immigrants entering the EU affected intra-European integration and the concept of a singular European identity? To explore this question, I will examine the province of Prato in Italy, which currently hosts one of the densest Chinese populations in Europe. I hypothesize that the tensions between the Chinese and Italians in Prato are in part affected by the respective communities' historical experience with migration; only by looking at their history can we begin to understand the present-day situation within Prato. The intersection of these two communities in Prato results from the overlap occurring between the new European migratory trends and the ongoing global movements of the Chinese diasporas. Prato's residents must not only contend with the crossroad of historical experience, but they must also cope with sociopolitical and economic pressures laid upon them regionally, nationally, and supra-nationally.

Scholarly interest in European integration and intra-European migration has steadily increased over the last two decades. Numerous studies of different immigrant communities within Europe supplant this growing scholarship; however, a majority of the material concerns economics and globalization or socio-political security and legality. The deeper historical

influence of international migration in relation to Europe has not been widely explored. Furthermore, study of the Chinese experience in Europe is a relatively new field. Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke's *The Chinese in Europe* (1998) was the first comprehensive work on the Chinese in Europe. Graeme Johanson, Russel Smyth, and Rebecca French's *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato* (2009) was the first comprehensive work in English on the Chinese in Prato. While my thesis draws heavily from these two edited collections, and the research inspired by these studies, I aim to utilize an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, comparative analysis – in particular history and anthropology – to explore multiple facets of Sino-Italian relations in Prato.

To supplant my secondary sources, I conducted field research in Prato from May to June of 2009. Utilizing Chinese, English, and Italian, I was able to interview a number of people and learn from their personal histories and opinions.⁶ Where appropriate, I have tried to maintain the use of the present tense so that the reader may experience the situations alongside me rather than as a passive observer. While the research methodology section is traditionally placed in the introduction, I have decided to include it in Chapter 5: Prato and the People: Observations and Interviews, because I feel that the section helps to explain how I created a network of contacts in the city. However, I will take this opportunity to clarify several terms which will show up regularly within the body of this thesis. While I prefer to use the term “migrant” when discussing participants within the migratory trends, because they are both emigrant in the eyes of their home country and immigrant in the eyes of their host country, I will also use “immigrant” and “emigrant” where I feel it is contextually appropriate. “Integration” is another contested term within social science literature; however, I use this term because I know of no other word to describe a process that makes whole and gives all members an equal opportunity to belong

⁶ English quotations were transcribed verbatim, but all translations of Chinese and Italian quotations are mine.

within a certain society. Lastly, I utilize the terms “Italian” and “Chinese” as applied to the nationalities as a whole, and I will explain my opinions towards this later in the text.

The body of my thesis is divided into two parts. Part I will examine the historical migration trends of the European and Chinese populations. Chapter One seeks to place the Italian story within a European context, while Chapter Two seeks to place the Chinese experience within a European and consequently Italian context. Both Italy and China are traditionally points of emigration, but today, there is a unique juncture in the historical experience whereupon one community, the Italians, has become host to the other, the Chinese. The juxtaposition of two ethnic communities demonstrates that while there are many similarities between them, Italy, and Europe, was unprepared for its new double role. Chapter Three poses the question “What’s different now?” Should the Italians be able to understand these migrants better due to their own experiences, or is the need to adapt a constant, even at this junction? I find that there is a creation of tension amongst the ethnicities that must now contend with multiple overlapping roles. Prato is presented as the case study within which I will seek to explore and analyze the tensions present within this community.

Part II will focus on Prato itself in an attempt to understand the consequences of an intersection between the Chinese and Italian communities. Chapter Four examines the situation in Prato, providing the social, political, and economic context for my interviews. The social issues occurring at the local level are creating a pressure-cooker of ethnic tension within the community, leading to separation and lack of dialogue. Nonetheless, everything and everyone is intertwined, and the people find it difficult to disassociate themselves from the issues at hand. Chapter Five then presents my observations and interviews with people living in Prato to give a picture of the situation on the ground. What are the points of tension and awareness that emerge?

Why does it matter whether or not people are aware of the issues? It is a real-life glimpse of what happens when people from two cultures, in this case the Italians and the Chinese, intersect at a particular point within Europe. Lastly, Chapter Six reflects upon the tensions that exist within the community and what this means for the Italians and Chinese within Europe. People are aware that tensions exist, but they have no clear-cut answer on how to begin creating a harmonious, multi-ethnic community. While both sides generally expect the Chinese to return “home,” the reality is that the Chinese are in Prato to stay.

Part I: Historical Migration Trends

Chapter 1: European Migration Trends and the Italian Experience

How does one define Europe today? As a geographic continent? As the European Union? As distinct nations and regions? Each region within Europe has its own history, culture, and language. Thus, Europe cannot be defined simply as a single entity but as a conglomeration of overlapping identities and geographic regions. What happens to this delicate overlap as people move within the continent, or when people arrive from areas outside of the continent? Are these regional identities more concretely defined as a result, or do they accommodate and incorporate the cultures of these new arrivals? While this encounter of identities may seem like a recent global phenomenon, the truth is that Europe in the past was also a fragmented but mobile place, although on a smaller scale than today. Until recently, “stability was a privilege” for the Europeans who were consistently affected by war, famine, and plague.⁷ The map of Europe reflected this uncertain identity, and it continued to be redrawn in the following centuries. Today, debates over how far the EU should expand and how deep its governmental influence should be felt concurrently reinforces and challenges the boundaries of Europe’s political and cultural landscape. Migration and ensuing intersections of identities precipitated by modern globalization consistently challenge this political entity – an entity which already accommodates twenty-three official languages and is trying to promote its own pan-European identity.

In the following chapter, I consider the migration trends of nineteenth and twentieth century Western Europe in conjunction with major changes in the social, political, and economic fabric of the continent, “connect[ing] the changes in European history with the lives of men and women in the past.”⁸ Additionally, I use this greater global movement to contextualize the Italian experience. Beginning with the movement of superfluous labor towards urban areas in

⁷ Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe Since 1650* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

the Industrial Revolution, I then trace the geographic expansion of European migrations during the Great Atlantic Migration in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These migrant populations and the changing political boundaries within Europe also contributed to questions of nationhood and national identity. While the World Wars in the first half of the twentieth century essentially stopped European migration, resulting events such as decolonization, the rebuilding of Europe, and the formation of the EU revitalized but prompted changes in traditional migratory trends. Present day Western Europe has now become a point of destination, not departure. Lastly, I examine Italy’s experience with immigration and its relationship with the EU over such policies.

To frame my overview of European and Italian migration trends, I will adopt Leslie Page Moch’s systemic perspective of migration as presented in her work *Moving Europeans*: “Migration itself is conceived as a socially constructed, self-perpetuating system that includes home and destination – a responsive system that expands, contracts, and changes according to circumstance.”⁹ I chose this framework because I believe that it provides a pragmatic attitude towards interpreting migration as a complex process affected by multiple pressure points without removing the humanity behind these decisions. Without migration, there would be little change within society, and without change within society, there would be little migration. Moch also utilizes Charles Tilly’s four primary migration systems classified based upon distance and type of break with the home culture.¹⁰

<i>Local Migration</i>	Migrants remained in close contact with home moving primarily for marriage, land, and labor.
<i>Circular Migration</i>	Migrants return home for specified intervals within a particular migration system.
<i>Chain Migration</i>	Migrants are connected with people at the destination point who assist them with locating housing and employment.

⁹ Ibid, 16.
¹⁰ Ibid, 16-17.

Career Migration Migrants who move according to the needs and location of potential employment outside of familial influence.

While I may not use these terms specifically below, the general patterns presented above should become apparent as I discuss the movements of Italians and Chinese in later chapters. These migration systems coexisted, drawing people at different points in their lives. Heavily influenced by economic constraints but primarily through “*human relations*,” migrants often moved from one system to another.¹¹ As the movement of people and information created larger migration networks, human relationships began to play different roles within the overarching historical context.

Identity and Industrialization

Despite the “wars, political oppression, and religious persecutions of the European past,” the fact that migrations occurred in pre-industrial Europe, even if on a more local scale, is a testament that it was very much a part of normal human activity.¹² Long distance migration remained a privilege of the elites, such as nobles, ecclesiastics, and traders/merchants. This early migratory experience away from the political and geographic confines of home regions exemplified an unconscious bilateral identification of different groups of people. While these elites may not have originated from exactly the same place, they clung to one another because they had more in common geographically and culturally than with the local population. The rest of the ‘Europeans’ in turn distinguished themselves from the ‘others’ by compressing the dispersed peoples into a greater but simplified whole, designating them a general area and culture on the map. Thus, identification with an Italian civilization, or *civiltà italiana*, for

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 11.

example, “made [the Italian elites] and their culture as cosmopolitan and European as it was Italian.”¹³ It was very much an identity formed abroad.

For the local, rural population in Europe, insignificant demographic growth negated the need for mass movement in search of more resources. Furthermore, under serfdom and a reliance on the land for an economic livelihood, “people were bound to the soil,” and most migration took place within a local context.¹⁴ The Agricultural Revolution in the eighteenth century provided new technology that dramatically increased food production and population numbers, and emerging capitalist agriculture took away already insufficient land from a growing population. Moch argues that it was precisely the migrants’ freedom, forced or chosen, from the land and its obligations and the ability to determine their own lifestyle which allowed rural industry to flourish.¹⁵ Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution, which emerged in Britain and then expanded to the continent, began to attract many of the superfluous migrant laborers, who had been pushed off the land in search of employment. New machine technology centralized production, transforming older towns and cities or creating new towns and cities into booming industrial metropolises fed by migrants from the surrounding areas.

Conditions in these early cities were dangerous and unsanitary, and the rapid turnover in the workforce, either through return migration or death, required constant replenishment. The stream of people moving in and out of the city drew directly from the surrounding areas, “suggest[ing] that we see city walls not as barriers but rather as semi-permeable membrane

¹³ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 29.

¹⁴ Nancy L. Green and François Weil, introduction to *Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation*, eds. Nancy L. Green and François Weil (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁵ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 73.

though which nearby populations flowed.”¹⁶ Creation of a new working class meant that people lost direct connection with the land and became more willing to move further in search of work. During hard economic times, they could not rely on kinship networks but had to pioneer ahead on their own, contributing to a growing network of chain migration.¹⁷ In conjunction with the growing population boom and capitalist agriculture, more seasonal migration began to occur, and the urban economy changed the face of intra-European migration. Moch suggests that we consider the rural-urban dynamic as “two ends of a continuum” which complemented the movement of one another. As local migration led to circular and chain migration, the practice of moving longer distances became more commonplace. Longer distances inevitably meant that migrant laborers would begin to move across political boundaries, allowing them a similar identity formation experience as the elites had before them.

The Great Transatlantic Migration and the Italian Experience

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Europe was gripped by the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic Empire, which attempted to unify Western Europe under one rule and one system. Napoleon Bonaparte’s Empire not only spread French laws and traditions, but also the idea of the nation state, a sovereign state with a shared cultural and/or ethnic entity. After Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo in 1815, European powers gathered at the Council of Vienna to create a treaty that would ensure a new balance of power among five spheres of influence: Austria, the United Kingdom, Russia, Prussia, and France. Liberal uprisings occurring mid-century reset this balance, and two new sovereignties, Germany and Italy, were unified through these uprisings. Until that time, the fragmented regions which were consolidated under Germany and Italy had often fallen under the domination of other nations and empires. Once consolidated,

¹⁶ Ibid, 47.

¹⁷ Ibid, 113.

the governments of both new nations needed to create a national identity which would bind still disparate regions through common policies on language, religion, education, etc.

The unification of Italy, also known as the Risorgimento, took place from 1846-1870 under the direction of revolutionary leaders such as Camillo Cavour, Giuseppe Mazzini, Giuseppe Garibaldi, and Victor Emanuel II. While the Kingdom of Italy was officially founded in 1861, the government lacked both a physical infrastructure and a psychological mentality which would bind the nation together. Italy's Renaissance had shaped modern European civilization, but "the residents of Italy lacked any common government, language, or culture. There was no Italian nation or Italian people before 1861."¹⁸ As the Italian government promoted a standardized Tuscan dialect as the lingua franca, its spread slowly broke down regional linguistic barriers. Another lasting impact of the Italian unification process included the disintegration of the feudal land system and the redistribution of land to the peasants, although inadequate redistribution led to rebellions in the south. The unification process was a long and unsteady one, officially ending in the early twentieth century although cultural distances, particularly between north and south, still exist. Italian historian Donna Gabaccia argues that "Italy's new bourgeois rulers had stigmatized a majority of the new nation's citizens as racially inferior, rebellious criminals...[which] helped guarantee that the mass international migrations of the next fifty years would generate not one Italian diaspora but many."¹⁹

The great transatlantic migration took place roughly between 1870 and 1914. Europeans as a whole, though they differed from region to region, were taking part in a global movement of people. Europe was fast becoming crowded and expensive, and children whose livelihoods were not guaranteed by inheritance often went abroad in search of better economic opportunities.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ Ibid, 57.

While the United States is often singled out as an example of exceptional immigration, in reality both North and South America experienced a large influx of migrants. The New World offered space for agriculture and labor intensive jobs – such as factory, field, and construction work – that would pay multiple times over potential employment options at home. Statistics support the migration explosion story:

In the late eighteenth century about 4 million people lived in North America. From 1820 to 1860 ca. 5 million (mainly) European immigrants came to the United States, and between 1860 and 1890 another 13.5 million immigrants followed. Finally, in the first quarter of the twentieth century ca. 18 million immigrants were landed.²⁰

In the absence of legal and political restraints, people moved towards perceived economic opportunity.²¹ This mass movement took governments by surprise, and their infrastructures were not adequately prepared to regulate such mass numbers. During a time when nations were in the “process of inventing themselves,” a large number of emigrating citizens “became a particularly sensitive issue,” indicating that all was not well at home.²² Freedom from the land had not only spurred migration towards the emerging industrial cities, but it was now encouraging migration across international boundaries.

Technology was crucial to this mass movement of people. In the earlier years of Atlantic migration, the migrant faced an uncertain future, with a long and dangerous oceanic trip and a lack of support upon arrival at the destination. New steam technology improved railroads and ships, and transportation became faster and more affordable. Other improvements in the “technology of survival,” such as sanitation and health coupled with increased government

²⁰ Holger Henke, introduction to *Crossing Over: Comparing Recent Migration in the United States and Europe*, ed. Holger Henke (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 5.

²¹ Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3.

²² Green and Weil, introduction, 3.

oversight made the trip almost risk-free.²³ A trip that could have taken several months by ship in previous times now took only week or two, and the rapid growth of railroads and ship passages testify to the boom in transatlantic transportation. Thus, migrant laborers who had difficulty finding work in Europe quickly took advantage of the opportunities abroad with the understanding that they could return home just as easily.²⁴ Moreover, the pioneering friends and family who had gone before them provided a secure network of aid and assistance once the migrant reached the new world. As Walter Nugent characterizes the phenomenon in *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914*, “The cumulative picture of movement is one of a swarming or churning of people back and forth across the Atlantic highway.”²⁵

Up until the late nineteenth century, job-seeking Italians had migrated north, through Italy, and into neighboring countries such as France and Switzerland.²⁶ Their prolific presence in seasonal construction crews across Europe led Italian laborers to be called “The Chinese of Europe,” referencing the great Chinese presence in construction work in the Americas.²⁷ Italian transatlantic migration did not peak until the end of the century when the sending rates of many European nations had already begun to decline, totaling a staggering fourteen million between 1876 and 1914.²⁸ Chain migration, then, might have been the most persuasive reason why Italians began to move across the Atlantic in such great numbers. Village ties created strong international bonds which continued to draw people away from Italy, and Brazil, Argentina, and the United States proved to be the most popular destinations. In one study, immigration scholar Ira Glazier took a random sample of 10,330 Italians who had migrated between 1880-1900. He

²³ Nugent, *Crossings*, 25.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁶ Nugent, *Crossings*, 95.

²⁷ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 121.

²⁸ Donna R. Gabaccia, et al., “Emigration and Nation Building During the Mass Migrations from Europe,” in *Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation*, eds. Nancy L. Green and François Weil (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 64.

found that the participants originated from 1,529 towns, but “216 towns contributed 56 percent of the migrants, suggesting the strong migration chains.”²⁹ In cases such as these, villages in the home country created multiple satellite villages with locations as diverse as Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and New York.³⁰

As a whole, host countries preferred European migrants over migrants from other areas in the world; however, even within this context, migrant statuses differed depending on their country of origin. Assimilation and integration of migrants in the receiving countries often depended on contemporary government policies and local attitudes towards the incoming migrants. Italians, for example, faced great hostilities in the United States due to their nationality and associated stereotypes, particularly their Catholicism and preference for return migration. On the other hand, Argentina actively recruited Spanish and Italian migrants. These migrants soon constituted approximately eighty percent of the overall population, contributing not only their manpower but their cultural heritage as well.³¹ In addition to a strong chain migration pull, Italian migrants believed that South America, with its similar cultural and language traditions would better facilitate assimilation in comparison with their United States counterparts.³² Italians in South America also discovered that the less-developed cities allowed them to take part in their development and expansion and become well regarded, and in some cases prosperous, migrants.³³ Accordingly, these migrants made calculated choices prior to departure. Migration patterns affected European nations unevenly, but the tendency to emigrate also depended on the family and regional ties already in place.³⁴

²⁹ Nugent, *Crossings*, 99.

³⁰ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 73.

³¹ Nugent, *Crossings*, 112-14.

³² *Ibid*, 99, 120.

³³ *Ibid*, 126.

³⁴ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 149.

A significant portion of European migrants became known as “birds of passage,” describing migrants who crossed the Atlantic more than once. While not all European migrants followed this pattern, with some groups intending permanent resettlement, it seems safe to say that in every migrant group, there were at least a few who looked at the new world solely in terms of economic gain. Sometimes this was part of an intentional pattern of circular migration, but in other instances a migrant’s level of financial security determined how often he would move. Many of these “birds of passage” dreamed of making their fortunes abroad and then returning to their home villages to purchase land or establish small businesses. According to Umberto Coletti, the executive secretary for the Society for Italian Immigrants in New York, at the turn of the nineteenth century:

The Italian laborers, after they have worked for awhile in their country, return to Italy, where, with their savings...they look forward to a comfortable future, trading and farming, keeping alive in their mountain villages...some of the American spirit they acquired in this country. Yet a large majority of them repatriated sooner or later...to America³⁵

When considering the new “foreigners” from Europe, Americans believed that they were opening up their country to oppressed immigrants who had come to take refuge, so “To leave again implied that the migrant came only for money...[and] was too crass to appreciate America as a noble experiment in democracy.”³⁶ Americans expected the migrants to establish a new life in the country and appreciate the opportunities by investing rather than sending their earnings back to the home country. The European migrants who took part in this constant stream of movement saw nothing unusual about their behavior, for they were participating in a centuries-

³⁵ Nugent, *Crossings*, 157.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 158-59.

long tradition of wage labor migration. In fact, those who sought land, “implying permanent resettlement, may well have been exceptional.”³⁷

A feeling of collective national Italian identity was strongly pursued and created abroad through the movement of multiple Italian diasporas. “*Tutto il mondo è paese*,” or “all the world is one home place,” is a commonly cited Italian proverb, and for the Italian migrants, “home was a place...not a people, nation, or descent group.”³⁸ Given the multiple diaspora identities that formed following the unification, it seems surprising that the overseas Italians would cluster together into ethnic neighborhoods and work gangs. However, outside of Italy, the different Italian diasporas did band together, following a standing tradition begun by elite Italian migrants within Europe. They moved to strongly identify with a new nation of Italians whose migratory experience and dependence on the idea of a homeland were unmatched by the still fragmented groups of Italians in the home state. The Italian migrants were able to share in the idea of a “beloved home” regardless of their village of origin.³⁹ Exiled revolutionary Mazzini, for example, identified Italian labor migrants in South America “as fellow Italians and potential followers.”⁴⁰ Italian unification through the formation of a national identity began abroad, and the future political leaders were able to comprehend this fact:

Italy has always had a ‘politics of identity’; questions of Italian-ness have been the concern of Italian politicians since the Risorgimento...it is plausible to argue that Italian identity was forged as much in the streets of New York or Buenos Aires as of Rome and Milan, transmitted to Italy through return and transnational migration.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid, 35.

³⁸ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 6-7.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 45.

⁴¹ Ralph Grillo, “Immigration and the Politics of Recognizing Difference in Italy,” in *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian-style*, eds. Ralph Grillo and Jeff Pratt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 11.

Those working abroad were able to connect with other Italians, finding and “creat[ing] a number of distinctive and distinctively ‘Italian’ occupational niches within the global labor market.”⁴² Migrants sent home large portions of their earnings, also known as remittances, but these were primarily used for the familial consumption of material goods and improvement of homes, sometimes the villages. Very little remittance money was invested to create a more self-sustaining local economy, requiring a consistent demand for additional income. Thus, there was constant movement within the global labor market, and the conscious decision of many to work away from home and then return “confirms the sophistication, intentionality, and instrumentality of their moves.”⁴³ For the Italian migrants, Gabaccia claims that it was the “large number of transients, not the smaller groups that settled abroad or returned home [who] defined the particularity of Italy’s diasporas.”⁴⁴ Transnational families developed through calculated choices by certain members, generally men, to sacrifice personal comforts and family ties in order to provide for the family by working where wages were higher. Although the new Italian government was initially aggrieved at the idea that its citizens were leaving, it soon realized the financial benefits of remittances, and it sought to regularize such ties within the Italian economy.⁴⁵ Fittingly, perhaps, the Italian migrants became “one of the first social groups to benefit from the beginnings of an Italian welfare state” given that they were, ironically, the best documented and most accessible population for the government.⁴⁶

Global market patterns transformed interregional European migration into a global phenomenon. European migrants joined the workers of the world, and transnationalism soon

⁴² Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, 74.

⁴³ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 156-57.

⁴⁴ Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, 7.

⁴⁵ Caroline Douki, “The Liberal Italian State and Mass Emigration, 1860-1914,” trans. Amy Jacobs in *Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation*, eds. Nancy L. Green and François Weil (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 105.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 104-05.

became a way of life for many Europeans. A constant intersection with migrants from different geographic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds also helped the migrants define their own identity. Regardless of where they were, Italian migrants attempted to recreate their home villages and a taste of the life that they had left behind.⁴⁷ In essence, Italian national identity evolved through the movement of its people outside of the newly united nation.

The World Wars and their Aftermath in Europe

The great movement of people back and forth across the Atlantic abruptly stopped in 1914 when World War I shattered the tenuous peace in Europe. Tense political relations during the war forced nations to close their borders in an attempt to safeguard themselves from possible further attack. An extraordinary period of essentially limitless free movement had ended, and the “status of foreigners became more salient in questions of citizenship, juridical rights, suffrage, and political discussion.”⁴⁸ Bureaucratic regulations such as immigrant quotas, passports, and visas became a necessary consideration for emigrants after this period.⁴⁹ While the regulation of international labor added a new step to the migration process, it did not prevent kinship networks from remaining the first point of reference within international migration systems. Kinship networks learned how to operate within, or evade, these new regulations, and this is supported by the fact that an additional four million Italians emigrated between 1915 and 1945.^{50 51}

In the aftermath of the war, Europe’s socioeconomic instability, coupled with the global economic depression of the early 1930s, limited migration within and out of Europe. The spread of radical groups, such as Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime and Benito Mussolini’s Fascist regime, also inhibited the movement of people. Initially, Mussolini’s Fascist government believed that

⁴⁷ Nugent, *Crossings*, 96.

⁴⁸ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 161.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵¹ Gabaccia et al., “Emigration and Nation Building During the Mass Migrations from Europe,” 64.

emigration was necessary for the nation's socioeconomic stability; however, he later shifted his position and supported only the emigration of professional Italians to "transform the image of Italy's immigrants abroad...view[ing emigrants] as a means of spreading Italian culture and ideas...[and] an integral part of Fascist foreign policy."⁵² While this latter policy intended to contain lower-class Italians within Italian territories, state-supported emigration of professional-Italians prevented the government from improving domestic conditions, leading to further emigration by the lower classes.⁵³ Nonetheless, Gabaccia argues that "Worldwide, both fascism and anti-fascism became competing and transnational but self-consciously nationalist movements seeming to bind migrant Italians to Italy."⁵⁴ Although Europe was certainly a stage for movement during the ensuing Second World War, in the form of soldiers, prisoners, and refugees, the scale was nowhere as monumental as before. Following the end of the war, succeeding events would bring about new trends in migration.

At the end of World War II, the prominence of Western Europe had diminished in the eyes of the world. No longer supreme world powers, once-leading European nations were replaced by the United States and Russia. The Yalta conference once again redrew the European map, and the continent was split into two blocs: east and west. Almost immediately, the United States and Russia, each leading their own unique ideology, locked themselves in a bitter competition, better known as the Cold War, for the next forty-six years. Tense military, political, and economic competition between communist and democratic nations created a barrier which broke only in the 1990s following the reunification of East and West Germany. During this time, national control was asserted through migration restriction, the surveillance of migrants seen as

⁵² Monte S. Finkelstein, "The Johnson Act, Mussolini and Fascist Emigration Policy: 1921-1930" *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 8 (Fall 1998): 44.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁴ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 151.

“essential to national security.”⁵⁵ Nations began to differentiate between “wanted” and “unwanted” migrants, preferring people with critical skills and resources.

A wave of decolonization swept the globe as many of the European nations struggled to rebuild. Some of these were initiated by the mother countries to free themselves from the responsibility over these faraway locales. Other colonies were inspired by the nation building movements taking place around the world and saw the period as their best opportunity for independence. Decolonization left the European colonists in a precarious situation. Over the course of thirty-five years, approximately five to seven million former colonists returned to Europe, and this “mass population movement represents Europe’s first important shift in the twentieth century from a site of net population exportation to one of immigration.”⁵⁶ The European nations were unprepared to accommodate this sudden influx of migrants who served as “living embodiments of a history repudiated around the world.”⁵⁷ In some colonies, such as Algeria (France) or Indonesia (Netherlands), where some of the colonists had resided for multiple generations, decolonization unleashed questions of identity and belonging that were quite different than, for example, Angola’s more recent Portuguese settlement.⁵⁸ Having been educated under the imperial system in the colonies, these migrants were caught between multiple layers of identity which were compounded by migrating to the former mother country. Italy’s own colonization experiment had been relatively unsuccessful, and its experience with colonial migrants was considerably less in comparison with other European nations, such as Britain and France, who spoke of their former empire “striking back” at them. In this particularly stressful

⁵⁵ Ibid, 131.

⁵⁶ Andrea L. Smith, introduction to *Europe’s Invisible Migrants*, ed. Andrea L. Smith (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 9.

⁵⁷ Frederick Cooper, “Postcolonial Peoples: A Commentary,” in *Europe’s Invisible Migrants*, ed. Andrea L. Smith (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 172.

⁵⁸ Smith, introduction, 15.

and uncertain moment in Europe's history, just following World War II, the consequences of colonization were not something that European nations were prepared to address.⁵⁹

Physically rebuilding Europe required significant amounts of outside funding, much of which was provided through the United States' Marshall Plan. The ensuing European economic miracle stimulated migration, effectively turning the former emigrating continent into a magnet for immigration. However, change occurred in steps, first drawing from close-by sources of labor before labor migrants from other areas of the world began to move in. Intra-European migration recommenced, and a great exodus of people from the rural countryside flooded the reconstructed cities.⁶⁰ To supplement the needs of its diminished postwar labor force, the more industrialized Northern European nations also began to support labor migration programs, including Italians moving into Belgium and Turks moving into Germany. Guest worker programs such as these focused on the idea that labor was a flexible economic tool essential for the postwar economic boom; once the workers were no longer needed, they would return to their countries of origin.⁶¹ However, with the "rise of welfare states," migrants became "something other than neutral, cost-less, factors of production in a national economy."⁶² Migrants receiving the benefits of a tax-paid welfare system therefore "took" from the national system rather than simply increasing the national system's revenue. As labor migrants began to move longer distances and across further national boundaries, their demographic composition in terms of "ethnicity, race, or religious tradition" differentiated them from previous internal European

⁵⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁰ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 163.

⁶¹ Christina Boswell, "Labor Migration Programs in Europe: History Repeating Itself?" in *Crossing Over: Comparing Recent Migration in the United States and Europe*, ed. Holger Henke (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 223.

⁶² Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 132-33.

migrations by drawing upon a more similar background than, say, an Algerian in France or a Turk in Germany.⁶³

Italy's defeat in World War II prompted the demise of the Fascist government and the creation of the Italian Republic in 1946. The war had also shattered existing infrastructure, leaving an already underdeveloped country in ruins. Many people were unemployed, and the effects of the unequal land distribution following the Risorgimento left them without a means for a livelihood. According to a 1953 Italian parliamentary report on unemployment, 48% of the South, 43.8% of the Center, and 41.3% of the North were "drastically underemployed."⁶⁴ Italy continued to serve as a point of emigration under these conditions. Between 1946 and 1957, 1,100,000 of those who left for the New World and 80,000 of those who left for northern European nations, such as France, Belgium, and Switzerland, did not return.⁶⁵ The number of Italian immigrants settling in northern Europe was much smaller because they "tended to go for shorter periods, on six-month or one-year contracts, and regarded work abroad as a temporary rather than a permanent solution to their problems."⁶⁶ Within Italy, the northern Industrial Triangle, major cities and towns, and also rural and developing areas in central Italy, including Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, drew a "small but significant flow of migrants," primarily from the south.⁶⁷ These domestic and European migration trends follow similar labor migration patterns to those who witnessed in earlier periods of history.

The economic revival that followed in the 1950s and 60s heralded Italy's Golden Age for international trade. With the end of trade protectionism and the onset of consumerism, Italy took

⁶³ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 163.

⁶⁴ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 210-11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

advantage of American machinery and technology and joined the ongoing European economic miracle. Italy's per capita income growth rate surpassed all other European nations, and, by 1970, the per capita income "had reached 60 per cent of that in France and 82 per cent of that in Britain."⁶⁸ This was no small feat in just under twenty years, and Italy's government maintained their economic dominance by placing Italy at the forefront of European economic integration. To feed the resulting growing demand for labor, a mass movement within the country took place, from the rural South towards the industrialized North, relieving the drastic underemployment just following the war. Italian migrants preferred the chance to work domestically, where cultural differences and family reunification were comparatively much easier than if moving abroad; thus ended Italy's "long history as one of the world's most important exporters of labor."⁶⁹ With the more comprehensive economic successes came welfare reforms and beneficial national policies which strengthened the state-citizen bond, "fostering a new sense of national solidarity."⁷⁰ Nonetheless, the economic miracle had centered on the North, and over a hundred years after the unification of Italy, the disequilibrium between North and South reinforced an Italian identity that "continues to be built around the duality of North and South and the tensions between them."⁷¹

In light of the tremendous bloodshed of two World Wars, the European nations looked within themselves to determine how to avoid another war. On a global scale, European nations joined together to form international organizations such as the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. On a continental scale, European nations moved towards integration as a way to escape the nationalism which had proved to be so costly. The Council of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 239.

⁶⁹ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, 160.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 154.

⁷¹ Grillo, "Immigration and the Politics of Recognizing Difference in Italy," 11.

Europe was established in 1949, which led to the 1951 Treaty of Paris and the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC): West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Integration of these two critical industries for weapons production ensured that no nation would be able to arm itself like Germany. In 1957, the Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC), comprised of the same countries as the ECSC. This new community sought a unified economic policy and common market to further integrate European trade and movement. Guest worker programs and provisions for the free internal movement of workers and their families were slowly enacted over the following decades. Migration in the 1960s fostered the intersection of new and old economic flows of migration in emerging urban cores/corridors, creating a mesh of identities.⁷² In 1967, the ECSC, EEC, and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) merged to form the European Community (EC). While many rulers had attempted to unite Western Europe before this time, this was the first instance of a voluntary agreement by European nation states to submit themselves to a greater united European community.

The EC began the first of several geographic expansions in 1973, adding more European nations to its membership; however, 1973 was also the year of the international oil crisis. A promising resurgence and development of the global economy quickly led to hard economic times across the world. In response, many European nations closed their borders and ended guest worker programs. Since they were conceived as programs of flexible labor, the host countries expected migrants to return home once they lost their jobs. Fearing that they would not be allowed back in once they left, many migrants brought their families to Europe under existing reunification policies. A migrant laborer was willing to undergo extreme sacrifices, such as separation from family, long hours, and terrible conditions, in the short term. However, they

⁷² Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 173.

were “not willing to forego all hope of a family life permanently,” meaning that if they had to stay indefinitely then they would unify or recreate elements of their previous lives.⁷³

Reunifications and the birth of the second generation consequently increased the immigrant population despite the new stringent border controls. The Single European Act in 1986, the first major revision of the Treaty of Rome, would be the next big step towards a common economic policy in Europe. Shortly thereafter, a series of revolutions ended the decades long Cold War, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signified the beginning of a new era. Europe was no longer divided into two; the migrants pouring into the Western bloc signaled a new era for Europe.

The EU and Italy in the Present Day

The Maastricht Treaty in 1993 formally transformed the EC into the European Union. Along with the establishment of the tools of a supranational government, including a central parliament, court, and bank, the EU also enacted two policies that steered its member states closer toward a unified economic community. The Schengen Zone was finally in full effect, and its member countries created open borders between participating countries, negating the need to pass internal border controls.⁷⁴ The Eurozone created a common economic area which used the same currency, the Euro, as the means of financial exchange.⁷⁵ With additional treaties at Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001), and Lisbon (2007), the EU continually refashions itself into a more comprehensive body, placing greater emphasis on vital topics such as citizenship, security,

⁷³ Ibid, 183.

⁷⁴ The Schengen Area, formed in 1985, facilitated international travel by eliminating internal borders while simultaneously strengthening border controls with non-participating nations. Currently, twenty-five European nations have agreed to this arrangement. All EU member states, with the exception of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Romania, take part in the Schengen Area with three additional non-EU member states: Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland.

⁷⁵ The Eurozone, or Euro Area, was officially launched on 1 January 1999 when the Euro was introduced into the legal monetary system. Today, it is officially comprised of sixteen EU member states, falling under the responsibility of the European Central Bank. Some smaller Third Countries have also adopted the Euro, such as Monaco and Vatican City, and they may also be informally considered a part of the Eurozone.

and expansion. As the EU increased its powers, immigration policies fell under its jurisdiction and underwent a series of reiterations, but the vitality of the Schengen Zone remained central to its policies. Franck Düvell, who specializes in migration and the EU, concludes that “The European Union’s new approaches to immigration policies are far-reaching and paradigmatic. They reveal close links between immigration, population, and foreign policies, and economic considerations.”⁷⁶ At twenty-seven members strong today, the voluntary movement towards a supranational government has transformed the EU into a major center of world power.

Returning to the question of how one defines Europe today, the recent EU expansion programs have sparked debate over whether and how the EU can concurrently expand physically while deepening its influence through the creation of further governing structures and a pan-European identity.

Europe has become the newest and largest magnet for migrants from both within the EU and external Third Countries.⁷⁷ Expansion of the EU member countries into less developed areas, in conjunction with the free internal borders of the Schengen Zone, has also led to an increase in migrants coming from the poorer member countries in the East towards the wealthier West.

Additionally, the EU is unsuccessfully trying to prevent Third Country residents from entering its external borders. Italy, for example, hosts large numbers of Albanian and Romanian immigrants from Eastern Europe. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller list six major trends in Europe’s recent migrant population growth in their work entitled *The Age of Migration:*

*International Population Movements in the Modern World.*⁷⁸ First, “new temporary foreign worker programs in the 1990s” attempted to recreate the guest worker programs of the past to

⁷⁶ Frank Düvell, “Globalization of Migration Control: A Tug-of-War between Restrictionists and Human Agency?” in *Crossing Over: Comparing Recent Migration in the United States and Europe*, ed. Holger Henke (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), 32.

⁷⁷ Third Countries are any non-EU member states.

⁷⁸ Henke, introduction, 6.

supplant a diminishing native labor force. Second, “family reunions among former foreign and ex-colonial workers” bring in a sizable immigrant population who settle and raise future generations. Third, southern and central Europe shifted from roles as “countries of emigration to countries of immigration,” remarking on an incredible trend which undoubtedly includes Italy. Fourth, a “new mass movement of refugees and asylum-seekers” are forcing Western European nations to reconsider their immigration policies. Fifth, “growing international mobility of highly-qualified human resources” reflects the global aims of career migrants. Sixth, a “proliferation of illegal migration and legalization policies in host countries” has perpetuated a cycle of migration in search for documented status. How the EU responds to this intersection of demands will provide an example for future endeavors in immigration and integration of transnational migrants.

Today, many European citizens consider migrants coming from “unfamiliar” areas such as Africa, Asia, or the Slavic countries as “a threat to world order [and] to the fabric of ‘Western’ social hierarchies and economies.”⁷⁹ The ease of entry by undocumented migrants is a particular concern for Schengen Zone border nations, particularly those flanking poorer neighboring areas. Italy is one of these border countries coping with a large influx of immigrants coming from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, East Asia, and beyond. Its particularly expansive coastal borders make strict patrol hardly feasible, providing greater access to undocumented migrants. The presence of undocumented migrants also contributes to the public’s fear over lax internal security. Previously, the nation states repeatedly closed their borders in the times of great difficulty, but the EU finds globalization challenging these instinctive tendencies. Some migration scholars such as Alessandra Buonfino criticize the “politicization of migration...aimed at preserving the status quo and the traditional national boundaries/power relations in an illusory

⁷⁹ Düvell, “Globalization of Migration Control: A Tug-of-War between Restrictionists and Human Agency?” 27-28.

attempt to preserve a static national identity in an increasingly interconnected world.”⁸⁰

Encounters with cultures once deemed exotic are challenging the Europeans to reconsider their own identities.

The events of September 11, 2001, and the major ensuing terrorist attacks in Europe (e.g. Madrid) prompted a reevaluation of the relationship between immigration, integration, and security. In response, the EU tightened security around its external borders and introduced improved visa regulations within the Schengen Zone.⁸¹ While the US chose to focus its energy on fighting terrorists outside its own borders, the EU opted to look within its own migrant populations and promote internal security. In particular, the especially large presence of Muslims in Europe and their connections with the Islamic world causes great concern for a Europe that seeks to hold onto its Judeo-Christian foundations. Turkey’s admission into the EU, particularly in light of its large Muslim population, is still a contested topic today. The EU has discovered that “labor migration cannot be treated simply as a flexible tool of economic policy” anymore; the introduction of guest workers from different backgrounds brings a “range of socioeconomic and cultural impacts on receiving societies and raises complex questions about the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities.”⁸² Yet, Europe’s population is aging, and its unsustainable fertility rate requires replacement labor for the success of the economy. This entails a greater focus on integrating migrants into present day society and reevaluating how they fit within a greater European identity.

⁸⁰ Alessandra Buonfino, “Beyond the Security Dilemma? The Hegemonic Political Discourse on the Europeanization of Immigration in Italy and Britain” in *Crossing Over: Comparing Recent Migration in the United States and Europe*, ed. Holger Henke (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 88.

⁸¹ Peter van Krieken, “Terrorism and the Changing Paradigm of Migratory Movements” in *Crossing Over: Comparing Recent Migration in the United States and Europe*, ed. Holger Henke (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 57-58.

⁸² Boswell, “Labor Migration Programs in Europe: History Repeating Itself?”, 224.

On a smaller scale, Italy faces many of the same challenges as the EU. Large waves of undocumented migrants underscore the fear of Italians already preoccupied with slow economic growth, high unemployment, and political instability. As of today, “Italy’s official debt remains above 100% of GDP,” but who will help to repay this?⁸³ The strict Italian labor market creates few opportunities to change employment, while its aging workforce, on the cusp of mass retirement, and low birthrate, one of the lowest in the world, finds few qualified replacements. While Italy focuses its economic endeavors on the “manufacture of high-quality consumer goods...Italy also has a sizable underground economy, which by some estimates accounts for as much as 15% of the GDP.”⁸⁴ Many undocumented migrants evade paying taxes, but Italy needs a tax-paying workforce to help sustain its current social welfare programs. International migrants are changing the face of Italy, creating tension within the neighborhoods and communities where Italian citizens are no longer the majority. Today, the Italian government faces the same problems that host governments of Italian migrants once faced, and the Italian citizens are grappling with the same issues their ancestors posed to their host nations. The debates on legality and citizenship and on racism and xenophobia in Italy will force the nation to contend with its past role as a point of emigration and its current role as a point of immigration.

Who is responsible for administering Italy’s immigration issues? Italian citizens want the government to resolve these issues in a timely manner. Italian officials want the EU to assist with patrolling its borders and serving the newly arrived migrants. EU officials expect Italian officials to oversee their internal affairs while concurrently executing EU immigration policies. When few tangible, workable answers arrive from above, the Italian officials are left to settle

⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, 2009, available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/it.html>; Internet; accessed 9 December 2009.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

multiple demands.⁸⁵ Giuseppe Pisanu, former Italian Minister of the Interior, “accuse[d] the EU of having ‘closed its eyes’ to the problem of boats full of migrants entering Italy.”⁸⁶ As one of the founding members of the EU, Italy has been one of its staunchest supporters for European integration, but its government officials feel under-supported in “defending” Europe’s external borders. Gabaccia argues that Italy has neglected to understand its own migration history and national identity formation as its government attempts to follow its commitment to the EU:

Italy’s actions toward its many migrants reflect more the country’s efforts to bring its policies into line with those of its partners in the European Union than any national accommodation with its diasporas. Italy has not developed a clear understanding of how its history of migration has defined its national identity...By comparing the legacies of Italy’s many diasporas, however, we can see how much a sending nation like Italy has already come to resemble some other immigrant-receiving nations around the world.⁸⁷

Italy’s people have not had the opportunity to consider the historical implications of their actions.

The traditional North-South duality of the Italian identity can be projected onto the European scale, relegating Italy to “Southern” Europe. Roberto Dainotto, who specializes in modern and contemporary Italian culture, argues that the “idea of the defective Europeaness of the south...has shaped the policies of the two-tier Europe.”⁸⁸ Consequently, the gradual shift in migration destinations from Northern Europe to Southern Europe requires a reassessment of Italy’s place within Europe. While Italy’s economy improved dramatically in the 1950s and 60s, it has slowed down and maintains large numbers of unemployed in comparison with the rest of Europe. This, in addition to the fact that Italy, until recently, had been a point of out-migration means that “the presence of immigrant workers in Italy [represents] an anomaly.”⁸⁹ When Italy

⁸⁵ Buonfino, “Beyond the Security Dilemma?: The Hegemonic Political Discourse on the Europeanization of Immigration in Italy and Britain,” 85.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, 173.

⁸⁸ Roberto M. Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 7.

⁸⁹ Steven Colatrella, *Workers of the World: African and Asian Migrants in Italy in the 1990s* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2001), 201.

began receiving immigrants, it was at a much later date than other major European countries. Its small, lackluster colonial experiment means that immigration is not as heavily dependent on explicit postcolonial relationships, and, today, Italy has significant groups of migrants from all over the world, not just a small number of groups that make up a large proportion of the immigrant population as in Britain or France.⁹⁰ Most importantly, the country's foreign population grew rapidly in the 1980s and 90s, without precedent, drastically shifting the nation's demographics. In the 1980s, "only Germany had a higher absolute increase in immigrant population among European nations, and not by much."⁹¹ These trends continue today, so while Italy receives numerically fewer immigrants than many other European countries, the foreign population, not including undocumented migrants, comprises 7.2% of the population, above the EU average.⁹² Such a sudden, unprecedented influx of migrants means that Italy's government was not prepared, without an infrastructure or clear immigration legislation, to accommodate these groups. The tensions which arose become evident through my case study of Prato in Part II.

Conclusion

As boundaries overlap, they blur together, and at present in Europe, "Both host societies and migrant communities are affected by the experience of relocating and transience...they both react to each other, influence the way they perceive each other, and they adapt or fail to adapt to each other."⁹³ In the past, identity was mapped by going abroad, but at present, internal definitions of identity are being remapped by the arrival of foreign immigrants. The European experience reflects Moch's systemic perspective on migration; multiple pressure points have prompted changes within historical migration trends. Dainotto's *Europe (in Theory)*

⁹⁰ Grillo, "Immigration and the Politics of Recognizing Difference in Italy," 4-7.

⁹¹ Colatrella, *Workers of the World*, 209-10.

⁹² Teresa Fiore, "Una Roma 'spiazzata': Clash and Harmony in the Capital of Italy's Migrations," (Lecture, Duke University, Durham, NC, 25 March 2010).

⁹³ Henke, introduction, 4.

“implies...that social realities and institutions – say, Europe with its undergoing unification...[– are a] by-product...[of the] rhetorical unconscious...what has been said and written for about and around Europe...*still* determines what we think and do about it.”⁹⁴ Italy’s historical migration trends clearly affect its present day relationship with its foreign immigrants. Thus, while Italy resembles other immigrant-receiving nations around the world, there are still distinct differences which combine to form the Italian experience, and not just the European experience. For example, today there are approximately seventy million descendents of the Italian diasporas, much greater than the current population of ethnic Italians living within Italy. Where does this leave Italy today? How has the Italian experience affected day-to-day relations with foreign immigrants? In the following chapter, I will examine the migration history of the Chinese diasporas and its intersection with the European and Italian experience.

⁹⁴ Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)*, 8.

Chapter 2: Chinese Migration Trends and the European Experience

The history of Chinese migration is long and complex, without a clear starting or ending point. Southeast Asia, located just at the periphery of the mainland, was the first realm of exploration and migration, and, today, it hosts the majority of the overseas Chinese population. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Americas and Australasia attracted Chinese migrants with their gold and promise of new economic opportunities. Europe began to attract the Chinese as well, coming into the forefront of international migratory movements in the latter half of the twentieth century. By the year 1990, “some 37 million people who claim Chinese ancestry or are classed by others as Chinese lived outside the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan in 136 countries worldwide”.⁹⁵ Twenty years later, in 2010, these numbers have surely grown to include not only more first-generation migrants, but also subsequent generations born in overseas communities. The fact that twenty-five to thirty million Chinese emigrated from China to Southeast Asia, the United States, and Europe between 1985 and 2005 indicates not only a sharp rise in the population post-1990s, but also a pointed direction towards particular areas of the world.⁹⁶ Although the Chinese are one of the oldest immigrant communities in Europe, only in the 1990s did their role develop as “the European migratory space transformed rapidly.”⁹⁷

Following Moch’s systemic perspective of migration, as explained in Chapter 1, this chapter examines the migration trends of the Chinese in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe in response to ongoing social, political, and economic changes taking place within China. After

⁹⁵ Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2008), 2.

⁹⁶ Pierpaolo Mudu and Wei Li, “A Comparative Evaluation of Recent Chinese Immigration in the United States and Italy: Settlement Patterns and Local Resistance,” in *Crossing Over: Comparing Recent Migration in the United States and Europe*, ed. Holger Henke (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 279.

⁹⁷ Felicitas Hillmann et al., “Landscapes of Asian migrant labour in Europe,” in *Asian Migrants and European Labour Markets: Patterns and processes of immigrant labour market insertion in Europe*, eds. Felicitas Hillmann et al. (London, Routledge: 2005), 1.

briefly discussing Chinese migration within the broader European context and comparing Chinese and Italian migration trends, I focus specifically on the Europe-bound migration of the Zhejiangese, who constitute the majority of the Chinese population in the Prato case study. Utilizing 1978 and China's new era of economic reform as my dividing point, I trace the Zhejiang migration up to and after that year. Although Zhejiang province underwent a significant economic boom in the 1990s, the migration towards Europe only intensified due to the region's culture of migration. Lastly, I develop my analysis on the movement of the Zhejiangese into Italy and their socioeconomic situation in preparation for Part II.

Why is an Overview of Chinese Migration to Europe Difficult?

Constructing an overview of Chinese migration to Europe is extremely difficult because there are vast differences not only among the groups, but also in the timing of their arrival and the size of their presence. There is no central narrative. The five core communities are the Zhejiangese, Cantonese, Indo-Chinese (ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), Fujianese, and the well-educated members of the "brain drain." "These *core communities* migrate to and spread across Europe largely independently of each other. They only interact – and sometimes, indeed, temporarily create what looks like a unified Chinese community – when required to do so by the political, economic or social environment."⁹⁸ Consequently, it is difficult and counter-productive to force a unity onto a community that is frequently segmented into complex sub-ethnic groups. Frank N. Pieke, who has written many works on the Chinese in Europe, characterizes the Chinese population as kaleidoscopic:

Viewed from one angle, the Chinese population in a certain area may indeed seem an integrated community. From another perspective, however, they may possibly best be described as a loose collection of independent local, national or transnational core communities that act as independent groups. Yet on closer

⁹⁸ Frank N. Pieke, introduction to *The Chinese in Europe*, eds. Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998), 12.

inspection, these core communities may very well disaggregate into collections of partially overlapping and partially discrete informal networks.⁹⁹

While it would be convenient to study the Chinese as a whole, either in regional, national, European, or even transnational contexts, doing so would impose a sense of normative unity on the group, pigeonholing a particular body of people. Instead, it will be more productive to consider Chinese migration through transnationalism which allows us to “take into account connections across borders and a continuous feedback with a network of relatives and people placed in different nations.”¹⁰⁰ For the purposes of the case study, I focus on the Zhejiang migration into Europe, referring to the other groups only to provide a greater context for their movements. Use of the word “Chinese,” then, refers to the ethnic Chinese body, while use of the word “Zhejiangese” will refer to people originating from this Southern province in China.

Comparison between Chinese and Italian Migration Trends

Historical accounts often refer to the nineteenth century and the “Opening of China” as a “liberation” of the Chinese to modernizing influences, but it is incorrect to assume that the Chinese did not move about prior to this. In fact, the Chinese did move about, and many of their basic patterns show remarkable similarity to the European/Italian migration trends seen in the previous chapter. Both diasporas understood the strategies of “labor-export” and family migration. Ideally, the family maintained a base in the home village and sent out members to work as necessary to utilize excess manpower; however, to remain rooted “paradoxically could require dispersing family members over space.”¹⁰¹ Other times, whole families transported themselves in search of better economic opportunity, especially as the population grew and land became a scarce commodity. Additionally, both migration movements also accorded the same

⁹⁹ Pieke, introduction, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Mudu and Li, “A Comparative Evaluation of Recent Chinese Immigration in the United States and Italy: Settlement Patterns and Local Resistance,” 279.

¹⁰¹ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 15.

recognition to a sexual division of labor. With the exception of family migration, women rarely left to seek work elsewhere, as that was the domain of the male members of household. Women, in turn, were expected to care for the family as well as provide the labor to maintain the fields and other small economic pursuits at home. Overall, when the Chinese or the Europeans made a move that took them away from the home village, it was most often a calculated choice made in the best interests of the family.

Migration for economic opportunity, the transfer of remittances, and the plan to return home one day were as vital to the Chinese family as they were to the Italian “birds of passage.” Chinese migrants considered themselves to be “sojourners” and not immigrants, although a fair number of them never returned to their places of origin. Within this migration system, the “essence of the matter is *not the separation but the connection*...most were not definitively ‘leaving China’ as much as they were expanding the spatial dimension of the ties between worker and family.”¹⁰² The etymology of the Chinese word for migration is *yimin* 移民, meaning “people who move, with or without intent to remain.”¹⁰³ Like a “bird of passage,” “sojourners” intend to travel afar for economic intents, but plan to eventually return after they have made a significant sum of money. An extension of family ties, rather than a complete break with home, also committed the migrant to the welfare of the family in both the Chinese and Italian case. However, unique to the Chinese was the practice of polygamy prior to 1949. A man could remain married to his wife in China while also taking a wife in his host country, thereby allowing migrant men to maintain a strong link to the homeland. Maintaining connections with the home country formed a distinct reminder for the Chinese sojourners that they were “destined” to return one day.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 5.

While the preferred method of emigration was always through self- or family-financed tickets, often in the form of remittances, the most common methods of emigration were the “credit ticket” system, involving loans from agents, or a form of indentured servitude.¹⁰⁴ Italians and Chinese took part in all three of these payment methods, but the Chinese were also involved in the “coolie” trade during the 1800s, where they were deceived into migrating. Upon arrival at their destination, finding a means for survival and to pay back the ticket would be crucial for the migrants. Often they filled in for a shortage in physical labor, but the Chinese and the Italians, just like any other migrant group, sought a niche within which they could save money either to send home or to bring more family and friends over. In *Italy's Many Diasporas*, Donna Gabaccia compares the sacrifices made by Chinese and the Italians in the Americas to achieve their goals:

When necessary, sojourners denied themselves food, sex, and pleasure to generate a surplus. Natives, in turn, fumed over migrants’ ‘unAmerican’ living standards. They recognized that Italian and Chinese workers could live on their low wages because they ate little more than rice, pasta, bread, and vegetables while native Canadians, Americans, and Argentines wanted meat, and lots of it.¹⁰⁵

While both groups looked for an economic niche, the Chinese migrants were particularly driven by entrepreneurial desires. It was easiest to develop a relatively unexplored area than to compete with already established business niches in the local economy. However, the dynamics of migrant niche-making also depended upon the migrants’ skills and the needs of the area.

Creating a permanent economic base also allowed migrants to recruit and set up systems of chain migration. These compatriots were a reliable source of labor with compatible characteristics in terms of food, language, and out-look, and recruiting allowed the migrant to fulfill his duty to help compatriots and maintain links with the home country. Chain migration

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 113.

¹⁰⁵ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 91.

and the formation of migrant communities are inevitable byproducts of centuries of outward movement. Paradoxically, the migrants' perpetual communication with home "may actually work against the development of a 'myth of return.' Or a longing to go home again, because in certain respects the migrant has never left home."¹⁰⁶ "Sojourners" and "birds of passage" share many of the trends elaborated upon above, such as calculated choice, chain migration, ethnic enclave, and familial duty, and these patterns and motivations still exist today. They are a reminder that such links between origin and destination, kin and work, remain crucial components to the Chinese and Italian migration histories.

Zhejiang Migration to Europe and the Era of Mass Migration

Although there are over thirty-seven million Chinese abroad, the majority originate from one particular region – coastal South China: Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, and Zhejiang. These powerhouses for migration have both a long history of maritime trade, due to their proximity to Southeast Asia, and a rich linguistic diversity that manifests itself in its overseas communities. Zhejiang's proximity to trade routes to the west and its culture of migration into and trade with Southeast Asia embedded a "buildup of knowledge, overseas connections, family habitudes, and social expectations" into the local populace.¹⁰⁷ Geographically, Zhejiang is split into two zones: North Zhejiang is characterized by fertile, arable land, overseas trade, and industrial diversification, whereas South Zhejiang is largely inaccessible, barren, and impoverished. Similar to Southern Italy's exodus to the north or overseas, Southern Zhejiang's Qingtian and Wenzhou are the locus of migration from the province. The first Zhejiangese to arrive in Europe were peddlers of Qingtian soapstone carvings and Chinese curios in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, arriving either by boat through Marseilles or by train through the newly

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰⁷ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 335.

completed Trans-Siberian railway. By the early 1900s, Western Europe, along with Japan and Southeast Asia, had become one of the major destinations for Zhejiangese. Facing pre-established Chinese communities and unfriendly governmental policies in other areas abroad, it was in Europe that the Zhejiangese migrants “found virgin territory.”¹⁰⁸

Mette Thunø, a specialist in Chinese migration, notes that the “most striking aspect” of the Zhejiang migration was that “it started as a spin off of Western imperialism that established relatively smooth transportation and communication between Zhejiang and Europe...A process...that despite periodic interruptions, has continued until this day.”¹⁰⁹ Zhejiangese hawkers capitalized on the West’s fascination with Eastern culture, and they slowly moved outward from their bases in Paris and Marseilles into neighboring European countries, including Italy.¹¹⁰ During World War I, France and England recruited over 100,000 Chinese labourers – including 2,000 from Qingtian – for the war effort, and although the governments attempted to repatriate the Chinese after the war, some stayed on and joined the small, established Chinese communities.¹¹¹ By the 1920s, both the Zhejiangese and the Cantonese, who had mostly come by way of British trading ships, constituted core Chinese communities within Europe. These core communities established by the early contract labourers would become the bridgeheads for chain migration following World War II.¹¹² The onset of the Global Depression, the Japanese Occupation of China in 1937 and the beginning of World War II effectively froze immigration, ending the Chinese Era of Mass Migration which began just after first Opium War in 1842. This

¹⁰⁸ Li Minghuan, “‘To Get Rich Quickly in Europe!’ – Reflections on migration motivation in Wenzhou,” in *Internal and International Migrations: Chinese Perspectives*, eds. Frank N. Pieke and Hein Mallee (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 188.

¹⁰⁹ Mette Thunø, “Moving Stones from China to Europe: The Dynamics of Emigration from Zhejiang to Europe,” in *Internal and International Migrations: Chinese Perspectives*, eds. Frank N. Pieke and Hein Mallee (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 167.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 163-67.

¹¹¹ Marlowe Hood, “Emigrant Communities in Zhejiang,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, ed. Lynn Pan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 40.

¹¹² Pieke, introduction, 4.

time frame corresponds roughly with the free liberal era of Atlantic migration undertaken by the Europeans in the western part of the hemisphere. It was also during this period in which *huaqiao* 华侨, meaning “‘Chinese sojourners’...became both the official and the popular term for Chinese overseas.”¹¹³

Just as the Italian diasporas assisted in the creation of an Italian nationalism, the Chinese diasporas assisted in the formation of the Chinese nationalism that had begun to emerge in the early twentieth century, undoubtedly in some part influenced by contact with the Western world. Abroad, the Chinese minorities, already keenly aware of their distinct culture, gained a “sense of ‘nation’ as an ethnocultural unit...directly from the fact that ‘Chinese’ as a community – regardless of formal nationality and despite the particularisms that divided them – were surrounded by non-Chinese populations and controlled by non-Chinese ruling powers.”¹¹⁴ Facing outward hostility, migrants often retreated within their communities, and for the Chinese, they created a physical manifestation in the form of Chinatowns, offering employment opportunities, a common language, familiar customs, and security in sense of self. While the influx of new Chinese migrants also caused tension between them and the older, more established, Chinese migrants, they provided a direct and fresh link to China. The recruitment conducted by exiled nationalist revolutionary leaders such as Sun Yat-Sen took advantage of the migrants’ circumstances, extending to these migrants a rallying point: “to create a self-image or group image that could enhance Chinese status and security, to protect their economic position, and to coalesce around common threats regardless of regional and dialect divisions.”¹¹⁵ The

¹¹³ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 243.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 248-49.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 249-50.

Italian government had also been very preoccupied with national identity abroad, with the actions of Sun Yat-Sen echoing that of Mazzini and other Italian revolutionary leaders.

Zhejiang Migration to Europe and the New Economic Reform

Between 1949 and 1976, new Chinese emigration from the Mainland was extremely restricted under the People's Republic of China. Consequently, while Europe had the "fastest growing Chinese population in the 1960s and 1970s," the migrants came from elsewhere in Asia, through other migratory routes.¹¹⁶ Most Zhejiangese migrants arriving during this time came through these venues as well, e.g. Singapore, Taiwan, or Hong Kong.¹¹⁷ Overall, family reunion factored heavily in the migrations, and the shared dialects of the Southern Coast served as a "vector of chain migration" towards established core communities.¹¹⁸ The migration trends for Mainland Chinese shifted dramatically after 1978 with the new era of economic reform. China's insertion into a new global network conveniently served as a response to the dismantling of rural collectivization and the expansion of private commerce, paralleling the European peasants' movement off the land and into the urban centers. Numerous masses of people still left to take part in the unskilled labor trade, but a new number of Chinese took part in the *xin yimin* or "New Migration," representing "products of 'new China': better educated, more skilled, more urbanized."¹¹⁹

For the Zhejiangese, favorable migration policies in both China and Europe facilitated their movement along the old migration chains. In China, the 1978 reforms loosened control over social life, in particular the *hukou* or residency permits, which allowed an upsurge of

¹¹⁶ Pieke, introduction, 9.

¹¹⁷ Hood, "Emigrant Communities in Zhejiang," 41.

¹¹⁸ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 29.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 322.

internal and external migration. Additionally, the new Chinese emigration law in 1985 meant that:

Being granted a passport became a right of overseas Chinese dependents; furthermore, any other person with a letter from an overseas Chinese sponsor could apply for a passport. The immediate result was the infusion of new blood into the aging and increasingly isolated communities of overseas Chinese. Soon, new migrants began to explore destinations beyond the ones their home areas traditionally specialized in.¹²⁰

While the expanding migration abroad is but a small portion of the Chinese “floating population,” it is indicative of greater socioeconomic changes taking place within the country. European Chinese communities that had begun in the late eighteenth century were reinvigorated by the new waves of Chinese migrants, primarily in Northern Europe, where the earliest communities had settled and where the majority of the jobs were to be found. However, in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, migration trends within Europe turned towards its southern Mediterranean region, and Chinese migrants, particularly from the People’s Republic of China, were attracted to the new sweatshop factories in Italy, Spain, and France.¹²¹

On the European side, several legal factors promoted the immigration of Chinese. Governments then, as now, generally maintained liberal laws on family reunification. Thus, in concordance with the Chinese emigration law of 1985, the old chain migration routes to Europe could be revived through a liberal definition of *jia* 家 meaning ‘family.’ Sometimes, just having the same last name was enough. European nations also granted amnesty to political refugees, a process that was occasionally manipulated by migrants seeking legalized status. The 1990s also saw the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the creation of the new Schengen Zone, both of which were vital landmarks in inter-European migration. Free international borders enticed new

¹²⁰ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 73.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

migrants, and the gradual addition of former Soviet territories opened up new areas for Chinese entrepreneurship. Lastly, in an attempt to exert control over a growing number of undocumented migrants, many European nations underwent regularization periods, granting amnesty and residency to all undocumented persons who came forward. While this allowed the governments to maintain more accurate records, the actual purpose of the law was thwarted by having undocumented migrants moving into the country in search of these amnesty periods. In response, many European nations began tightening their immigration policies, and “from then on, illegal migration from Wenzhou to Europe has become a major issue...[Yet,] it cannot be ignored that one crucial factor is that the policies of western European countries offer illegal migrants some hope,” either in the form of political amnesty or periodic regularizations.¹²² In the 1990s, migration became not only an “outcome of globalization processes” but also a “driving force behind many [of these] changes.”¹²³

Illusion of Migration : Reality of Migration

In the early 1990s, Wenzhou, the underdeveloped southern port city of Zhejiang, burst onto the economic scene as a “beehive of small-scale entrepreneurship, one where tens of thousands of private and nominally collective enterprises dominate the local economy and attempt to corner national markets.”¹²⁴ The success of the “Wenzhou Model” and its positive economic influence on the city’s surrounding areas brought national attention. However, as seen in Zhejiang’s earlier history, there are massive regional divergences even within short distances. Consequently, while the city of Wenzhou and its surrounding areas developed, areas just slightly farther away now struggled with increased cost of living and the ‘envy effect.’ The city had remained physically isolated from China until then, with its first airport constructed in 1990 and

¹²² Minhuan, “‘To Get Rich Quickly in Europe!’ – Reflections on migration motivation in Wenzhou,” 189.

¹²³ Hillmann et al., “Landscapes of Asian migrant labour in Europe,” 6.

¹²⁴ Hood, “Emigrant Communities in Zhejiang,” 40.

its first rail link in 1998, yet due to longstanding chain migration to core communities in Europe, the Zhejiangese had already sent a number of people overseas.¹²⁵ The two primary sending areas within the province were Qingtian and Wenzhou. By the beginning of 1995, there were “60,000 Qingtian [emigrants]...in fifty different countries, eighty per cent of them in Europe”¹²⁶ and “248,000 Wenzhou emigrants and their descendants...in sixty-five countries...about ninety-five per cent of them [in Europe], or 145,000, in the four countries of France, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain.”¹²⁷ With this example before them, those who did not have the financial capital or personal connections to join in on the developments in Wenzhou decided to migrate and try elsewhere. Furthermore, the culture of migration was firmly embedded within the societies of these two regions.

Although economic deprivation drove the first Zhejiansese migrants to Europe, by the 1990s, their standard of living in China had drastically improved thanks to the developments in the city of Wenzhou. Why, then, did the Zhejiangese still feel the need to migrate? Li Minghuan, who wrote a comprehensive history on the Chinese in Europe, conducted field research among the Zhejiangese and discovered that relative deprivation, or the ‘envy effect’ figured as one of the most prominent reasons:

When asked to compare their living standard now with twenty years ago, all people whom I talked with confirmed that they have become much richer. However, when asked why they are still eager to go abroad, their answer remains as simple as before: because we are poor and we want to be rich there.¹²⁸

Poverty is relative to the situation. Thus, those who witnessed the sudden successes of the Wenzhou boom or the earnings from families with members abroad felt that they needed to improve their economic standing as well. The wage differential and economic buying power

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Thunø, “Moving Stones from China to Europe: The Dynamics of Emigration from Zhejiang to Europe,” 176.

¹²⁷ Li, “‘To Get Rich Quickly in Europe!’ – Reflections on migration motivation in Wenzhou,” 183.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 185.

between European Euros and Chinese RMB is substantial enough that many Zhejiangese are willing and eager to work in Europe, using their “‘migratory capital’ ...[to] ensure their families just as quick a progress up the social and economic ladder.”¹²⁹ ¹³⁰ Migrants believe that they will be able to amass wealth quickly “without possessing any special skills, investment, or even knowledge of the host society.”¹³¹

While the culture of migration irrevocably links communities in China with those abroad, it paradoxically removes them from the surrounding society and economy.¹³² Whole communities prepare their youth to emigrate, focusing training on overseas demands, such as cooking and sewing, depriving the community of a viable, youthful workforce and forcing them to rely even more on remittances. Although members of the community have migrated elsewhere, including Beijing and the United States, many people in Zhejiang “consider ‘getting rich in Europe’ an opportunity reserved only for them...their common destination or birthright.”¹³³ On the one hand, Europe is their “birthright,” but on the other hand, Europe is a distant frontier without the same cultural significance for the Zhejiangese as given by the West.¹³⁴ ¹³⁵ Recent immigration policies enacted through the integration and expansion of the EU and attempts to regularize migrants within a nation facilitate the ideal of movement. Thus, aside from family reunification, there is rarely a desire to immigrate to any particular European

¹²⁹ Renminbi is the Chinese yuan, or standard of currency.

¹³⁰ Daniele Cologna, “Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Italy: Strengths and weaknesses of an ethnic enclave economy,” in *Asian Migrants and European Labour Markets: Patterns and processes of immigrant labour market insertion in Europe*, eds. Ernst Spaan, Felicitas Hillmann, and Tom van Naerssen (London: Routledge, 2005), 270.

¹³¹ Li, “‘To Get Rich Quickly in Europe!’ – Reflections on migration motivation in Wenzhou,” 186.

¹³² Pieke, introduction, 10-11.

¹³³ Li, “‘To Get Rich Quickly in Europe!’ – Reflections on migration motivation in Wenzhou,” 190.

¹³⁴ Frank N. Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese: Fujianese Migrants in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 72.

¹³⁵ While Europe is a culturally significant place for people from the western hemisphere, China is figures first in the Zhejiangese mindset rather than Europe.

nation.¹³⁶ Multiple moves within Europe are anticipated by a prospective Zhejiangese migrant. Zhejiangese expect to make their fortunes in Europe, and the open and expanding borders of the EU facilitate their goals for easy entry.

How do the Chinese enter the EU? Family reunification is generally the easiest way to legally enter a country. Those who do not have such connections and cannot obtain a passport and entry visa – which is most difficult from Mainland China – rely on professional traffickers who can assist a prospective migrant by taking advantage of the loopholes in the system. Despite “Fortress Europe’s” attempts to keep Third Country migrants out unless they have proper documentation, migrants are able to find alternative points and methods of entry. Many Chinese migrants utilize a combination of “family and acquaintance networks as well as commercial brokers for particular tasks or parts of the journey as needed, rather than getting the ‘package deals’ typical for many Chinese migrants to North America.”¹³⁷ Options for entry include changing visas several times before obtaining the desired entry visa or entering across land through the old channels in Russia, and an often-traveled route extends into Western Europe via Russia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and finally Italy.¹³⁸ Once within European borders, depending on the country, a migrant can apply for asylum or wait for/seek out a country that is undergoing a regularization process in order to obtain legal status.

Upon arrival, a migrant often discovers that the “promised land” is not how they imagined. The reality of “getting rich” in Europe involves long hours and low pay. “A rapid process of disenchantment ensues,” yet there are loans to be paid to the traffickers, remittances to

¹³⁶ Li Minghuan, “Transnational Links among the Chinese in Europe: A Study on European-wide Chinese Voluntary Associations,” in *The Chinese in Europe*, eds. Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998), 27.

¹³⁷ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 99.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

be sent to expectant family and friends, and fear of loss of face by the migrant.¹³⁹ A common mindset among the overseas Chinese is the “[ability] and willing[ness] to *chiku nailao* (lit. ‘to endure bitterness and work patiently’) until success comes their way.”¹⁴⁰ The migrant’s ultimate goal is to save enough funds so that he can establish his own business and bring other family and friends to work alongside him. Thus, creating and maintaining a network is crucial for any migrant who desires to achieve his dreams, and “a Chinese immigrant could very well have ‘invested’ tens of thousands of euros in his or her own support network.”¹⁴¹ Pieke calls “the ideal of independent entrepreneurship... a mythic panacea.”¹⁴²

In a study of successful Southeast Asian Chinese entrepreneurs, it was found that the three common structural features of their business life include: family firms, inter-personal trust, and personal connections.¹⁴³ These same features carry over into the Chinese ethnic enclave economies in Europe, providing the migrant with a ready-made community and the hope that he may one day become his own boss. He is surrounded by examples of self-starters, which instills a belief that if he waits enough, saves enough, and creates a sufficient network, then he can achieve this dream as well. In reality, not everyone can obtain this status. Ethnic enclave economies often become oversaturated, and their inherent reliance upon pre-existing models restricts the very innovation and entrepreneurship that drives the migrant to start his own business. Danielle Cologna’s study on the Chinese in Italy concludes that the Chinese ethnic

¹³⁹ Cologna, “Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Italy: Strengths and weaknesses of an ethnic enclave economy,” 270.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 271.

¹⁴² Pieke, introduction, 11.

¹⁴³ Jamie Mackie, “Five Southeast Asian Chinese Empire-Builders: Commonalities and Differences,” in *Chinese Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational, and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora*, eds. Michael W. Charney et al. (New Jersey: Singapore University Press and World Scientific, 2003), 6.

enclave economy is a “double-edged character as a social and economic insertion strategy.”¹⁴⁴ Only when oversaturation of an economic niche occurs will Chinese entrepreneurs move into other sectors or other geographic regions. Pieke utilizes the Prato Chinese ethnic enclave economy, which I will discuss further in detail in Chapter 4, as an example of oversaturation. Due to Prato’s concentrated location and rapid growth of Chinese businesses, demand often fell short of production capability, and many Chinese garment workers who are paid by piecework reported around the year 2000 that they earned almost fifty percent less than before.¹⁴⁵ Overall, while the Chinese within the ethnic enclave economy rely upon one another, isolation is impossible as “they are linked in various ways to Italian shops and suppliers.”¹⁴⁶

Why Italy?

The first Chinese arrived in Milan as peddlers via France in the 1920s. Until the 1950s, there was a small community of approximately fifty Chinese, mostly well-educated, single males who were students, diplomats, or tradesmen living in Milan. Many of them had lived elsewhere in Europe before coming to Italy. These early Chinese immigrants were well-integrated, marrying Italian women, operating small businesses, and raising children who attended Italian schools. In the 1960s and 70s, the demographics of the Chinese population within Italy began to change as relatives and more Chinese began to arrive, either from other parts of Europe or directly from Asia. The arrival of more women and families also shifted the gender balance, and it is estimated that by the late 1970s, there were approximately eight to nine thousand Chinese present in Italy. Slowly, they spread outward from Milan, towards Florence, Bologna, and Rome, establishing bridgeheads for chain migration in each of these cities. Most Chinese worked in one

¹⁴⁴ Cologna, “Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Italy: Strengths and weaknesses of an ethnic enclave economy,” 262.

¹⁴⁵ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 122.

¹⁴⁶ Mudu and Li, “A Comparative Evaluation of Recent Chinese Immigration in the United States and Italy: Settlement Patterns and Local Resistance,” 292.

of three trades: leatherwork, catering, or garment manufacturing. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the demographics shifted once again as an influx of Chinese entered Italy.¹⁴⁷ Initially, the population was largely Zhejiangese; however with the heterogenization of the Chinese migrants, new groups of Chinese have entered. The Chinese quickly increased the total immigrant population in Italy, and in proportion to all Asian migrants present in Italy: “In 1975, the ratio was 1 Chinese to every 36 Asians; it...increased to 1:20 in 1986 and 1:6 in 1990. On 31 December 1993...the ratio stood at about 1:5.”¹⁴⁸ As of 2000, there were 60,075 documented Chinese in Italy, already making Italy “the principal destination for Chinese in Europe.”¹⁴⁹ While previous migrants had come from the poorer southern region of Zhejiang, the recent Zhejiangese migrants of the 1990s have, “Unlike many of the communities in other European countries...come...from the wealthier plains around Wenzhou.”¹⁵⁰

In the sections above, I discussed some of the favorable European policies towards immigrants, or that which facilitate an immigrant’s movement. The most important within the Italian context is a series of immigration legislation that was passed in the 1980s and 90s providing for family reunification and regularization. News about these acts spread quickly among the Chinese, and many Chinese came, either from other parts of Europe with stricter policies or directly from China, to take advantage of the opportunity to legalize their status. According to Pieke, “Permanent residency was vital to the majority of our informants because it would give them the right to find employment and make possible free (or at least freer)

¹⁴⁷ Aliza S. Wong, “Italy,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, ed. Lynn Pan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 319.

¹⁴⁸ Francesco Carchedi and Marica Ferri, “The Chinese Presence in Italy: Dimensions and Structural Characteristics,” in *The Chinese in Europe*, eds. Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998), 265.

¹⁴⁹ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 117.

¹⁵⁰ Wong, “Italy,” 319.

movement in and out of the country for themselves and their families.”¹⁵¹ This would also allow migrants freer use of social services. When Li Minhuan conducted field research in Wenzhou at the end of 1995, she found Italy’s most recent regularization law was a “hot topic of conversation.”

Although the procedures stipulated by the law will be very costly, many families of illegal migrants throughout Europe were excited when this law became known. Western Europe is looked upon as a single entity and the internal borders between most European Union countries are known to be hardly guarded. Illegal migrants are confident that they can easily leave any western European country where they have temporarily settled and go to Italy to apply for a residence permit. Many also believe that what has happened today in Italy, might also happen in some other European countries tomorrow.”¹⁵²

The Italian government was unprepared for the sheer number of migrants who came forward to obtain regularization, and the need for clear policies “to deal with their presence was insufficiently recognized.”¹⁵³

Another important impetus for Chinese migration to Italy involves the business opportunities offered for self-employed entrepreneurs. Italy has served as a particular draw for Chinese migrants in recent years with the promise of new or undeveloped economic niches within markets that may otherwise be oversaturated in traditional immigrant centers. The Italian-Chinese Treaty of 1985 intensified the co-operation between these two nations, calling for favorable conditions for investment and business ventures. Signed and enacted at approximately the same time as the first regularization law in 1986, the “Chinese in Italy have benefitted from the opportunities the treaty offered to set up enterprises at the same time as the amnesties allowed them to employ workers holding a regular residence permit.”¹⁵⁴ However, the 1989 Tiananmen incident caused the Italian government to place an immediate freeze on the law, and

¹⁵¹ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 201.

¹⁵² Li, “To Get Rich Quickly in Europe!” – Reflections on migration motivation in Wenzhou,” 189-90.

¹⁵³ Carchedi and Ferri, “The Chinese Presence in Italy: Dimensions and Structural Characteristics.” 262.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

new immigrants were not given the option to start their own business until the 1998 immigration law. During this period, the Chinese community, which had a “strong aptitude for entrepreneurship,” was separated into the lucky few who had arrived and received papers pre-1989 and those who arrived after with only the option to work for wages.¹⁵⁵ Despite such barriers, the Chinese were able to insert themselves into economic sectors such as the Chinese catering business, Italian leather/clothing workshops, and wholesale/retail trade which “would either never have emerged without the Chinese, or would have all but collapsed in the absence of fresh Chinese entrepreneurship and labor.”¹⁵⁶ Within Italy, the Wenzhou migrants set up their “new ‘modular’ pattern of family workshop, bringing its own labor supply and minimal capital,” and this was a model that has been utilized in their clothing workshops in both Beijing and Tuscany.¹⁵⁷

Today, the Chinese are spread across Italy, but their primary areas are Lombardy (Milan), Tuscany (Florence), and Lazio (Rome) with some in Emilia-Romagna (Bologna) and the Piedmont (Turin). These are primarily Central and Northern Italian regions, demonstrating that the economic divide that persists in Italy today between North and South has not escaped the attention of the Chinese looking for work. While the Tuscan region has the highest percentage of Chinese immigrants, Milan and Rome are still the “two principal cities of residence.”¹⁵⁸ Milan’s older Chinese settlement allows for a stratified economic society, the establishment of associations, and a relatively higher standard of living. Tuscany, specifically Florence and Prato, in comparison, is a much younger community and with a highly concentrated Zhejiangese presence. Rome, lastly, is both the largest and most diverse Chinese community in Italy.

¹⁵⁵ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 121.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵⁷ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 353.

¹⁵⁸ Mudu and Li, “A Comparative Evaluation of Recent Chinese Immigration in the United States and Italy: Settlement Patterns and Local Resistance,” 278.

Despite their differences, all the Chinese have one thing in common today: “the Chinese in Italy are no longer the pioneers of the 1980s, who entered an ethnic economy that seemed to promise everyone overnight economic success. Since then, the Chinese population has become stratified, diversified, and firmly established.”¹⁵⁹ However, in 1998, an immigration act reinstated an immigrant’s right to be self-employed, and the “mushrooming of Chinese-operated businesses” is especially visible in Prato.¹⁶⁰ These businesses rely heavily on the ethnic enclave economy and the family migration patterns. Such a large number of family reunifications indicate that the Chinese population is reaching a gender balance, settling down, and starting families, with a birth rate that is “twice that of Italians, thus compensating for the natural negative growth rate of the Italian population.”¹⁶¹ ¹⁶² Luigi Tomba, who compared the “Wenzhou model” in Florence and Beijing, concluded that the “Wenzhou people move in search of the best opportunity to invest their capital, both financial and human,” indicating a reason why families and personal family networks are so important to the Zhejiangese.¹⁶³

Living in Italy has required the Chinese to develop their ethnic enclaves “within mixed multiethnic neighborhoods and not within homogenous ethnic landscapes like in traditional Chinatowns.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, it is nearly impossible to retreat completely within and isolate oneself from persons of other ethnicities; this is the fundamental difference between Chinatowns in North America and Southeast Asia versus Europe and Italy, in particular. Whereas Chinatowns in North America and Southeast Asia were created as “a product of residential segregation,

¹⁵⁹ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 118.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁶¹ Carchedi and Ferri, “The Chinese Presence in Italy: Dimensions and Structural Characteristics,” 266.

¹⁶² Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 82.

¹⁶³ Luigi Tomba, “Exporting the ‘Wenzhou model’ to Beijing and Florence: Suggestions for a comparative perspective on labour and economic organization in two migrant communities,” in *Internal and International Migration: Chinese Perspectives*, eds. Frank N. Pieke and Hein Mallee (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 287.

¹⁶⁴ Mudu and Li, “A Comparative Evaluation of Recent Chinese Immigration in the United States and Italy; Settlement Patterns and Local Resistance,” 285, 292.

ethnic division of labour, and the racism and proclivity for indirect rule of the authorities,” Chinatowns in Italy lack the presence of strong associations.¹⁶⁵ European Chinatowns focus on an economic function, to provide clientele specific goods and services, rather than forming a close, cohesive group. There are always personal networks to draw upon, which a migrant cultivates by investing personal time and thousands of Euros. Furthermore, “Italians are the majority of the population in all ‘Chinese’ neighborhoods, [and] economic activities are not only directed toward an ethnic group.”¹⁶⁶ Perhaps this is due to a young community without a collective history or a community increasingly directed towards transnational interests. In terms of relating with local, Italian society, there is a “gap between the inclusion of immigrants in the economy and their lack of integration into the social fabric.”¹⁶⁷

First True Europeans?

Identity signifies a collective set of characteristics that simultaneously distinguish a person and make him/her recognizable while also binding people of similar characteristics together in a group. There is no strict definition for identity. It is flexible and kaleidoscopic, depending on the time, place, and situation in which a person exists. Among the Chinese in Europe, the multiple layers of interaction that they must encounter “simultaneously reflects and influences their modes of social interaction.”¹⁶⁸ Moreover, there is a great deal of heterogeneity among the contemporary Chinese migrant groups. Not only are cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences among these Chinese groups “as vast as among people in different European countries,” but they have fanned out in every direction across the different European

¹⁶⁵ Pieke, introduction, 13.

¹⁶⁶ Mudu and Li, “A Comparative Evaluation of Recent Chinese Immigration in the United States and Italy; Settlement Patterns and Local Resistance,” 289.

¹⁶⁷ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 82.

¹⁶⁸ Fleming Christiansen, “Chinese Identity in Europe,” in *The Chinese in Europe*, eds. Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998), 42.

boundaries.¹⁶⁹ Gregor Benton, who studies Chinese migration within Europe, sums up the need to study the Chinese within multiple contexts:

It was never possible to understand Chinese migration to Europe solely at the level of the individual European states. Their communities must be analysed as an accommodation both to European national entities and to the wider European context, now institutionalized in the European Union. Chinese migrants have always shown scant regard for the lines drawn thickly and apparently at random across Asia's European promontory. In that respect, they were Europeans before the Europeans.¹⁷⁰

The Chinese have intersected the Europeans at this critical juncture, and they have taken the lessons of free movement to heart. Even by closely following the Zhejiangese migrants to Italy, it is evident that multiple boundaries – physical, social, psychological, etc. – must be crossed before arrival and continually crossed even afterward. In the next section, I will briefly assess the juxtaposition of these two migratory trends and introduce Prato, the city where I have chosen to study this juxtaposition in depth.

¹⁶⁹ Mudu and Li, "A Comparative Evaluation of Recent Chinese Immigration in the United States and Italy; Settlement Patterns and Local Resistance," 291-92.

¹⁷⁰ Gregor Benton, preface to *The Chinese in Europe*, eds. Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998), viii.

Chapter 3: Post-Assessment: What's Different Now?

One of the traditional emigrant communities has become host to another. In the previous two chapters, I examined the historical migration trends of the Italian and Chinese communities within the European context. Up until the 1950s, Italy was an emigrant country. However, its post World War II economic miracle, occurring alongside greater Europe's economic miracle, served to reverse global migratory trends as Europe became the new target destination for migrant labourers. Italy and greater Europe became a net-migration area despite the fact that there is still a large income disparity between Northern and Southern Italy. On the other side of the story, China's economic miracle started after the new economic reform of 1978. This reform allowed an 'opening up' of China to Western influences, this time self imposed, and freer movement outward.¹⁷¹ Traditional chain migration patterns to Europe strengthened under this system. Similar to the Italian story, some areas of China have become incredibly wealthy, while a large economic disparity remains. The southeastern coast of China benefitted tremendously from the economic reforms and its unique coastal position. Consequently, this region began drawing migrants from the poorer surrounding regions and from further afield, such as western China. While one would think that the Chinese in this area would remain to work in the growing job markets, the reality is that this economic boom has heightened their awareness of relative poverty. Thus, migrant laborers from other areas of China come to fill the labor needs of this region, while whole villages dedicate themselves solely to sending their family members abroad to work, living off of their remittances.

It is at this moment in history that the two ethnic communities experience such a sharp juxtaposition with one another. Zhejiangese believe that Europe is their birthright, making this

¹⁷¹ The first 'opening up' of China to the West occurred in the mid to late 1800s after China's defeat in the Opium Wars. Following the new economic reform of 1978, the Chinese government decided to 'open up' the country to Western investments and influences.

their primary destination. While the Zhejiangese constitute one of Europe's oldest immigrant communities, numbers remained extremely low until the 1980s and 90s. Numerical figures in the previous chapter demonstrate the great rush of people out of Zhejiang and into Europe during this time. Following patterns of chain migration established by earlier kinsmen, the Zhejiangese find themselves in Italy, establishing economic niches within trades once dominated by native Italians. While there is a great need for migrant labor within the now-dwindling Italian economic system, the Chinese prefer to work within their ethnic enclaves. Italians now have a double role. While they were once emigrants to other host nations, now they must play the host to immigrants from other nations. Ideally, the Italians are able to remember their own experiences as immigrants and demonstrate understanding towards the immigrants now in Italy. However, this has not been the case, and the Italians find themselves increasingly frustrated with the present immigrants. The situation shifts when immigrants join the Italians on their "home turf."

Overlaying this already tense situation are the constant boundary shifts, both political and personal, with which the people on the ground – the everyday Italians and Chinese – must contend. Multiple levels of government, ranging from the local to the supranational, have difficulty communicating and coordinating with one another. The lack of clear rules and regulations leaves loopholes for migrants. Furthermore, the supranational entity, the EU, is attempting to create a pan-European identity and a unified geographic area. While the immigrants are able to, or try to, take advantage of the removal of international borders, are they a part of the EU identity? Is there space for them as well? Identities are flexible, and, as the Chinese and Italians navigate the multiple layers of governance and personal identification, the pull to revert to self-identified subgroups is strong. Cultural differences promote an awareness

of segregation and the creation of tension between the two groups, because, despite all efforts, their lives cross paths daily. Together, they must determine a plausible solution to resolve the layers of tension that overlay their daily lives in a situation that neither were wholly prepared to handle.

In the remaining chapters, I will present the province of Prato as my case study for the intersection of Italian and Chinese migratory paths. Prato provides a unique opportunity, because at present, it has one of the densest Chinese populations in Europe. Yet, its Chinese population is relatively new, having begun only in the last fifteen to twenty years. In Chapter 4, I will provide a basic context for the crucial elements of the narrative, establishing an economic, political, and social base and point of reference. In Chapter 5, I present observations on daily interactions and profiles of people from the community. In Chapter 6, I seek to use this information to explore and analyze the tensions that run through the many interviews I present. On the one hand, Prato is an atypical exception to many of the environments in which migrant laborers currently find themselves; however, on the other hand, Prato could well be a typical case study for the future, as Chinese push forth from saturated ethnic enclaves in urban centers and into the periphery.

Part II: Prato

Chapter 4: Contextualizing Prato

In Part I, we witnessed how a role shift between host and migrant for the Italians and the Chinese, in particular Zhejiangese, resulted in an immediate intersection between two migratory diasporas. Just as Europe, at the height of its powers, had spread its influence into Asia, Asians are now moving into Europe in an ever-expanding search for economic opportunity. Prato, Italy, offers a unique case study of the tensions that arise from such an intersection between Italians and Chinese. Although Prato ranks among the smallest provinces in Italy, it has the densest concentration of Chinese immigrants of any Italian provincial government.¹⁷² Of the Chinese present, over 95% originate from two of the traditional emigrating provinces in southern China, Zhejiang and Fujian, with Zhejiang the vastly more represented of the two.¹⁷³ Economically, Prato specializes in textiles, utilizing an industrial district model centered on the division of labor among small, specialized business firms. The unique concentration of diversified firms involved in each step of the production process and the dynamic rhythms of its population flow creates a “place where the variety and intensity of the [industrial district] phenomenon reaches dimensions not found elsewhere.”¹⁷⁴ While migrant labor arguably reinvigorates the local economy, the historical proclivity among the Chinese migrants to form closed, self-sufficient communities, coupled with Italian prejudice towards the Chinese, has created a great deal of tension within the Prato community.

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the current economic, political, and social situation in Prato. After offering a brief sketch of the basic geography and demographics of the province, I will then discuss the historical development of the current industrial district. The

¹⁷² Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 2-3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷⁴ Daniela Toccafondi, “Prato’s Textile District and Chinese Ethnic Businesses,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 75.

Chinese migration to Prato did not occur until the 1990s, but since then they have created a strong economic niche that has continued to develop in the last fifteen to twenty years. Next, I will discuss the political dimensions of the situation beginning with the policies which brought the Chinese to Prato. Provincial reactions to this unexpected influx of migrants were further complicated by national and supranational migration policies. Lastly, I will discuss how tensions over the Chinese and Chinatown elicited strong, and in many cases skewed, reactions from the public. While most sources that I spoke with, both Chinese and Italian, have relinquished hope of integrating the adult first-generation migrants through Italian language and culture, much hope is placed upon the younger first and emerging second-generation Chinese who attend Italian schools and directly interact with Italian peers. These two very different communities have and will continue to coexist, but the question remains as to whether or not they can resolve these social tensions.

Geography and Demographics

Although the heart of Italian industry lies in the north, among the regions of Lombardy and Veneto, central Italy was revitalized after World War II and quickly became a strong economic region as well. Within the rolling hills of Tuscany lies the province of Prato, located just thirty kilometers north of Florence along the A11 highway. In years past, Prato was actually a part of the Province of Florence, but the national government in Rome granted Prato the power to form its own province in 1992. The historic city center, with its ancient city walls, forms the heart of the province, while the urban, industrial district sprawls outward towards the less densely settled small towns. Much of this growth occurred between 1945 and 1970, during which over 50% of the current buildings in Prato were constructed.¹⁷⁵ Accordingly, Prato's

¹⁷⁵ Massimo Bressan and Massimiliano Radini, "Diversity and Segregation in Prato," in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 132.

textile industrial district “evolved mainly along the roads radiating from the city walls” which was then “integrated by areas of predominantly residential growth” to the north, west, and south.¹⁷⁶

Alongside Via Pistoiese, which links Prato with the neighboring city of Pistoia to the west, was one of these old artisan areas that became highly popular with the Chinese due to its “typically artisan hybrid housing and workplaces,” consolidating the Chinese presence.¹⁷⁷ This area was largely deserted by Italians when safety, health, and environmental concerns caused a mass movement of people and businesses from the densely populated city into new suburbs and industrial areas, Macrolotto Uno (1) and Due (2) in the south.¹⁷⁸ Increasing Chinese presence further displaced the remaining Italians. Today, Via Pistoiese, along with the western suburbs of San Paolo and Chiesanuova, which also have a highly dense concentration of Chinese residents, are known collectively as Macrolotto Zero (0).¹⁷⁹

A distinguishing factor of Prato’s industrial district is the presence of a diverse population. After World War II, Prato’s population rapidly and steadily increased from 77,631 in 1951 to 165,670 in 1991 to over 180,000 today, and according to statistical figures, almost 60% of the city’s population immigrated from areas outside of Prato after 1950.¹⁸⁰ Regional migrants from rural areas of central Italy, who tend to come as families, constitute 30-40% of the residents in Prato, and another 12-15% stem from transregional migration within Italy, especially from the southern regions of Campania, Puglia, and Sicily.¹⁸¹ Finally, according to official figures, foreign migration accounts for 12-15% of Prato’s population.¹⁸² Although Prato’s

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 5.

¹⁷⁸ Bressan and Radini, “Diversity and Segregatio in Prato,” 134.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 131.

¹⁸⁰ Denison, et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 4.

¹⁸¹ Bressan and Radini, “Diversity and Segregatio in Prato,” 131.

¹⁸² Ibid.

population draws from over sixty different ethnicities, the primary four groups of external migrants are the Chinese, Albanians, Pakistani, and Moroccans working mainly in the local textile industry or construction.¹⁸³ The number of Chinese residents has mushroomed in recent years, but while official sources demonstrate the strong trend, it cannot be accurately quantified due to a sizable presence of undocumented migrants. Proportionally, five of every eight legal migrants arriving in Prato each day are Chinese,¹⁸⁴ or approximately 18,000 total.¹⁸⁵ Estimates on the number of undocumented Chinese in Prato range from a “conservative figure of 20-30% of legal immigrants”¹⁸⁶ to a recent estimate of 30,000 by a representative of the central government, nearly double to number of legal residents.¹⁸⁷ Altogether, such a strong concentration of recently-arrived foreign nationals within a small area provides a sharp contrast to the native population.

Development of the Industrial District

Prato’s textile specialization began in the Middle Ages through its participation in the flourishing wool trade that enriched the coffers of many Tuscan families. By World War II, Prato was an important manufacturing center catering to the rag trade. In buying, selling, and regenerating the rags to make new woolen textiles,¹⁸⁸ Prato became known as the “city of rags,” accounting for 90% percent of the rag trade in Italy by the end of the 1930s. Steady growth and military contracts allowed Prato to continue as one of the principal wool centers in Italy during World War II until the German occupation in the autumn of 1943. Strikes in response to German

¹⁸³ Annuario statistic 2009: Demografia: Popolazione Residente, Comune di Prato, 2009, available from http://www.comune.prato.it/annuario/2009/htm/pop.htm#c_stra; Internet; accessed 16 March 2010.

¹⁸⁴ Angelo Andrea Di Castro and Marika Vicziany, “Chinese Dragons in Prato: Italian-Chinese Relations in a Small European Town,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 184.

¹⁸⁵ Silvia Pieraccini, interview by author, 28 May 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

¹⁸⁶ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 4.

¹⁸⁷ Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

¹⁸⁸ Wool rags are regenerated by breaking down the cloth into fibers and then spinning, weaving, and dyeing these fibers to make new but recycled cloth.

control, allied bombings, and lack of materials killed the infrastructure and forced production to cease. After the war, enterprising individuals with experience in regenerating textiles recovered the moveable machinery that they had hidden and allowed Prato to come to the forefront in the devastated European economy. The jump in population beginning shortly after the war, as people migrated to work in Prato's growing textile factories, indicated the beginning of a new era for Prato.¹⁸⁹

The transformation from large-scale production towards the industrial district model was jumpstarted at the end of 1951 in response to an economic crisis and two ensuing mass layoffs from the factories.¹⁹⁰ Gabi Dei Ottati, an economist who has studied Prato for the past thirty years with Giacomo Beccatini, the “rediscoverer of the industrial district concept,” identified Prato as the empirical case upon which the model was rediscovered.¹⁹¹ Within this system, a division of labor among smaller, specialized firms creates a type of horizontal integration that links the various segments of production “through local markets, custom, and competition.”¹⁹² Production is then farmed out to multiple subcontractors, which allows one firm to offer a wider variety of products and minimal wait time on orders. Consequently, this interdependent relationship among individuals and firms relies upon a number of relationships sustained on trust and reputation. The growing need for labor in Prato was “sustained by a constant [in]flux of immigrants, at first coming from the Tuscan countryside...and then from the Italian south and abroad.”¹⁹³ Prato's industrial districts thus created a flexible system which could accommodate

¹⁸⁹ Gabi Dei Ottati, “Case study I: Prato and its evolution in an European context,” in *Regional Development in a Modern European Economy: The Case of Tuscany*, eds. Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994), 116-9.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁹¹ Gabi Dei Ottati, interview by author, 25 May 2009, Florence, Italy, digital recording.

¹⁹² Gabi Dei Ottati, interview by author, 26 May 2009, Florence, Italy, digital recording.

¹⁹³ Marco Bellandi and Margo Romagnoli, “Case study II: Prato and the textile industry,” in *Regional Development in a Modern European Economy: The Case of Tuscany*, eds. Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994), 145.

and meet “the uncertainty and constantly changing structure and origin of demand” in both quantity and quality.¹⁹⁴ Within twenty years, Prato had already surpassed its European competitors in carded fabric production.¹⁹⁵

Following a lengthy period of continual growth, economic crisis wracked Prato’s textiles district in the mid-1980s. In their case study of Prato’s textile industry, Marco Bellandi and Marco Romagnoli cite the following factors which contributed to the crisis:

the fall in the dollar and the drastic reduction of the North American market; the change in lifestyles and types of consumption which penalize the demand for heavy products as is the case with carded woolen products; the erosion of the cost advantage of Prato’s products; the new competitiveness of the larger textile firms and the excessive fragmentation and reduction in the size of Prato’s firms which caused diseconomies and limited the adoption and full use of technological innovations.¹⁹⁶

Although the industrial districts had buffered Prato’s economy for over three decades, the immense concentration of global factors negatively impacted the economy and reduced its production and hiring capacity. Textiles remained a vital aspect of the local economy, but the void in production left a new niche. The niche was soon filled by ready-to-wear fashion, or *pronto moda*,¹⁹⁷ which had begun as a small Italian side production in the late 1980s, and this nascent industry burst onto the scene in the 1990s, largely driven by the new Chinese presence. While the overall economy may have diminished in the eyes of the local residents, to the incoming immigrants, Prato was still a rich city where industry had always been and which would constantly require more workers, especially in the less desirable positions such as the dye works.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Dei Ottati, “Case study I: Prato and its evolution in a European context,” 127.

¹⁹⁵ Bellandi and Romagnoli, “Case study II: Prato and the textile industry,” 147.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁹⁷ This Italian term refers to the “fast fashion” or ready-to-wear fashion industry. I will explain the basic organization model for *pronto moda* shortly in the section below entitled “The Chinese Economic Niche.”

¹⁹⁸ Irene Gorelli, interview by author, 3 June 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

The Chinese Economic Niche

In the early 1990s, particularly after 1995, Chinese immigration to Prato quickly increased, from just 38 in 1989 to over 10,000 a decade later.¹⁹⁹ The first Chinese laborers worked in the knitting industry, when firms picking up after the mid-80s crisis were no longer able to find subcontractors among the women in the countryside as they had in the 1960s and 70s.²⁰⁰ Many of these women had left for the urban centers during the rural exodus. A constant need for migrants to work in labor intensive productions created a snowball phenomenon among the Chinese whose networks quickly turned Prato into a strong magnet for migrants.²⁰¹ Chinese migrants found sewing a cost-effective way to invest in business since “sewing machine, arms, and hands” required minimal start up costs.²⁰² As there were few Italian clothing production subcontractors in the textile district, much of the work went to the Chinese, who produced items quickly and cheaply. While Prato was not the only city to have such a great number of Chinese workshops, these workshops transformed the local economy to include the production of clothing en masse. Today, there are some 500 bosses and 3,000 workshops run by the Chinese, with Prato “account[ing] for 15-20% of Italy’s fashion exports.”^{203 204} According to Silvia Pieraccini, an economic journalist who recently published a book on the Prato’s industrial districts, “Before, [Chinese] were outsourcing for Italian clothing industry, and there were few [clothing firms]. Many [Italians] were dealing only in fabric, not clothing. Now, there is a Chinese district, and they have a complete monopoly on the entire clothing industry.”²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 4.

²⁰⁰ Dei Ottati, interview, 26 May 2009.

²⁰¹ Ettore Recchi, interview by author, 25 May 2009, Florence, Italy, digital recording.

²⁰² Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Pieke et al., *Transnational Chinese*, 119.

²⁰⁵ Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

Anja Fladrich, who studied the labor markets within the Prato community, observes that when unskilled migrants face “saturated European labour markets” their only recourse is the ethnic market which in the case of Prato readily supplies unskilled jobs.²⁰⁶ The Chinese created their economic niche in conjunction with Prato’s traditional textile manufacturing. Chinese migrants were not the only migrants working within Prato, but, as Dei Ottati explains, “other migrant people were coming to work *in* the Pratese workshop. The Chinese started to open their *own* workshops....And this is *entirely* different, because the *way* in which Prato assimilated migrant people was broken.”²⁰⁷ Pakistani migrants, for example, work in the Italian dye works, where they must work alongside Italians and thus acquire some basic knowledge of Italian language and culture.²⁰⁸ While this does not mean that the Pakistani are more integrated than the Chinese, the Pakistani do have a greater chance for exposure to Italian society. Furthermore, while other migrants might have started their own enterprises, they lack the closed labor market of the Chinese system. In actuality, the Chinese have created a large number of jobs which they then filled with their own source of labor. This may not have allowed Italians to access the new openings, but it means that the Chinese did not “steal” jobs, a popular perception, from the Italians. Fladrich notes that the Xiaolin supermarket on Via Pistoiese, in the heart of Chinatown, overflows with both written and electronic advertisements, but the use of Chinese language restricts the applicants to members of the ethnic enclave.²⁰⁹ Dei Ottati also argues that the socio-cultural system of the Chinese ethnic community works in tandem with the industrial district and facilitates the division of labour.²¹⁰ Bonds of intra-ethnic ties work well within the

²⁰⁶ Anja Fladrich, “The Chinese Labour Market and Job Mobility in Prato,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 106.

²⁰⁷ Dei Ottati, interview, 25 May 2009.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Fladrich, “The Chinese Labour Market and Job Mobility in Prato,” 109.

²¹⁰ Gabi Dei Ottati, “Italian Industrial Districts and the Dual Chinese Challenge,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 32.

interdependence required of the industrial district model, and sub-ethnic ties further diversify the enclaves within the overall Chinese niche.

A majority of the Chinese businesses in Prato operate as subcontractors for *pronto moda* firms, centering primarily on assembly. On average, a Chinese workshop will have ten to fifteen employees and subcontract for two to three clients.²¹¹ In order to compete with the other workshops, the garments are quickly made and sold at extremely low prices. To make up for the low cost, the average workday ranges from sixteen to eighteen hours, sometimes longer during rush season. Although quality and craftsmanship may suffer, the sheer availability of cheap labor keeps production costs low for the bosses. Consequently, the migrants inject “fresh blood” into the workforce, and their entrepreneurial aspirations prompt further innovation, something the Chinese have consistently done in their new environments. Within Prato’s industrial district, Chinese entrepreneurs have moved from working as subcontractors to manufacturers within the *pronto moda* system. Antonella Ceccagno, the past director of Prato’s *Centro Ricerche, Documentazione e Servizi per la Comunità Cinese* (Center for Research Documentation and Services to the Chinese Community), notes that the “Migrants’ preference for commercial activities is also linked to the evolution of the ideology of the successful migrant in China, which, as it celebrates migrants as bearers of modernity, puts strong pressures on them to realize lightning fast economic success.”²¹² The strong drive to succeed has, on the one hand, established a flourishing new sector, but on the other hand, it has required its workers live at substandard conditions.

²¹¹ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 6.

²¹² Antonella Ceccagno, “Chinese Migrants as Apparel Manufacturers in an Era of Perishable Global Fashion: New Fashion Scenarios in Prato,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 46.

Pronto moda evolved from the outpouring of Chinese labor into a production system modeled after Prato's industrial districts. After reaching "critical mass" in 2000, with approximately one hundred Chinese firms in existence, the Chinese have completely taken over this economic niche today.²¹³ *Pronto moda* firms differ from traditional programmed firms due to the time schedule they adhere to:

Pronto moda firms prepare collections and collect orders from clients only a little before the sales season and often even after the season has started. The so-called 'programmed' firms...are those which establish the collection well in advance of the sales season and programme their production on the basis of the orders received. While programmed firms contribute to defining the fashion trends, *pronto moda* firms are in some ways imitators that produce the models that achieve the greatest success. Programmed firms have greater abilities in design and generally higher quality in their production.²¹⁴

Flexibility drives the *pronto moda* system, but it depends on a proximity to resources and a strong organizational model built upon trust and loyalty in order to complete orders in such a rapid pace. This causes further competition among the Chinese firms, driving down prices and prompting more arduous working conditions for the laborers. Italian subcontractors are unwilling to work under such conditions, preferring to remain with programmed firms that value quality more than quantity, and few Italians are able to work as manufacturers within *pronto moda* due to the high level of interdependency among the Chinese. Although the Chinese had begun in *pronto moda* by working under Italian firms, instances of lost payments, deception, and fraud on the part of the Italians reinforced a preference among the Chinese to work within the enclave if possible.²¹⁵

²¹³ Ibid., 54.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 54-54.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 60-61.



Figure 3: Road Signs for *Pronto Moda* Showrooms

The price, variety, and flexibility of Prato's *pronto moda* products have transformed the city into an “international *pronto moda* centre.”²¹⁶ Wholesalers, retailers, and street vendors from across Europe, and even some from as far away as the United States and Taiwan, converge at Macrolotto Uno, the heart of the Chinese clothing industry, to select and purchase products from approximately five hundred *pronto moda* firms. Just ten years ago, Macrolotto Uno was inhabited by Italian fabric firms, but today, there is just one Italian *pronto moda* firm among a sea of Chinese *pronto moda* firms.²¹⁷ I had the opportunity to visit Macrolotto Uno with Silvia Pieraccini during our interview, and the compact area of approximately seven streets is crowded

²¹⁶ Ibid., 54-55.

²¹⁷ Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

with pre-engineered metal buildings. With doors flung open, racks and racks of clothing are displayed in open showrooms in a multitude of colors and styles. Attached to each garment is the crucial “Made in Italy” tag. The stamp of quality associated with Italian-made goods has been reinvented in the last ten to fifteen years. Chinese labor in Italy provides the low costs and quick production of “Made in China” with the added market appeal of “Made in Italy.” Being ethnically Italian is no longer important as long as the sewing machine and the labor to produce it remain in Italy.²¹⁸ Indeed, Pieraccini estimates that one million articles of clothing are produced by the Chinese in Prato each day, and the cost to the buyer is extremely low in comparison to what he can sell at market.²¹⁹ A T-shirt sells for three euros, pants for four euros, and a blouse for six euros. The frenzied pace of global fashion keeps Prato’s *pronto moda* in constant production to imitate the latest styles.



Figure 4: Showroom in Macrolotto Uno



Figure 5: Workers Loading a Shipment

Globalization and Economic Links

Despite its insular tendencies, Prato’s Chinese enclave is irrevocably tied to transnational interests. While the Chinese rely on interethnic relationships as much as possible, they are integrated into the broader regional and national economy. If they were not integrated, then they

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

would not “rely on Italian contracts and clients for their existence...that determines the conditions of business.”²²⁰ By extension, the Chinese cannot avoid depending on the greater EU integrated economy. The Chinese thus rely upon their ties within Tuscany, within Italy, within Europe, and extending outward to China. During our interview, Dei Ottati referred to a small family firm which was “completely internationalized” due to the location of their premises in both Prato and Wenzhou, their use of materials from both Italy and China, their employment of an Italian designer and Chinese subcontractors, and their clients who come from across Europe.²²¹ Nowadays, the Chinese economic competition within Italy is twofold, as even Chinese entrepreneurs must struggle against the inflow of Chinese goods and products. The *pronto moda* firms retain their competitive edge due to their productive flexibility and proximity to the market in addition to the “image of the district as a producer of fashion.”²²²

Silvia Pieraccini theorizes Prato’s economy as “parallel districts” with Italian-made textiles catering to top-end quality and Chinese-made apparel catering to low to mid-end quality.²²³ The disparate markets make it difficult for the two to work in tandem. While both utilize the industrial district system, they remain, in essence, separate activities. Recently, some of the textiles production and dye works have allocated small segments of their business to cater to *pronto moda* needs; however, the extent of this cooperative relationship is yet to be determined.²²⁴ Regardless, both districts find similarities between the Pratese and Chinese which extend beyond a comparison of industrial district and interethnic relations. Economist Silvia Lombardi finds that the similarity between Wenzhou and Prato modes of production organization

²²⁰ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 13.

²²¹ Dei Ottati, interview, 26 May 2009.

²²² Ceccagno, “Chinese Migrants as Apparel Manufacturers in an Era of Perishable Global Fashion: New Fashion Scenarios in Prato,” 63-64.

²²³ Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

²²⁴ Ceccagno, “Chinese Migrants as Apparel Manufacturers in an Era of Perishable Global Fashion: New Fashion Scenarios in Prato,” 64-65.

facilitated the integration of the Chinese, primarily from Zhejiang where Wenzhou is located, into Prato's local economic structure.²²⁵ She credits the “entrepreneurial spirit of the local communities and their efforts in responding to historical change” as the key to the economic success in both areas.²²⁶ Ceccagno also comments upon the “similarity of conditions, aspirations and attitude of former workers in the nascent industrial districts in postwar Italy and of Chinese migrants in the last two decades in Italian industrial districts.”²²⁷ Thus, the Chinese in Prato draw upon traditions in both their homeland and host country as impetus for their entrepreneurial drive.

Government Influence: Who's in Charge?

It is important to examine the multiple layers of government influence in Prato's transnational socioeconomic links. A discussion of Prato's regional politics would be incomplete without recalling its position within the larger governing body of the EU. Politics and economics rarely operate alone, and, in the current global order, their connection is further heightened by the increasingly intricate connections formed among nations. Ray Taras' *Europe Old and New* presents the EU as a fragmented supranational institution seeking to provide guidance to the many nations under its leadership. Arguing that Europe is not only divided between familiar Old-New and East-West lines, Taras depicts a Europe torn between countervailing pushes for EU integration from the political elites above and the cultural wars taking place between the citizens below.²²⁸ Developments such as the Euro Zone, the European passport, and the free borders of the Schengen Zone are tangible results of the EU's influence,

²²⁵ Silvia Lombardi, “The Wenzhou Model of Development through the Lenses of Industrial Districts,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 296.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ceccagno, “Chinese Migrants as Apparel Manufacturers in an Era of Perishable Global Fashion: New Fashion Scenarios in Prato,” 65.

²²⁸ Ray Taras, *Europe Old and New: Transnationalism, Belonging, Xenophobia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2009).

but its policies concerning amorphous topics such as identity, immigration, and civil rights require a change in mindset. While I will present a more comprehensive discussion of European cultural identity in Chapter 6, a lengthy discussion of the purpose and duties of the EU are beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I would like to concentrate on the fact that distinct layers of governmental control are often in contention with one another, which contributes unmistakably to the tensions within Prato.

The longstanding relationship between Italy and the EU, as discussed in Chapter 1, shows signs of deep strain under the immigration debate. While the EU often singles out the Italian borders as a weak link against the entry of undocumented immigrants, Italian officials claim that the larger body consistently ignores their pleas for assistance in this matter. In an effort to regain control over the wave of incoming undocumented immigrants, the Italian government enacted a series of immigration legislation spanning the 1990s and into the early 2000s, specifically: 1990, 1995, 1998, and 2002. These laws attempted to regulate and tighten official immigration by providing mass amnesties to the undocumented immigrants present in Italy; however, this only encouraged further movement of undocumented migrants into Italy in hopes of attaining regularization. Regularization movements often prompted a flow of undocumented migrants from region to region within Europe, as well as from outside of Europe, in search of amnesty, and Italy proved no exception. In 1995 the number of regularized immigrants totaled 246,000, in 1998 a total of 217,000 immigrants, and in 2002 a sizeable total of 702,156 immigrants.²²⁹

According to Denison et al. in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*:

While by 1998 there seemed to be a more general view that the Chinese were contributing to a revitalization of the textile sector, the 2002 mass amnesty strained the capacity of public institutions to deal with racial issues and lead to a reversal of public opinion and increased tension²³⁰

²²⁹ Denison et al., "The Chinese Community in Prato," 3.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

Consequently, the national amnesty negatively affected the equilibrium reached within the boundaries of Prato.

National, regional, and local governments must contend with varying stances towards immigrants. At the national level, officials recognize that immigrants are a necessary addition to the national workforce, but much of their rhetoric positions the immigrants as guest workers, preferring to cast them solely as temporary presence in Italian society. Most prominent are the views voiced by *Lega Nord*, a primarily northern Italian party renowned for its ‘xenophobic’ and ‘anti immigrant’ sentiments, and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who is president of centre-right party *Il Popolo della Libertà*.²³¹ Measures that Berlusconi has proposed include criminalizing illegal entry and imprisoning *clandestini*.²³² According to Irene Gorelli, Prato’s provincial councilor for social affairs, the national government views the immigrants only “as arms, not like persons...[with a] heart.”²³³ She contrasts the national view with the regional Tuscan government, which, in her opinion, recognizes that there are problems due to the lack of control, but that it has a responsibility towards both documented immigrants and the *clandestini*. Gorelli claims that the national government’s policies create constant flux among the migrant populations, handing off the responsibility to regional governments without providing to tools to assist in regulating them.²³⁴ The local populace in turn exerts their frustration upon the regional government, and Dei Ottati stated that the most likely reason for the replacement of Prato’s prior mayor was due to his lenient policies towards the migrants.²³⁵

²³¹ The People of Liberty; North League

²³² *Clandestini* is the Italian term for undocumented migrants.

²³³ Gorelli, interview, 3 June 2009.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Dei Ottati interview, 26 May 2009.



Figure 6: La Destra Campaign Poster. A national-conservative political party. The poster calls for a stronger Italian presence in Europe.



Figure 7: Lega Nord Campaign Poster. “They were not able to set rules against immigration. Now they live on the reserves! Think of us.”

The reality of the situation shows that there are many points of disconnect in the migration system between the supranational and national policies. Regional governments are then left to contend with the manifestations of these issues. The Schengen Zone and its free internal borders form the core of this debate on quotas, visas, and residence permits. A Schengen visa, which permits unrestricted entry into participating nations, is restricted to those with passports, but the lack of stringent internal border control facilitates movement. Ambiguities in the legal system that had been widely tolerated as the EU and Italy attempted to clarify their working relationship in the 1990s were disrupted with the sudden arrival of the Chinese, whose “rapid rise to fortune and success has focused attention on all the familiar issues

of poor governance.”²³⁶ According to Stefano Assirelli of Prato’s municipal police, any non-resident in Italy must present himself to police headquarters within eight days of arrival to register and request permission for residence. Once the standard ninety days has expired, the visitors are expected to leave unless they apply for further residence.²³⁷ Gorelli sums up the quota issue in simple mathematical terms. The quota of people permitted regularization is never large enough for the number of applicants. Therefore, if there are a hundred requests and fifty are granted legal status, the other fifty persons do not instantly disappear from the country. These fifty remain and become classified as *clandestini*.²³⁸

Lack of documentation equates a lack of control over enforcement, leaving the government essentially powerless to execute existing immigration policies. In conventional immigration, a person submits a visa application to the local consulate, receives approval, and then enters and remains in the country only for the specified length of time. Many undocumented Chinese migrants often travel to Europe through a combination of legal and illegal channels in search of countries that easily grant residence or visas towards the next stopping point. After crisscrossing the map of legal loopholes and arriving at their end destination, many migrants dispose of their documentation or have their documentation taken away by traffickers. Without documentation, it is nearly impossible to deport a *clandestino*; they cannot be put on a plane back to their home country.²³⁹ Pieraccini explains the irony of the situation when the police who apprehend undocumented Chinese send digital photos to the Chinese consulate in Florence expecting them to identify and label these migrants.²⁴⁰ Not only is this an impossible task, to match nameless faces to over one billion residents, but there is simply

²³⁶ Di Castro and Vicziany, “Chinese Dragons in Prato: Italian-Chinese Relations in a Small European Town,” 187.

²³⁷ Stefano Assirelli, interview by author, 29 May 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

²³⁸ Gorelli, interview, 3 June 2009.

²³⁹ Toccafondi, interview, 3 June 2009.

²⁴⁰ Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

not enough manpower to meet the demand. Assirelli echoes the futility in arresting all of the undocumented migrants; without clear penalties, there is nothing that can be done against those arrested, and they are often released after a few days. Not only can migrants simply move to a different city, but those who are identified are rarely sent away. He cites that in 2008, 930 migrants of all ethnicities were identified for repatriation, and in the end, only twenty-two were effectively sent away.²⁴¹ Once again, it becomes a matter of legal ambiguity and the lack of a clear, unified plan among all layers of governments and policies.

What does this mean for the migrants?

Caught in the middle of the legal ambiguity are real people who have little say in what happens to them. Without documentation, the immigrants have no say in civil and human rights or access to state-supported social welfare. Those who have registered with the local police and are in the process of attaining a residency permit are not permitted to move freely either within Europe or to return home, effectively keeping migrants within Italy for the two plus years it takes to attain residency and the multiple renewals afterward.²⁴² Immigrants who attain permanent residency status and are law-abiding, tax-paying individuals still do not have the same legal rights as Italians. Citizenship is extremely difficult to attain in Italy, requiring a minimum residency of ten years, and second and third generation immigrants are still defined as foreigners in the eyes of the government.²⁴³ Unlike France or the United States, being born on Italian soil does not automatically entitle the child of an immigrant to citizenship and the rights associated with it. Voting, which serves as the ultimate expression of political voice for leadership and policy change, is precluded from the immigrants. A recent immigration law under discussion in Tuscany for Eastern European immigrants was considered “too benevolent” because it sought to

²⁴¹ Assirelli, interview, 29 May 2009.

²⁴² Gorelli, interview, 3 June 2009.

²⁴³ Ibid.

provide, among other things, freedom of religion and healthcare.²⁴⁴ The immigrants' lives are heavily influenced by competing pressures between local, regional, national, and supranational demands.

In part, the role of the provincial government can be understood through its own history, which began in 1992, barely two decades ago. The influx of Chinese migration began in earnest in 1995. As a result, the understaffed new provincial government was unprepared to keep up with the growing Chinese population.²⁴⁵ However, the new government recognized the need to plan for the Chinese presence, and the *Centro Ricerche, Documentazione e Servizi per la Comunità Cinese* was founded in 1994 to assist officials in ascertaining both problems and opportunities within the Chinese community and to conduct long-term planning.²⁴⁶ Resources offered by the local government include translators, language courses, and guides to further resources printed in a variety of languages. Furthermore, the government works with various cultural associations, of which there are over 250, to reach out to the diverse population within the province.²⁴⁷ The majority of these projects have come into fruition in the last five years, demonstrating an increased recognition of the need to coordinate in the hopes of, according to Gorelli, "demolish[ing] the...walls of ignorance...or the fear of the other."²⁴⁸ Despite the continuing need to construct policies regarding the Chinese, the center was recently closed due in part to a lack of funding from the central Italian government but more importantly the demands of the Prato business community.²⁴⁹ Public opinion among the Pratese community views the provincial government as exceedingly permissive towards immigration.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ Toccafondi, interview, 3 June 2009.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Denison et al., "The Chinese Community in Prato," 5.

²⁴⁷ Gorelli, interview, 3 June 2009.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Dei Ottati, interview, 26 May 2009.

²⁵⁰ Elena Bertocchi, interview by author, 1 June 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

Opinions on the extent and effectiveness of these policies vary: while some believe that the laws are too permissive, others think that the Chinese population is not integrated enough. Most troublesome for the Italian public is their perception that many of the Chinese do not live in accordance with Italian law. Chinese businesses, in particular, are seen as benefitting largely from the resources available in Prato while evading taxes and employees' social security payments, housing their employees within the workshops, and working their employees, often undocumented, far past the legal workday. These points denote a lifestyle choice highly incompatible with the Western notion of keeping work and home life separate and sanitary. Furthermore, the success and respectability amongst fellow immigrants and in the home country tends to overrule an immigrant's need to maintain prestige with the local residents while living and working abroad.²⁵¹ Pieraccini succinctly explains the basic psychology behind this rationale: "If [I] go to another country in search of a better life [I am] disposed to do everything" which means that "I want to work a lot...I am not interested in the rules. This is the same for the Chinese, like the Italians."²⁵² Ceccagno echoes this idea, stating that this tendency to work long hours "off the books" was common not only among Italian immigrants abroad, but also among the Italian firms in Prato during its early history.²⁵³ This drive to succeed reflects a common bond among all migrants regardless of origin or destination.

A lack of concordance among the governing agencies allows the migrants a certain level of socioeconomic mobility, but it also serves to keep them from extending beyond their ethnic enclaves and interacting with greater Italian society. Immigrants are caught in a vicious cycle of documentation and regularization. Chinese businesses often operate without proper records in

²⁵¹ Denison et al., "The Chinese Community in Prato," 14.

²⁵² Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

²⁵³ Ceccagno, "Chinese Migrants as Apparel Manufacturers in an Era of Perishable Global Fashion: New Fashion Scenarios in Prato," 66.

order to hire the undocumented workers seeking employment; however, this prevents the workers from regularizing their status since they must prove employment and housing, both of which are technically against Italian legal code.²⁵⁴ Not only does this prevent proper documentation and financial support for the Italian government, it also limits possibilities for inter-ethnic interaction and mutual understanding. Fear of being caught prevents the Chinese from extending beyond their ethnic enclave.²⁵⁵ Their presence introduces a number of challenges and creates a great deal of tension within the community. While the people, government, and infrastructure of Prato were not prepared to for the influx of Chinese, the reality is that the Chinese are there to stay. It is impossible to send away the thousands of Chinese migrants who have become a vital component of the local economy. Dei Ottati reflected on the current situation without offering, or knowing, the answer to what she knows is necessary:

I think it's a[n] experience that we were not prepared [for], we were not prepared...Now it's happening, and we have to manage and do differently, we have just to manage in a way that is improving their quality of life and also ours...we have to find a way...²⁵⁶

Chinatown Tensions

During the course of my interviews with local Italian residents in Prato, many of my respondents stated that the Pratese have always been tolerant and welcoming to the migrants they have received during Prato's long history as an industrial center. What makes the Chinese so different? In the past, the majority of the migrants originated from regional and domestic points of origin. Thus, while there may have been linguistic and cultural differences, the differences were not nearly as striking as those posed by recent international migrants. I spoke of Prato's longstanding assimilation process through the employment and insertion of new migrants into

²⁵⁴ Denison et al., "The Chinese Community in Prato," 6.

²⁵⁵ Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

²⁵⁶ Dei Ottati, interview, 26 May 2009.

existing workshops above in the section entitled “The Chinese Economic Niche.” Conversely, the Chinese broke this practice with the formation of their ethnic economic enclaves. A memory of migration remains in the Pratese consciousness, but the sheer number of migrants, especially migrants with such striking cultural and linguistic differences, overwhelms the local society’s willingness to accept them.

Above, I also mentioned the perceived lack of respect for local social customs and state regulations in work and economy, and these effects are compounded by how they play out in daily behaviors. Lifestyle differences play a vital role in the tensions between the Chinese and Italian communities in each and every hour of the day. Italians traditionally work an eight hour day interrupted by an afternoon lunch break where a majority of the shops are closed and everyone returns home for the midday meal. Chinese migrants, in contrast, work long, irregular hours in the workshops to keep up with the orders. This creates a discord in terms of the noise levels that sewing, cooking, and general daily living creates and the free time spent outside of the workshop. Elena Bertocchi, who studied the perception of criminality in Prato’s Chinatown, cites time as a crucial factor for integration:

They work...18 hours a day. They do not have the possibility of inserting themselves in...[the] cultural activities of the city to learn or to make acquaintances...This, in my opinion, is a very important aspect of divergence, of diversity, between our, between the two, the two societies.²⁵⁷

Limited leisure time also prevents the migrants from acquiring and practicing the Italian language with local residents, and without means of communication, misunderstandings are perpetuated.

The Chinese reside in many Prato neighborhoods, but the strongest concentration remains in Macrolotto Zero where the “physical and cultural presence of the Chinese...makes public

²⁵⁷ Bertocchi, interview, 1 June 2009.

intervention...still more difficult.”²⁵⁸ When the Chinese do venture outside of the workshops, personal habits, such as speaking loudly, spitting, and littering, are viewed by the Italians as disrespectful to those around them and to the city. A minority of the Chinese, particularly those of a higher socioeconomic status or those who have resided in the West for a while, also view these habits with distaste and annoyance and resent that this stereotype is then applied to all Chinese. City pride among the Pratese is strong, and during my time there, I spied many “*Amo la città di Prato*” signs in storefronts along city center.²⁵⁹ I hypothesize that this is a thinly veiled expression of anti-immigrant sentiment. Daniela Toccafondi, the Director of PratoFutura, a think tank for local entrepreneurs and professionals concerning the future of Prato, conducted a survey of Pratese residents and their opinions towards the Chinese. Her results showed an overwhelmingly negative or mixed view towards the Chinese, and many of the respondents considered the zones in which they live “dirty” and “degraded,” showing no “love for the city.”²⁶⁰ She also found that the Pratese believe the Chinese utilize the resources of Prato to establish businesses and earn money without contributing back to local society.²⁶¹ The general consensus among the Italians that I interviewed and the conversation I overheard in the streets is that the Chinese migrants utilize governmental and social services, such as healthcare and education, without paying taxes into an already weakened system, nor do the Chinese contribute much to the local economy by shopping or banking in Italian firms. Most grating to the Italians, however, is the fact that the Chinese send the bulk of their earnings overseas in the form of remittances and donations to their hometowns. Prato has one of the highest remittance rates

²⁵⁸ Massimo Bressan and Sabrina Tosi Cambini, “The ‘Macrolotto 0’ as a Zone of Transition: Cultural Diversity and Public Spaces,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 157.

²⁵⁹ “I love the city of Prato”

²⁶⁰ Toccafondi, interview, 3 June 2009.

²⁶¹ Toccafondi, “Prato’s Textile District and Chinese Ethnic Businesses,” 84.

from Italy to China, and in 2007, an estimated one million Euros were sent each day or 384 million Euros total for the year.²⁶² Additionally, this estimate was made based solely upon legal money transfer records, not taking into account hand delivery and other informal channels of transmittance. The immense wealth earned by the Chinese in this one city is staggering, and the local residents are unhappy that this wealth is not benefitting the city and the residents.

Local Perceptions

Political parties in turn capitalize on the heightened public awareness of the immigration issues. On the one hand, national parties such as the *Lega Nord* amplify existing fears with strong rhetoric, “throwing oil on fire to try to...[present] themselves as defenders of law and all the policies.”²⁶³ The effects of these declarations trickle down to the psyche of the general population in Prato, promoting “less tolerant views” of the Chinese migrants.²⁶⁴ A similar cycle of action and reaction occurs here, with intolerance leading to self-segregation and self-segregation prompting further intolerance among the Chinese and Italian communities. Such views are not limited to “ordinary” leaders but prominent civic leaders including the President of Prato’s Chamber of Commerce. An owner of a local textile firm, he has been quoted saying: “We underestimated them. What they’re doing here is called unfair competition. We need a battalion, an operation like the one in Iraq, to keep them under control.”²⁶⁵ With such strong statements, equating the immigrants to Iraqi insurgents, the local government is caught between multiple demands. Even if local officials do favor assisting the migrants, as suggested by the wide variety of resources they offer, their statements and policies must still appease the constituents who voted them in. The closing of the *Centro Ricerche, Documentazione e Servizi*

²⁶² Pieraccini, interview, 28 May 2009.

²⁶³ Recchi, interview, 25 May 2009.

²⁶⁴ Di Castro and Vicziany, “Chinese Dragons in Prato: Italian-Chinese Relations in a Small European Town,” 188.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

per la Comunità Cinese, for example, resulted from both a lack of state funding and an absence of support among the leading Prato businessmen. Marco Romagnoli, the previous Mayor of Prato, has been quoted as saying that the Chinese are an economic “blessing” but a “catastrophe for the [Prato] community.”²⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Andrea Frattani, Prato’s Councilor for Multicultural Affairs, was quoted expressing frustration at the “deafness” of the Chinese community and their need for “a wake up call” over their lack of complicity with local customs and state regulations.²⁶⁷ With little experience in confronting large-scale immigration, Prato’s government is struggling to determine the best course of action.



Figure 8: Prato Mayoral Campaign Poster.

“Ethics, Legality, Work.

Our Prato: more work, more social justice, more safety.”

²⁶⁶ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 19.

²⁶⁷ Di Castro and Vicziany, “Chinese Dragons in Prato: Italian-Chinese Relations in a Small European Town,” 181-82.

Various sources of local media also pick up on the local fears, hyping and contributing to the tension in addition to reporting the words of local officials. A common belief perpetuated amongst the Italians in Prato is that “in the last 20 years not a single Chinese person has died,” implying that the Italians view the Chinese as all the same, not differentiating between them as individuals.²⁶⁸ Much of the media commentary utilizes dramatic stereotypes when discussing migrants with phrases such as “protection rackets,” “forced slave labor,” “gangs” and “mafia,” “thieves” and “kidnappers,” and “murderers.”^{269 270} For example, between 1988 and 1994, *La Nazione*, a popular local regional paper, used the term “mafia” in 55.81% of Chinese related articles and “almost all spoke in terms of menace.”²⁷¹ Toccafondi’s thesis on the media’s perception on Prato’s development found that they were “not capable to the extent of understanding the transformation... In reality, they were lighting distress... [and] made the articles very pessimistic of the future.”²⁷² Media sources are known to select stories in response to popular demand, feeding into a particular notion and creating more fear where fear exists already. Articles concerning positive actions undertaken by the Chinese, such as donations to hospitals or cultural events, merit small articles hidden within a newspaper, while negative news such as murders and arrests of *clandestini* dominate the headlines of the day’s paper.²⁷³

The Italian idiom “*fare di tutta l’erba un fascio*,” or where one part becomes the whole, accurately captures how the media cycle has perpetuated local fear, panic, and distrust against the foreign migrants within the city.²⁷⁴ The reality is that the Chinese conduct such separate

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 176.

²⁶⁹ Tom Denison and Graeme Johanson, “Community Connections: The Chinese Community in Prato, Italy and their use of Technology,” in *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*, eds. Graeme Johanson et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 163.

²⁷⁰ Bertocchi, interview, 1 June 2009.

²⁷¹ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 11.

²⁷² Toccafondi, interview, 3 June 2009.

²⁷³ Bertocchi, interview, 1 June 2009.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

lives from the Italians that it is very difficult for altercations to occur between members of these two communities. Assirelli explains that cases of violence within Italian or Chinese ethnic groups are common, but cases involving both Italian and Chinese participants are very rare.²⁷⁵ Still, any and all altercations between the Chinese foster a perception of criminality, feeding into the dramatic media stereotypes, and such perceptions are difficult to correct within a diverse community of immigrants who do not share a common language and culture. Initially, a majority of the Chinese migrants were male, which created a sense of insecurity among local Italians about living in such close proximity to a large number of males. As more families were reunited and whole families transplanted from other areas in Europe and China, the gender imbalance has equalized, easing such worries, for “If you live in a palazzo where there is an immigrant family next to you with a father, mother, and child, you feel differently than if there was an apartment full of men.”²⁷⁶ Perception of safety is but one of the many factors which contribute to the overall tension between the Chinese and Italians in Prato.

Hope for the Next Generation Amidst Segregated Communities

First generation immigrants, particularly adults, are seen as too set in their ways and they have less access to resources, thus hope for integration lies in the second generation who grow up and attend school with Italian children. The number of Chinese children in Prato is increasing, as Chinese families tend to have two to three children, while Italians, with their notably low birthrate, have on average just one child.²⁷⁷ Working parents are also accustomed to sending their infants to China to be cared for by family members and attain a Chinese language background until they are of school age or older. Others, who left their children in China when they migrated, attempt to bring their children and spouses to Italy and reunify the family later.

²⁷⁵ Assirelli, interview, 29 May 2009.

²⁷⁶ Gorelli, interview, 3 June 2009.

²⁷⁷ Toccafondi, interview, 3 June 2009.

Although the Chinese parents understand that their children should learn Italian, especially to assist them as translators, they emphasize Chinese language at home, giving them little opportunity to practice their Italian. Consequently, while the general rule is that the earlier a student begins to attend Italian schools the more attuned he/she is with Italian language and culture, family life and background influence a child's acculturation as well.

The two schools in Prato with the highest percentage of non-Italian students are Istituto Comprensivo di Pietro Mascagni, a comprehensive institute from nursery to high school, and Scuola Elementare di Stato Cesare Guasti, an elementary school.²⁷⁸ Both are located extremely close to Macrolotto Zero with Istituto Mascagni in San Paolo and Scuola Guasti just within the city walls adjacent to Via Pistoiese. I had the opportunity to visit Scuola Guasti and to speak with some of the staff working there, whose comments I will summarize below.²⁷⁹ This school is comprised of approximately 50% non-Italian students who are mostly Chinese but also Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Albanian, Romanian, and Moroccan. Staff found that in general there is "friendship" between all the students in the younger classes and that the children are well integrated. However, the older children who arrive directly from China at ages eight or nine find it far more difficult to integrate, indicating a similar problem with even older students and adults. Chinese students are provided with Italian as a second language classes; however, one educator did not believe that it is only language which prohibits integration, especially at the older ages.

²⁷⁸ Staff at Scuola Elementare di Stato Cesare Guasti, interview by author, 3 June 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.



Figure 9: Italian Father and Son



Figure 10: Chinese and Italian Schoolchildren on Mother's Day



Figure 11: Chinese Mother and Daughter

Researchers have found that students above elementary school age find it far more difficult to successfully socialize. Ceccagno conducted research on twelve to seventeen year-old second-generation Chinese in Prato, and she found that while these children were more accustomed with Italian language and culture than their first-generation counterparts, many problems remained.²⁸⁰ Sociologist Ettore Recchi who conducted a 2008 study in Tuscany among twelve year-old school children found that “immigrant children are rather isolated, and this is especially the case with the Chinese. In the natural co-relationships among peers...they interact very little.”²⁸¹ While these interactions could improve over time, as the Chinese population is relatively new to Prato in comparison to other settlements, there is little chance for such developments to occur within the current generation. Approximately 50% of Chinese students drop out of secondary school between their second and third years.²⁸² The most common reasons for students to join the family business include the family’s need for additional labor, inadequate

²⁸⁰ Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 12.

²⁸¹ Recchi, interview, 25 May 2009.

²⁸² Denison et al., “The Chinese Community in Prato,” 12.

assistance from school officials to integrate non-Italian speaking students, and academic challenges associated with poor living conditions.²⁸³ It is very difficult to live between two cultures, and Bertocchi believes that the second-generation children are disoriented and confused about their true identity. During our interview, she explained that, while second generation Chinese are familiar with Italian culture, many of the Italian children, influenced by public opinion and media reports, still consider them as outsiders to their culture. On the other hand, she states that the Chinese children grow up in a non-traditional Chinese environment and are expected to maintain their family's languages and customs while also assisting their parents in navigating Italian society.²⁸⁴

Conclusion

Prato's Italian and Chinese communities live side by side, yet they lead very separate lives. Through local, regional, national, and transnational links, multiple layers of coexistence create the complicated society which I have attempted to sketch above. While the Chinese population began unexpectedly and has grown to one of the largest and densest populations in Europe, Prato's government and local populace are still determining the best course of action. In Bertocchi's opinion, the Chinese are "perfectly inserted in that which is the reality of Prato...but seen through the eyes of the Pratese, it is a terrible crime...that has brought Prato to a crisis, absolutely mad."²⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the local population and the immigrants are left to contend with the historical implications projected into their current society:

[They]...encounter a sort of "mirror" effect (*cultural transfer*) where the people of Prato see in these tireless workers their own experiences of a few decades ago. This resemblance is repressed by virtue of a defensive attitude that oscillates

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Bertocchi, interview, 1 June 2009.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

between the sphere of the local identity (and its changes over time) and attitudes towards and misunderstanding of migrant identity.²⁸⁶

One key to beginning to understand the situation in Prato is to speak to the people living there.

Thus, in the next chapter, I will present some of my observations of the city made during my field research in Prato and recount some of the amazing stories from people kind enough to share their experiences and opinions. Prato is a “cross of other realities in all of Italy [and] in all of Europe,”²⁸⁷ and it presents a unique case of immigration and integration to understand possible future cases.

²⁸⁶ Bressan and Cambini, “The ‘Macrolotto 0’ as a Zone of Transition: Cultural Diversity and Public Spaces,” 155.

²⁸⁷ Toccafondi, interview, 3 June 2009.

Chapter 5: Prato and the People: Observations and Interviews²⁸⁸**First Impressions**

Munich, Germany. I disembark from the airplane and follow the horde of people moving towards customs. As I move steadily, I look around to get my bearings, and I am relieved to find signs in both German and English. Everywhere I look, there are subtle telltale indications, from the store displays down to the bathroom design, informing me that I am no longer in the United States. I pass customs easily and find my gate to Florence. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a Chinese man, in his thirties, of robust stature wearing jeans and a black polo embellished with ‘Armani Jeans Milano’ on the back. He clutches a burgundy Italian passport in his hand. To the left of me sits a young Chinese man in his twenties sporting a chic look complete with a reddish-brown mullet and messenger bag. I feel compelled to say hello, but the shy part of me screams “no!” while the logical part of me asks “which language?” Instead, I keep quiet and focus on enjoying the views of the Dolomite Mountains during my short flight into Italy. I gather my bags at the carousel and move towards the exit, but straight ahead I see that the man in the black polo has been stopped by airport security. The security guard questions the man about his passport, and as I skirt around him, I hear the man reply that he lives in Florence and works in a restaurant.

After checking into my apartment in Prato and unpacking, I venture out for food, deciding upon a little bar close by which offers outdoor seating. It is just after one, and people are returning home for the midday meal. I see Chinese couples and Italian couples pass by the bar, and the difference in their clothing, especially the women’s clothing, is extremely noticeable. While the Chinese women favor extremely form fitting clothes with discordant patterns and a lot of black, the Italian women seem much more coordinated in my Western-influenced opinion.

²⁸⁸ Please note that the names of the interviewees in this section have been changed to protect their privacy.

High school aged children begin to flow past me from another direction, and I see Italian, Chinese, and Pakistani students, all separated by ethnic background, clustered together as they speak in their respective languages. I notice that the young Chinese males are dressed in the same fashions as the twenty-something young man I saw at the gate in Munich, while the young Chinese females have subtly mixed Chinese and Italian fashions into their own unique style. Many of the Chinese, I notice, look over at me curiously when they pass, and later, I realize just how strange I must have looked to be dining at an upscale Italian bar.



Figure 12: Pakistani Youth Conversing in a Piazza



Figure 13: Italian Youth Conversing in a Piazza

Later on, around eight in the evening, I decide to walk about the city a little and get my bearings. It is still light out, but all the shops have begun to close down. Eventually, I find myself heading towards Via Pistoiese, and I begin to see several Chinese owned shops. I feel nervous and unsure of what to do, but I finally decide to walk into an empty shop and look around. At the counter by the door, there is a woman in her late 20s playing a game on a white laptop that is blasting Chinese pop music. The woman is dressed in a similar fashion to the other Chinese woman I have seen that day, with permed reddish brown hair, a white puffy jacket, snug Capri pants, and tall black heels. The interior of the shop is small but divided into two rooms with simple racks displaying men's and women's clothing, all imported from China. Seeing me poke around the clothes for a few minutes, the woman gets up and tries to sell me something,

which I politely refuse, saying that the clothes probably will not fit me. She gives me a look-over and says that I do not look like the other girls around here, who like to dress up. My clothes are more modest and “natural” looking. Am I new? I admit that I am a student recently arrived in town and comment that I had not seen her shop when I was last in Prato. The news does not surprise her. She says that they have been open for about a year, but it makes a decent business here because of the large number of Chinese around. According to her, there are more Chinese in Prato than in Pistoia, the neighboring province, and definitely more than in the United States. When the woman learns that I am from the United States, she invites me to stay and chat. Her five-year-old daughter runs in through the entrance, and I learn that her daughter’s name is Sabrina. It will be several more visits before I learn the woman’s name, since in Chinese culture, titles of courtesy, such as “Big Sister” and “Aunt,” are more appropriate.

For the remainder of our visit, the woman often makes comparisons between Europe and the United States. She thinks that possessing a US passport is the most amazing thing, for who would not want to live there? In her opinion, it is much harder to make money in Europe, unlike the United States where I must enjoy a pretty comfortable life. Still, she says that life in Europe is, naturally, much better than China, a place without jobs. She tells me that in China, her family status was not good, and she left school at eleven to work in the fields. When I remark that many Americans, including myself, come to Europe to study, she can not imagine why they would choose Italy – there is not much to do, and it is quite boring. At the same time, she is impressed that I have visited the notable cities, such as Milan, Venice, and Rome, as she has never been despite having lived in Italy for almost a decade. I explain a little about my background and research, and my language skills surprise her. She finds Italian almost impossible to understand; however the fact that Chinese language is offered at a university and that Westerners actually

want to learn it is even more interesting to her. Ruffling Sabrina's hair, she concludes that children often dream different dreams than their parents. The church bells toll eight forty-five, and the woman says that it is best that I make my way home. With so many Chinese people out here now, she tells me that I must be careful – this area is not safe. I bid goodnight and promise to visit soon. She will become my most constant friend during my time in Prato.

When I conceptualized this project, I imagined that I would become part historian and part anthropologist. Consequently, I tried to speak with as many people as I could in order to learn about their experiences and opinions; however, I also found that observations formed a crucial aspect of my research. In the following two sections, I gather together some of my observations and impressions of the city and the daily activities of the local populace. I also elaborate on how I began to form a network of contacts that I could interview and the research methodology that I chose to follow. Lastly, I include a selection of interviews that I conducted with the local populace sectioned into 'The Italians,' 'The Chinese,' and 'Outside Perspectives.' These are representatives of the 'everyday people' who must live among one another and contend with the tensions created by having two communities coexisting within a greater, multi-ethnic community. It is my hope that their experiences and opinions will illuminate what the scholars and community leaders that I interviewed could not.

Day-to-Day Life in Prato

Prato is not the most elegant of cities. While some parts are quite charming, with cobblestone streets and wrought iron balconies that overflow with flowers and vines, others areas are covered in graffiti, looking rather disheveled and run-down. Much of historic city center is filled with stately *palazzi*, tall rectangular buildings, painted with colors ranging from grayish-white to yellowish-orange and filled with row upon row of green shutters. Interspersed among

these are aged brick buildings and multi-colored stone churches. The most impressive of these is the Duomo, the main cathedral that dominates the heart of city center, and its large *piazza* in front which provides a gathering place for the community. The city center is, overall, a compact pentagon, but even when walking around this small area, it is easy to distinguish between the absolute heart of the city, where expensive boutiques advertise their wares, and areas nearer the city walls, where more and more shops run by immigrants appear. Besides the kabob shops and clothing stores along these outer fringes, there are also shops offering specialty services to the immigrants: money transfers, translation assistance, and international phone calls. Encircling all of this is an ancient city wall, and just outside of this is the River Bisenzio.



Figure 14: Piazza del Duomo



Figure 15: Piazza del Comune

Bars and cafes are interspersed throughout the city, and, on a warm Friday evening, crowds of people walk along the streets or chat in the *piazze*, often with a gelato in hand. Most striking to me is the coexistence of people from different ethnicities: Italian, Chinese, Pakistani, Moroccan, etc.; however, they do not interact much, if any, with people of another ethnicity. They sit on the same benches and steps, but never once do I see any form of greeting pass between them. This is most apparent in Piazza del Comune where Via Riascoli and Via Cesare

Guasti intersect in a bustle of people.²⁸⁹ Older residents gossip with one another or, if solitary, read the evening paper, while the young adolescents walk in packs in the streets or gather together to eat, speaking loudly with one another. Sometimes it is at the local pizzeria, but other times they may find themselves at one of those ubiquitous bars and cafes. Bars in Italy are not the bars that one thinks of in the United States. Tending to blend aspects of a fast-food restaurant and a café, a bar is a place to grab a quick espresso or brioche in the morning, or to have a lively gathering for aperitifs and appetizers before supper.

The Chinese, I find, prefer to frequent their own ethnic shops and restaurants close to or along Via Pistoiese and Via Fabbio Fizi, the two primary roads that constitute Prato's Chinatown. Many of the Chinese, especially new arrivals, live here, clustered along streets jam-packed with shops, supermarkets, and restaurants galore. The first time I drive through the streets, I discover that I had seen but a fraction of Chinatown the previous time I had visited, several months before. Although Prato is an average-sized city, it is small in comparison to Milan or Rome, and the addendum of Chinatown marks a strange territory where few Italians or their businesses and homes remain. In the heart of Chinatown is a little *piazza*/parking lot where many Chinese gather, and two methods of advertisement are readily available to attract a person in search for employment and lodgings. On the large wall to the right and along the corridor to the left, connecting Via Pistoiese to Via Fabbio Fizi, there are numerous colorful postings and advertisements. In the front window of “小林超市,”²⁹⁰ one of the supermarkets lining the *piazza*, I see four blue display screens simultaneously flashing announcements in yellow. A crowd of people is gathered around it copying down announcements and making phone calls.

²⁸⁹Via Cesare Guasti is a segment of the long road that leads into the city centre from Via Pistoiese in Chinatown, and a constant stream of Chinese are often seen passing in morning and night.

²⁹⁰“Little Forest Supermarket”

The stores and supermarkets in Chinatown are given some rather inventive names such as “好又多超市”²⁹¹ or “好日子超市.”²⁹² In my opinion, these reflect a hopeful mentality for the future of the Chinese.



Figure 16: 小林超市. Even when the store is closed, its display signs continuously flash announcements for the Chinese gathered around them.

Despite geographical divisions among people of different ethnicities, the outdoor markets draw everyone together. The largest market takes place each Monday in Piazza Mercato Nuovo, located just outside the city wall, behind the train station and university, by the banks of the River Bisenzio. It is easy to get lost among the rows and rows of stalls offering just about every

²⁹¹ “Good and Plentiful Supermarket”

²⁹² “Good Life Supermarket”

single product imaginable. Colorful fruits and vegetables and plump cheeses and sausages overflow the stalls in one corner. At one particular stall, I see that someone has translated the names of foods such as mozzarella and olives into Chinese characters. In another section, there are kitchen and household gadgets of every kind intermixed with clothing and accessories. Bargaining, I find, is a must. While some Italians sell clothing, almost all of the Chinese I see are involved with clothing, and the first time that I climb into the back of a van to try on an item of clothing, I feel slightly unnerved. Many of the fashions offered are quite similar, and after pushing past hordes of people moving every which way, it all begins to look the same. Within the noise, it is possible to pick out conversations being carried out in a variety of languages.



Figure 17: Pronto Moda at the Market. A selection of clothes from a stall.

My research period falls between May and June, and I realize that I am just in time for all of the commotion as different political parties campaign for the upcoming elections. The walls are plastered with posters championing changes such as a bigger voice for Italy within Europe

and better immigration controls. A television advertisement claims “*L’Europa è tua.*”²⁹³ Rallies and campaigns seek to elicit votes, and no person it seems is spared from being chased down with a flier – no Italian that is. Political activists do not chase me or any other person of foreign descent, and when I stop at their tables, no one tries to speak with me. I realize that unless I walk around with a sign proclaiming “*Americana*”²⁹⁴ hanging from my neck, everyone assumes that I am just like every other Chinese person. When I enter shops and restaurants, when I walk through the streets, I am a “*Cinese.*”²⁹⁵ Consequently, I find that entering establishments primarily frequented by Italians only elicits look of curiosity. Among the Chinese, I am instantly picked out as a newcomer; however, they feel comfortable enough to stop me and ask for directions or to engage in conversation with me. Among the non-Chinese, though, I find myself experiencing to a degree the subtle marginalization that the Chinese must experience on a daily basis. Most degrading are the calls of “*Cinese*” and “*Ni hao*”²⁹⁶ by Italian teenagers, howling with laughter as I walk past them. In one instance, two Pakistani immigrants mutter “*clandestini*” under their breath when I pass them in the street. Everyone is watching me just as much as I am watching them.

Creating a Network of Interviews

I am a naturally shy and introverted person; thus the prospect of being on my own and being forced to speak with strangers is simultaneously liberating and daunting. I find that my conceptions of trust and identity are redefined as I navigate through a foreign society without anyone with whom I can truly identify. Many of my contacts are formed by venturing into different establishments and building up a rapport over time, but others are through chance

²⁹³ “Europe is yours”

²⁹⁴ “American”

²⁹⁵ “Chinese”

²⁹⁶ Romanization of Chinese pronunciation for “Hello”

encounters at the market or on the trains. I discover that contacts are indispensable within Italian society, and as an unknown foreign student I must find or rather stumble upon people who will graciously provide this for me. For my interviews within the Prato community, I am indebted to Stephano,²⁹⁷ whose extensive contacts grant me meetings with both local experts on the subject and representatives from the local municipal government. For my interviews with academics and other hard-to-find people, Monash University serves as an invaluable resource. Monash is an Australian university with a campus in Prato, and just months prior to my arrival it published the first comprehensive study in English on Prato entitled *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato*. Administrative staff in Prato are able to place me in contact with the leaders of the project, Russel Smyth and Graeme Johansen, who provide a plethora of names and contact information.

Aside from formal channels of communication, I explore local religious institutions to see how they interact with the local populace. Catholic services at Santo Stefano, the Duomo, are conducted in Italian and attract a largely Italian congregation. The Mormon Church, which also performs services in Italian, has, in contrast, a community of members primarily from Albania and Africa. Speaking with the American missionaries, I learn that they use more English than Italian when inviting new attendees because many of the immigrants learned English as part of their educational curriculum in their home country. I also attend services at the Jehovah's Witness Church, located close to Chinatown. What I find most remarkable about this church is the fact that they attempt to reach out to the immigrant community through the use of their native languages. There are services conducted in Italian, French, English, Chinese, and a language they described as "Pakistani," and some Italian members of the church commit to learning a new language and attending services with the immigrants. Regular Chinese attendees

²⁹⁷ I will introduce Stephano below in one of the interview sketches.

tell me that the use of Chinese during services is one of the most attractive features. They also appreciate the opening and accepting attitudes of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who, in their opinion, are quite open compared with the other Italians around them.

Research Methodology

Through these various methods, I created a network of contacts during my research period from May 7, 2009 to June 3, 2009. While the majority of the academics and local leaders I spoke with were willing to sign written consent forms and allow me to use a digital voice recorder, many of the local populace either preferred to remain anonymous, were constrained by time, or were chance encounters. My initial methodology of choice with the local populace involved a three-page questionnaire followed by an optional one-on-one interview. I quickly realized that this was not realistic. It is not easy to generalize a diverse set of interviews, but I can say that the format of the interview I chose differed depending on the context, ranging from handwritten notes to written surveys to digital recorders and from written to verbal consent. My goal was to speak with as many people as I could in order to create the most complete picture possible; thus, I aimed to make the interviewee as comfortable and relaxed as possible. In total, I was able to administer fourteen questionnaires, conduct eight interviews with academics and community leaders, and conduct twenty-two interviews with the local populace. Sometimes, an overlap occurred between questionnaire and interview participants. From academic specialist to newly arrived immigrant, I had the opportunity to ask questions and to listen to my interviewees' experiences and opinions.

I arrived in Prato with a set of questions that I hoped to answer, but I discovered that the more I learned the more questions I developed. It turns out that there is no such thing as a simple answer, nor is there such a thing as a standard answer. Every person with whom I spoke had a

different story to tell, influenced by his/her personal history. It is impossible to study migration without considering the big-picture trends. However, without revealing the people and their stories behind migration, the greater themes in history are rendered meaningless. Below, I present some of these stories in the sections entitled 'The Italians,' 'The Chinese,' and 'Outside Perspectives.' While I tried to choose representative narratives that encompassed a range of experiences and perspectives, these were ultimately chosen because they figure most prominently in my mind when I think of my field research in Italy. I maintain consistent use of first-person point-of-view, and any sections in Italics are direct quotes taken during interviews.

The Italians

Luisa ^{298 299}

Luisa's tall lanky figure showcases a sporty outfit in white, accessorized with clunky silver jewelry and dark sunglasses atop her short curly brown hair. She appears before me as I wait on the steps of my apartment for my first driving tour of Prato. I met Luisa the year before I arrived in Prato, during my semester abroad in Italy, and as a native Pratese, she is very excited that I will be researching and writing about her province. At thirty-four, she is just beginning a bachelor's in Art History, while she works in an administrative position at an American study abroad program. Although she had wanted to attend university after graduating high school, her father died soon after, and there was no money for her to continue her education. Instead, Luisa went to work with a yarn distributor for ten years, witnessing the city undergo a dramatic transformation during the 1990s and early 2000s. According to her, working in the textiles industry was a very natural way of life for people in Prato, until recently, and many members of her family are "*still in the business.*"

For the first portion of our trip, we drive towards Chinatown. Luisa points to the numerous shops with signs written in Chinese characters and the many Chinese walking about on the streets. "*Vedi. Vedi.*" she says, "*Chinese everywhere...It's hard to find an Italian.*"³⁰⁰ She tells me that this place was once completely inhabited by Italians before the Chinese slowly moved in. It is true; I see just one or two Italians along the outer fringes of Chinatown as we drive further down the main street, Via Pistoiese. Luisa believes that it is difficult for the Italian police to keep track of what happens in Chinatown because they are unable to read or speak the language. "*If an Italian police knows English, è un miracolo,*" she says, meaning that if the

²⁹⁸ Luisa, interview by author, 7 May 2009, Prato, Italy, handwritten notes.

²⁹⁹ Luisa, interview by author, 9 May 2009, Prato, Italy, handwritten notes.

³⁰⁰ "Look"

Italian police can not even speak English, then Chinese is out of the question.³⁰¹ While these two streets constitute the largest Chinese settlement in Prato, Luisa tells me that there are similar but smaller ones across the city and in the outlying areas of the province, such as Montemurlo, Maretti, and Galciana.

As we turn towards Macrolotto Uno, the distribution point for *pronto moda*, we pass long, low, rust-colored buildings with iron gates and small windows. Luisa tells me that some of these warehouses are sweatshops where the Chinese live and work, but Italy also has strict labor laws regulating hours, sanitation, etc. Thus, the Chinese can not legally live and work in these conditions. In her opinion, the Chinese do not respect these laws in order to produce clothing at a faster rate, and, she says, “*a large part of the immigrants have become enslaved by their fellow immigrants.*” I interpret this to mean that the Chinese immigrants who came to Italy first and set up these subcontracting businesses now employ other, more recently arrived Chinese immigrants. Chinese tend to hire within their ethnic enclave, and while many recent Chinese immigrants are indebted to the people who help to bring them into the country, I would say that enslavement is a serious accusation to apply so generally.

Circling around Macrolotto Uno, Luisa notes that this area was almost completely Italian-owned ten years ago, but now these are mainly Chinese-owned firms. We see but one Italian firm among the numerous pre-engineered grey buildings. The Chinese, Luisa explains, have taken over *pronto moda* because they are willing to work “*day and night, day and night,*” without stopping for rest in order to complete a shipment. She tells me that little of the clothing available in Italian shops nowadays is made by Italians, but they have been outsourced to areas with cheaper labor such as Eastern Europe, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Clothes with a “Made in Italy” card, Luisa says, generally fall into two categories: high fashion by the Italians and *pronto*

³⁰¹ “it is a miracle”

moda by the Chinese. A comparison of production rates between the Italians and the Chinese is, according to her, “*like an elephant compared to a mouse.*” Thus, she believes that the Italians are elephants, heavy and slow, while the Chinese are mice, quick and nimble. This identification of the Chinese as industrious and speedy is a stereotype that I often hear applied to the ethnic community, but never in such a literary manner.

Despite the differences between the Italian and Chinese cultures, Luisa highlights that they have one thing in common – work. She corrects herself and emphasizes that it is the Pratese, that she speaks of, who have similar outlooks on life as the Chinese in the sense that both love to work and work becomes their life. This is a favorable generalization and point of commonality that she draws between the two communities, but I wonder if Luisa recognizes the fact that a large proportion of the Italians living in Prato today immigrated to the city in the years after World War II. We drive toward the city center, and as we leave the last of the metal buildings behind us, Luisa reflects on the current situation of Prato’s industrial districts. “*It’s impressive for me, since I used to work in this*” Luisa says, “*It’s hard to figure out you’re in Italy.*” Indeed, she remarks in closing, “*Italy didn’t use to be like this.*” To me, it sounds like a wistful and nostalgic observation on an industry that she was once a part of not so long ago.

Stephano ^{302 303}

Located in the heart of Prato, Stephano's bar is the perfect meeting place for people across the socioeconomic spectrum. Mothers with baby strollers, employees on break, and elderly men and women taking their morning stroll are among the many people who pass through the bar for an espresso, a pastry, some cigarettes, or just a bit of conversation. Behind the polished counter, in a crisp work shirt and apron, Stephano serves each of the customers with a wink and a smile. His graying dark brown hair and chiseled facial features reflect a man who has aged gracefully in his forty-nine years. Although it seems as though he enjoys what he does, running a business and dealing with customers is never easy. In the late 1960s, Stephano's family moved to Prato from a small regional mountain town in search of better economic opportunities, ultimately purchasing the present bar. While Stephano had trained and worked as a mechanic, his father died when Stephano was in his early twenties, leaving him, the eldest child, full responsibility over the bar. Stephano later tells me that he initially resented being kept indoors at work when all his friends had carefree lives; however, as he matured and started a family, he reconciled with this lifestyle which would provide a livelihood for his loved ones. For the last twenty-five years, Stephano and his sister Alisa have worked side by side to keep their family legacy in business.

A friend of Alisa's had suggested that I speak with them, and I agreed to try since they overhear and take part in many conversations each day, keeping tabs on the opinions of the local populace. Walking into the bar one sunny afternoon for a snack, I notice that it is completely empty of customers and take advantage of the opportunity to ask some questions. Alisa softens

³⁰² Stephano, interview by author, 27 May 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

³⁰³ Stephano, interview by author, 3 June 2009, Prato, Italy, handwritten notes.

instantly after hearing her friend's name, but she insists that Stephano would be a much better person to speak with about my topic. "*What do you want to know?*" he asks, motioning me to the only two stools in the establishment.

From what I had gathered in prior observations of the city, it is a popular belief among the Italians that the Chinese have taken away their work and their resources. However, the first idea that Stephano emphasizes in our interview is the fact that the Chinese community engage completely in *pronto moda*, something "*which the Italians [in Prato] never did a lot of... Therefore, it isn't that the Chinese community has robbed the work of the Italians.*" He explains that the reason the Chinese come to Italy to make the clothes, rather than staying in China, is so that they can attach the "Made in Italy" card, which carries connotations of quality and high fashion to the final product. This card and the low prices are what draw buyers from all over Europe, he says: "*They come to buy from Bulgaria, from Romania, from France, from Spain. They come to Prato to buy the clothes sewn by the Chinese, with the tag "Made in Italy" because they were made in Italy.*"

According to Stephano, the Chinese are able to lower production costs and prices "*thanks to the fact of the exploitation of labor*" and the fact that they do not pay taxes. He contrasts the working conditions between the Italians and the Chinese: A regular Italian worker works eight to ten hours a day, earning 2,000 Euros a month but paying 50% of it in taxes to support social welfare. A regular Chinese worker works twelve to thirteen hours a day for 2 Euros, eating and sleeping on the job in order to work longer hours and paying none of it in taxes. I do not know if Stephano is exaggerating to make a point, but in actuality, a regular workday in a Chinese workshop is sixteen to eighteen hours, though they do earn more than 2 Euros a day. Nonetheless, taxes and the Chinese are a topic of particular annoyance for the Italians, he says,

who are unhappy with the fact that the Chinese utilize the free health care and free schools without paying into the system.

I ask if the Chinese contribute overall to Prato's society and economy. One would think that the economic benefits outweigh the disadvantages, Stephano replies, but in reality, they have very little impact on the local economy. In his opinion, the laws on immigration are soft, and this allows the Chinese to come and set up a business in pursuance of everyone's quest – money. However, despite the fact that "*They work all over the world,*" he notes that "*The Chinese community is a closed community.*" Aside from spending on Italian-owned real estate and automobiles, Stephano claims that the Chinese prefer to spend within Chinese shops and supermarkets, observing that Chinese rarely come into his shop. Furthermore, he remarks that a good thing about the Chinese is that even though there are many acts of crime and violence among the Chinese, there are almost no criminal acts between the Chinese and the Italians.

For the rest of our acquaintance, Stephano serves as an invaluable reference. If I am to properly understand the situation in Prato, he says, I must have access to people who can give me different points of view. As a foreign student, however, I have no connections, so, using the name of his establishment, he makes numerous phone calls and asks for many favors on my behalf. Consequently, it is through him that I am able to interview several of the people who helped to contextualize Prato in the previous chapter. On my last day in Prato, Stephano finds out that I am twenty, not twenty-seven or twenty-eight as he had thought. "*Mamma mia,*" he says, "*you are a child.*" Not only has Stephano taken me under his wing, but that afternoon, he refers to me as his "*sister*" to one of his "*brothers,*" a Nigerian street vendor taking a cup of tea and a respite from the hot sun.

Gianna ^{304 305}

On my first day in Prato, walking about the city, I notice several large sidewalk signs announcing the day's headlines from various newspapers. When I walk closer to read more, I realize that these signs are advertising for the small newsstand behind them, and I enter to purchase a newspaper. The clerk behind the large counter, Gianna, is a middle-aged, heavysset woman. Her round glasses and frizzy hair give off a stern impression, but as I try to explain my search for the local Prato paper, she smiles and begins to suggest a few titles. I become a regular, coming each day to purchase a paper or two, exchanging "*Ciao*" and "*Grazie*" and a few Euros.³⁰⁶ Feeling particularly bold one day, I ask "*How are you?*," and Gianna is surprised, asking if I am learning Italian. From that day on, she begins to correct my Italian whenever we speak.

When I explain my research project to her, Gianna immediately shakes her head and comments, "*No, no, the Chinese are not integrated.*" From her perch behind the counter, she watches the Italians, Chinese, Pakistani, and Africans pass by, but she hardly ever sees Chinese interact with people of other ethnicities. Instead, the Chinese have their own streets, their own shops, and, most importantly, according to her, their own language. I am, she says, the first Chinese person who has ever come in to purchase a newspaper. She goes on to say that other Chinese should be "*good*" like me and try to learn the Italian language, read the news, and interact with other Italians. Gianna does not believe that Chinatown separates the Chinese from the Italians; rather she presumes that the Chinese choose this through their unwillingness to

³⁰⁴ Gianna, interview by author, 28 May 2009, Prato, Italy, questionnaire and handwritten notes.

³⁰⁵ Gianna, interview by author, 29 May 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

³⁰⁶ "Hello/Goodbye" and "Thank you"

speak the Italian language. Although she understands that Italian verb conjugation can be difficult, she argues that Chinese is also very difficult for the Italians to learn.

According to Gianna, members of all ethnic groups are equal, and how they carry themselves depends on the individual, not the ethnicity. Consequently, she believes that integration depends on the individual's willingness to communicate with the local citizens and to learn about their society:

It is important that [immigrants] respect our laws; however, they don't respect ours. When we go out, on a trip abroad, we need to respect [the other country's] laws...It is right that [immigrants] maintain their own culture, but that they also learn our culture...Because it isn't right that a country changes its culture [in response].

Gianna recalls how Italians left to work abroad, and while they adapted to life in a new environment, they were able to maintain their own culture and history. Italian immigrants, she emphasizes, followed the laws of their host country. She contrasts this with the Chinese here, who do not follow the laws, especially in tax payments, and therefore cost the community as a whole. The Italian government has permitted this, Gianna says, and the Italian system is broken. In her opinion, the immigration laws should not be loosened to allow more immigrants in, because more “*bad*” people will come in.

I surmise that Gianna is reflecting on how the Chinese have personally impacted her own life. She was born in a province outside of Prato, although her family roots are here in the province, and when she was three, her parents moved the family back. In the fifty-some years since, she has never traveled outside of Italy, nor has she ventured beyond Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, Tuscany's neighboring region. Gianna proudly stated that she has always worked a lot and traveled little. After she graduated primary school, Gianna went to work in Prato's

booming textile industry and used the money to help raise her family. Ten years ago she found herself without steady employment, forcing her to switch jobs midlife. She tells me that “*the Chinese work day and night,*” and the Italians simply cannot keep up.

Overall, Gianna remarks that immigrants have not assisted in Europe’s economic prosperity, nor do they form a part of European identity. When questioned about her personal take on European identity, Gianna struggles to define herself: “*I feel Italian...I don’t feel European...I know that I am a part of Europe, but...I don’t know...I feel Italian...[before]Europe, before everything, I feel Italian.*” Having remained in Italy for her entire life, Gianna does not feel any connection to greater Europe, but she believes that the younger generation, who enjoy moving around, might find themselves feeling more European. She tells me that the younger generation is no longer interested in their history, so perhaps the younger immigrant generation will slowly become habituated to life in Italy. Still the social fabric has changed through the years, Gianna laments, and in her opinion, the community is no longer united as it once was fifty years ago, when everyone waved to each other in the streets. Through the change in tone, I sense nostalgia for a past lifestyle which continues to change with the arrival of the immigrants. Gianna closes with this remark on modern society: “*For me, it is nice to interact with a person who speaks...on their experience...We are much colder, but also with the...Italians, not only with the immigrants.*”

The Chinese

Mr. Cai^{307 308}

It is mid-afternoon, and all the other shops in the area are closed for the midday meal. A Chinese woman with a baby stroller crosses the street in front of me, and I see her enter a shop. The shop is a translation service that I have passed by several times before but never entered. Since it seems to be open, I enter, taking in the large, barely furnished room. The woman, who I later find out is Mr. Cai's wife, is feeding her baby, and at the computer sits Mr. Cai. On subsequent visits, I often see him simultaneously speaking on the phone, typing into the computer, shuffling documents, and motioning a customer into the shop. Today at midday, however, there are no customers. At thirty, Mr. Cai is a rather robust-looking man with a square face and direct tone of voice. When I explain who I am and what I am doing, he says that he is always happy to help a student.

Mr. Cai's family arrived in Prato almost twenty years ago to join extended family who had come before them. At that time, he says, there were far fewer Chinese in the area, and relations with the Italians were much easier. When I calculate twenty years back, I realize that this would place Mr. Cai among the first Chinese who arrived in Prato, circa 1990. He was too young to work, so Mr. Cai was sent to school to learn Italian. His family expected him to help translate for them, he says, and to this day, his parents still cannot speak Italian. Although he learned the Italian language at school, he tells me that acquiring Italian culture was something that he had to do on his own, through self study. He made friends with both Italian and Chinese students at school, but there were still differences and prejudices between the two cultures that he had to figure out for himself. According to Mr. Cai, if he could not acculturate himself on the

³⁰⁷ Mr. Cai, interview by author, 18 May 2009, Prato, Italy, questionnaire and handwritten notes.

³⁰⁸ Mr. Cai, interview by author, 28 May 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

differences, then he fought it out with the other students and did quite well. However, on the whole, he believes that he had an easier time than some of the Chinese students today since he had lived in a city in China, Wenzhou, and was accustomed to city life while many of the recently arrived Chinese come from rural areas.

Upon graduation from high school, Mr. Cai worked in construction for a few years and then returned to China to start a business. When the business failed, he returned to Prato and offered his services as a translator. The language barrier, he tells me, is still a problem, and both communities still need translators to communicate with one another, especially within the realms of the legal system. Many of the Chinese, he says, sign away their rights without knowing what they are doing. While Mr. Cai was often asked to translate for the Italian government in the past, he tells me that he still has a stack of unpaid statements for his services. Today, he refuses to work before he has been paid, something that, in his opinion, the Italians are very difficult about and reluctant to do. Consequently, the majority of his clients are Chinese who request help in navigating Italian bureaucracy.

In Mr. Cai's opinion, the Italian government does not do enough to help the immigrants, and the first thing that it needs to do is to clarify its own position on the immigration situation: *"The main problem for Italy is that they do not have a clear-cut immigration law. Nor do they have a clear-cut immigration policy...There is no standard. The internal government cannot even govern themselves well."* According to him, thirty percent of the Prato government wants to help the immigrants, forty percent wants to get rid of the immigrants, and another thirty percent are confused about the whole situation. Furthermore, he is adamant about the fact that the Italian government should not constantly change a law due to popular opinion once it has passed one:

It is not that [the residents] cannot understand the laws, but [the Italian government] cannot understand the laws and know clearly what they are doing...Then they discuss a new law to abolish the old law, but all of the old laws have not even had time to be enacted. How can they abolish then? They themselves are conflicted. It is all in chaos.

In his opinion, the Italian government should change the immigration and citizenship laws to allow more documented immigrants into country. While he acknowledges that the Chinese are not culturally integrated into Prato's society today, he believes that the Chinese are still a crucial part of the local economy, and the government needs to find a way to accept that the Chinese are a part of Prato's identity.

When I ask him his view on the grander European identity and free movement, he says that this is a tricky situation, because it truly depends on *where* a person originates are from. He asks me if I mean someone from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, or Latin America? For Europe, it seems to him that someone from Eastern Europe would be a more obvious choice for inclusion than Asia or Africa. Although Mr. Cai is an Italian citizen now and considers Italy to be his home, he does not know where he will go in the future. He tells me that he still considers himself one hundred percent Chinese, not Italian, not European. Regardless, he firmly states that people are people and everyone has a responsibility to change and acclimate to the current situation. The Italians in Prato, he remarks, *"have all forgotten that they themselves are immigrants."* My last question on the future relations between the Chinese and Italians elicits this skeptical response: *"What I hope has no use. If everyone would use their brains more that would be enough, not just open their mouths and speak...Italy's conflict is forever [due to] popular made decisions."*

Zhouxuan ³⁰⁹

Through attending the Chinese language services at the Jehovah's Witness church, I meet Zhouxuan, a soft-spoken twenty year-old student. The first thing that I notice about her is her taste in clothes, more conservative and well coordinated in comparison to many of the Chinese females I have seen in Prato. As I become acquainted with her, I discover that Zhouxuan's experiences in Italy have also taken a slightly different path from other young girls her age. Four years ago, Zhouxuan immigrated to Italy with her mother and two siblings to join her father. She tells me that prior to coming, she believed that life in Europe would be much better than in China, but when she arrived, she found Prato to be the complete opposite of what she had imagined. The clothing workshop where her father worked at was extremely dirty, had long hours, and provided monotonous, low-skilled work. While Zhouxuan's mother joined her father at the workshop, living and eating there as well, Zhouxuan was left in charge of her siblings in their own apartment at just sixteen years of age.

All three siblings, Zhouxuan tells me, enrolled in a Chinese-run Italian language school, but at one hundred Euros per student per month, it was too costly for her parents. Zhouxuan then found another school for twenty Euros a year, but she remarks that there were only worksheets and no student-teacher interaction at all. Consequently, Zhouxuan had to rely on self-study to learn Italian, something that her parents expected her, as the eldest, to do in order to translate for them. When she graduated after two years with a middle school equivalency certificate, the staff at the school assisted her in finding a high school in Florence where she studies fashion design today, commuting each day to attend. Zhouxuan tells me that she feels lucky that her parents did not force her to end her education after attaining Italian proficiency as many other Chinese

³⁰⁹ Zhouxuan, interview by author, 31 May 2009, Prato, Italy, handwritten notes.

parents do. Other Chinese students, such as her sister, do not feel that they can catch up, so they drop out to work. The high school she attends is primarily Italian, and Zhouxuan notes that there are only three Chinese students attending. What I find most interesting is the fact that the other two Chinese students, both Italian-born, believe that China is far superior to Italy and plan to return one day even though they do not speak very much Chinese at all.

Church life has been instrumental in acclimating Zhouxuan to life in Italy. She tells me that she began attending two years ago, discovering that the Italians in the Chinese congregation are unlike the rest of the Italian society. In her opinion, not only are they making an effort to reach out to her by learning Chinese, but they choose to focus on building relationships between people of different ethnicities. When I asked her what she would like to do after graduation, she assuredly answers that she wants to stay in Italy permanently and find employment with an Italian firm. Chinese bosses in her opinion are too difficult to work with and require long, erratic hours. Furthermore, she tells me that she is already used to life here, and it would be difficult for her to adjust to the living standards in China or to find employment there. Zhouxuan also wants to become an Italian citizen – not because she feels Italian, she says, but because life would be so much easier without having to worry about applying for residence permits every year from a terrible bureaucracy. I note that she can then move freely around Europe and live wherever she would like if she attains citizenship. While Zhouxuan admits that she would like to travel through Europe and better understand her surroundings, she is reluctant to move elsewhere unless the official language is Italian. As she explains, it took her so long to acculturate herself to Italy that she dreads undergoing the same processes and pressures again.

I ask Zhouxuan what her views are towards the tension between the Italians and the Chinese in Prato, and she readily explains her conclusions formulated after spending several

years in Prato. First, Italians do not like to make contact with the Chinese, so the Chinese wonder why they, knowing less Italian, should be ones to initiate conversation. Second, the Chinese create their own opportunities for work and social activities, negating the need to interact with Italians. Third, there are just far too many Chinese for the Italians to handle, and they are dirty, uneducated, and do not have time to study the language. Even some of the Chinese are embarrassed for, and ashamed of, other Chinese who cause this, she says. For the most part, Zhouxuan believes that the Chinese are good people from rural areas who are unused to urban life in Europe. If they have the pressure and drive to diligently work and study, then life for them, she says, will improve. Chinatown, however, in her view, makes it too convenient for the Chinese to escape. She is convinced that if there was no easy way out, then the Chinese would be forced to learn Italian and become better integrated into society.

Fiona ^{310 311}

I am standing just within the city walls leading out to Via Pistoiese, and everywhere I turn, I see a Chinese-owned clothing shop. Entering one of the shops, I notice the white walls starkly accented in purple and black and clothes selectively hung on racks or piled on shelves suspended from the ceiling. A remarkably beautiful Chinese woman in her late twenties rises from behind the counter and greets me with a sweet smile, asking if I would like to look at anything. I begin a conversation with her, and her interest piques when I explain that I am an American here to research about the Chinese in Prato. She introduces herself as Fiona and agrees to help me as there is not much else to do this time of the year. In the following weeks, we become friends through our interviews, and I discover that she can talk a mile-a-minute.

From the outset, Fiona tells me that her experience is not typical of the majority of the Chinese that I will encounter in Prato. Whereas most of the Chinese are from rural areas in China with family connections in Italy, she came from the city, without any prior networks in place. Fiona explains that when she graduated high school, her grades were not sufficient for university, so she went to work as a salesperson at Adidas. Her parents, she tells me, did not think that this was good enough for their only child, and they became convinced that she had to try her luck in another country. Although they considered America, they knew that the trip would be long and dangerous, whereas Italy was both convenient, as she could travel by plane rather than boat, and easy to enter. Furthermore, she had heard that she could gain legal status through an amnesty which would take place every couple of years. By her estimation, the last one “should” have been in 2006. Fiona confides that she did not want to leave for Italy, but her

³¹⁰ Fiona, interview by author, 16 May 2009, Prato, Italy, questionnaire and handwritten notes.

³¹¹ Fiona, interview by author, 19 May 2009, Prato, Italy, handwritten notes.

parents insisted. Her father, she says, also decided to immigrate with her, as he could not bear the thought of her alone in a foreign country, and they came to Italy almost five years ago.

Fiona tells me that, prior to arriving in Prato, she worked in a workshop close to Milan and at a bar in Rome – that was where she learned Italian. However, she decided to come to Prato to join a friend, assured that work would be plentiful due to the large Chinese presence. She recalls that she was shocked at the living and working conditions in Prato, truly understanding how difficult life could be in Italy. The workshop that she had worked in close to Milan had been Italian-owned, and even though the Chinese there worked longer hours than the Italians, there was a midday break and a focus on quality over quantity. In contrast, she says that the standard working time in Prato is somewhere between sixteen to eighteen hours a day, often from three in the morning to seven at night, or thereabouts, and this, she continually emphasizes, is already much better than before. During rush time, some people have to work as long as twenty-five to thirty hours. Such conditions, she explains, are why, although illegal, people live in the workshops, as it is not practical to live separately. There is hardly ever time to go outside of the workshop, and Fiona recalls that it would sometimes be half a year before she took more than a few steps from the workshop doors. Later, she takes me to visit a workshop.

Due to the stress, Fiona tells me that she quit her job a few months ago in order to rest and regain her health. She does not go into much detail, but she does say that she lives with her father in a small apartment and spends her days either in her friend's shop helping out or entertaining herself with other unemployed friends. When I ask if she feels lucky that her father is here with her, she replies that even though she entreats him to return, he refuses to leave her here. Fiona's mother still lives in China, and without husband or daughter, Fiona tells me that she is quite lonely. Still, she says that her mother is already suggesting that if Fiona does not

find success in Prato, she should try the United States. As Fiona has said before, she is not eager to go to the United States, nor does she want to stay in Italy and become a citizen. When she was in China, she recalls thinking that even the moon must be brighter and rounder in the West, but she does not believe in this anymore. Life in the West, she says, has not lived up to her expectations. Even if she were to raise a family here, Fiona believes that she will first send her children to China to be brought up by family members and to learn about Chinese culture and language before bringing them back to learn Italian. This is a common practice among Chinese immigrant parents who do not have the time or resources to care for young children. Many of the younger generation, she notes, will grow up a little confused about their identity.

In the meantime, Fiona's greatest aspiration is to master the Italian language. She tells me that she wants to make something of herself and earn plenty of money before returning to China. Fiona finds that there are still many cultural differences between hers and Italian society. While she claims that she has adapted in some ways, she believes that a fundamental difference between the Chinese and the Italians lies in their work ethic. In her opinion, the Chinese are eager and faster to work, while the Italians want to work less for more pay and have little respect for planning and economy. Fiona cannot understand why Italians would work all year only to spend all of their savings on a beach vacation in August. Preserving cultural traditions and language, she observes, is important to both sides, and if the Italians and the Chinese could communicate with one another, many of the misconceptions between them would not be as severe. On my last day in Prato, I present Fiona with a book for Chinese-speakers learning Italian. She is pleased with the gift and promises to study hard and master the language.

*Workshop Visit with Fiona*³¹²

One warm, sunny afternoon, Fiona and I leave the store to visit her friend at a workshop. The purpose of this visit, Fiona tells me, is to shock me with the conditions under which the Chinese must live and work. As we walk, Fiona slips her arm in the crook of mine, and this is pleasantly surprising to me as walking arm-in-arm is a sign of friendship among Chinese females. Walking along Via Pistoiese, Fiona comments how just a few years ago many of these shops and restaurants did not exist. Towards the end of the dense profusion of shops, we turn left onto a mostly deserted side street. We stop in front of a rusty metal door, and through some cracked and broken glass I can see some light and movement inside. A black curtain bars my view, although it cannot block the definite whirring sounds from within. Fiona's friend sticks his head out the door and motions us inside.



Figure 18: Entrance to a Workshop. Workshops are interspersed throughout the province, sometimes even on more populated streets such as this one. The Audi belongs to one of the bosses who I witnessed exiting the workshop with colorful sundresses.

³¹² Fiona, interview by author, 22 May 2009, Prato, Italy, handwritten notes.

I duck under the curtain and find myself in a dark, shadowy room. To the side, I see many drying racks overflowing with hand-washed laundry. Florescent light spills out of a large doorway, and passing through it, I am now in a very large, but stuffy room. A small rotating fan is placed in the far corner, but it does little to alleviate the stifling temperature. There are three long rows formed by tables pushed together and linked by cardboard or plastic mats to prevent things from falling through the cracks. Multiple sergers³¹³ and sewing machines are placed on these tables. Scattered everywhere are large worn cardboard boxes overflowing with pre-cut pieces of cloth and scraps of paper patterns. Piles and piles of cloth are also visible on the tables, the chairs, and the floors, with one side of the room in red pieces, and the other in black. In another corner, a tall metal rack stands, filled with large spools of thread in every imaginable color. All of this is lighted by large, low fluorescent lights suspended by wires strung through the exposed beams high above. In fact, there are loose wires strung every which way to connect all of the machinery, definitely not according to safety regulations. Visible dust particles float about the room with no escape, as the only windows are high above in the rafters. Without accessible windows, I remark that it must be difficult to tell time. Fiona agrees, saying that time was essentially flipped when she was living and working in the workshop, and she could not distinguish between night and day. While the workshops used to operate during the night in order to mesh with shipping schedules, stricter governmental regulations have ensured that most people work during the daytime.

Fiona sits and visits awhile with her friend, and I have the chance to observe some more. A little girl rides her tricycle in the open space, while an older, pre-adolescent boy takes a turn at sewing a shirt. These are the bosses' children. To my surprise, I learn that the bosses and their family live and work in the workshop as well. There are eight people working the sewing

³¹³ A specialized machine that overcasts or binds raw fabric edges with V-shaped stitches to prevent unraveling.

machines: three women and five men, and they are all seated on extremely well-cushioned chairs. Their motions are mechanical and calculated. Even though the noise is consistent and loud, many of the workers are either listening to music, talking to each other, or on their cell phones. Some of them are smoking, only adding to the mugginess of the room. I ask if these people knew each other before they came to the workshop. No, Fiona replies, most do not, but workshops do prefer to hire people as couples or in pairs. According to her, this is efficient because two can split up and streamline the work, and they also have someone to talk to.

After a while, Fiona asks if I would like to go upstairs and see where the workers live. The upstairs, I see, is constructed by a wooden frame with roughly finished walls. In the corner of the room, we ascend a steep set of rickety wooden stairs, and, at the top, I look down a long dark tunnel. Fiona's friend's room is one of the first ones, and, when we enter, I notice that the makeshift walls leave large gaps at the top between the adjoining rooms. The room is just large enough to hold a queen-sized bed, with an assortment of furniture jammed in around it. Personal items are scattered about the room, and I see that string intertwined into the exposed beams creates a place for hangers. I can feel the floor vibrate beneath my feet, and every sound from below is clearly heard. Fiona says that when she just arrived in the factories, she could not believe her circumstances: "*This simply was not my life.*" She remarks that nowadays, at the very least, each person generally has his/her own room. I notice a shiny laptop sitting on the bed, and Fiona tells me that it is quite common for workers to have one nowadays to communicate with home, read the news, watch television, etc.

We wait for Fiona's friend to finish work, but after a long while, he informs us that he still needs another two hours and will not be able to speak with me. When Fiona's friend opens the front door to let us out, the extra light allows me a better look at the space surrounding the

entryway. Opposite the drying laundry, there is a small, enclosed makeshift kitchen, two large round tables for eating, and a separate room with several mattresses on the floor. Nothing, in my opinion, looks very sanitary. We bid her friend goodbye, and turn back onto Via Pistoiese. As we pass people on the sidewalks, I ask Fiona what these people do if they are not working. Most, she tells me, are students, unemployed, or bosses on business; however, come August, when the entire country is on holiday, the streets of Chinatown will be filled with Chinese as far as the eye can see.

Outside Perspectives

*Hanna and Matthias*³¹⁴

The market is overcrowded, and I make my way to the edges of the piazza. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice a display written in Chinese, and intrigued, I come closer to peruse the titles. A blonde woman approaches me and begins to speak to me in heavily accented Chinese, leaving me in shock. All of the Italians that I have met thus far have difficulty speaking in English, let alone Chinese. The blonde woman is conducting community outreach for the local Jehovah's Witness church, and she introduces me to an older woman, Hanna, who, to my surprise, speaks even more fluent Chinese. When I attend church with them that Sunday with the Chinese language congregation, Hanna and her husband Matthias offer to answer any questions I may have about their experience with the Chinese community.

I discover that Hanna and Matthias are German missionaries who use their knowledge of Chinese, English, and Italian to work among the Prato community and bring followers to God. In particular, they are affiliated with the church's Chinese language congregation. This is one of five different language congregations that hold service every Sunday, and it includes both ethnic Chinese and Italians who know Chinese. Both Hanna, who always has two pairs of glasses on her head, and Matthias, whose serious demeanor hides his sense of humor, are incredibly welcoming towards me. Hanna and Matthias grew up in rural communities in Germany, becoming acquainted with the Jehovah's Witness church only after they moved to the larger cities for study and work. Both became increasingly involved in ministry and began to learn Chinese from ethnic Chinese in their congregation. Several years after marrying late in life,

³¹⁴ Hanna and Matthias, interview by author, 2 June 2009, Prato, Italy, digital recording.

Hanna and Matthias decided to become full-time missionaries, and they were sent to Italy to work among Prato's immigrant Chinese population almost three years ago. Having traveled across the province for their work, they feel that they are able to give me a comprehensive view of the Chinese situation in Prato. I see this as a good opportunity to learn how foreigners, without ethnic ties to either community in question, view Prato.

Hanna and Matthias explain that they had been to Italy many times before, and when they arrived, “[they] expected a normal Italian city with Italian culture, with good food, good weather. The things Italy is famous for in Germany. But Prato is not Italy. No, this is the city [for] making industry. It is not really Italy.” Hanna also remarks that, in her experience, the Pratese are not particularly friendly towards foreigners: “When you go in other city, it's more friendly, the person are more friendly. So Prato is the problem.” Furthermore, she recounts how Italians will approach them when they are working among the Chinese and ask “Why do you speak with these people? [They are] Like animals.” However, Matthias and Hanna believe that while the Chinese in Germany are highly educated and open-minded, many of the Chinese in Prato are “closed” off, “greedy,” and focused on earning money, making it difficult for Hanna and Matthias to relate with the Chinese. According to Hanna, “Sometime their way of thinking is like little children. They do not want to look at the outside, only them, here and now...the Euro satisfies them.” Yet, for both of them, the Italians are just as insular as the Chinese and “Only listen to what Berlusconi says about politic[s], and that is enough...[They] don't have an open mind.” The Italian mentality, Hanna despairs, is to think that Italians are better than everyone else and to lump all of the Chinese together into one indistinguishable group. I wonder if they understand that they have their own misconceptions about the Italians and the Chinese as well.

The difference between Prato city center and the surrounding regions in the province, according to Hanna and Matthias, is the immense pressure of the large and growing Chinese population. They believe that it is easier for the Italians to accept a few immigrants who try to establish relationships with the local citizens, but when the immigrants, in this case the Chinese, claim several streets for themselves, it becomes a serious issue. However, Matthias explains that the Chinese are also being exploited by the Italian police, and “*if people are not relying [on] the police, or [on] the government...who is encouraged to follow the law?*” Many of the factories employ undocumented workers, and Hanna tells me that policemen and other Italian companies continually extort money from the Chinese to prevent them from reporting the workshops to the authorities. In fact, for Matthias, when police do close down the factories and make arrests, it seems more like a publicity stunt to show that the government is in control. Consequently, there is a high level of distrust of Italians among the Chinese, and Matthias and Hanna find that when they attempt to speak with the Chinese “*Not being Italian helped [them]*” make connections.

Although the EU seeks to influence its member countries both in policy and ideology, Hanna and Matthias find it is not the case in Italy. When I ask about their opinion on the possibility of an EU identity, Matthias responds:

If it could be done, for sure it would be good. But...to me it seems impossible...because people, and even the governments, continue thinking in their own ways...their old barriers in terms of culture, their way of thinking, and so on [remain]. For me, a European citizenship...it's not visible...even an Italian identity is, most of the times, not visible. If there is...a soccer match, then they are all together. But the rest of the time people are not Italians. They are from Tuscany, from Sicily, from Rome, from Lombardia. So [people] from the North don't like these people from the South, and therefore [they have] very bad words to call them. And that's the same with South. And the South they have a bad word for those from the North...So even an Italian identity, most of the times, is not there. It's much harder to get an European identity in place.

For example, as foreigners themselves, they ran into complications with permits of stay, and Matthias recounts that “*The policeman in the office told us very clearly [you] are here in Italy, and we are doing it our way...this is [the Italian] way of thinking.*” Or, as Hanna adds in, “*in Italy, to act according to the law is really very complicated...They do not clearly tell you the law because they themselves are not clear about the law.*” Both think that Italy could stand to look at Germany as an example and embrace its strict immigration laws, which would prevent many serious problems from arising and control immigrant pressure on the welfare system. It seems to me that Hanna and Matthias believe that they, as Germans, are above this issue. Ultimately, though, Hanna and Matthias believe that the tensions and problems arising from the Chinese presence in Prato can only be solved through reliance on God and the use of scripturally based teachings.

*Group of Chinese Men in Florence*³¹⁵

Through my connections at Monash University's Prato Campus, I contact Mr. Shih, who first immigrated to the Netherlands from Zhejiang before moving to Italy in the 1990s. Today, he runs a Chinese-language school in cooperation with the Florentine Government. When I meet him for our interview, he takes me to visit his office and insists that I stay for lunch. Although he did not tell me ahead of time, he has also invited several leading men from the Florentine Chinese community to speak with me, and after a veritable feast, I find myself in willing company, who are eager to share their opinions. The two most vocal men also happen to be the ones who have lived in Italy the longest. One man arrived in 1970 and now runs a travel agency, while another man, with an advanced degree in Chemistry, arrived in 1992 after the Tiananmen incident and now works as a consultant for Sino-Italian trade. Together, these men represent a wealth of experience as well as a different Chinese voice, slightly removed from the Pratese Chinese community and with their own agenda. The opinions expressed below are a compilation of the answers I received during our conversation.

Throughout my time with them, these men consistently state that the Italian officials have evaded their full responsibilities. The men try to live according to the law – bringing justice to those who have done wrong, but also praising those who have done right. In their opinion, the Italians cannot think beyond the illegal status of many of the Chinese, turning a blind eye to the issue so long as the Chinese do not infringe upon their communities. However, this is not right, according to them, because the Chinese are also human beings, and, on Italian soil, the Chinese become the responsibility of the Italian government. While they acknowledge that the Chinese government is to blame for allowing so many Chinese to leave on tourist visas, they believe that

³¹⁵ Group of Chinese Men in Florence, interview by author, 2 June 2009, Florence, Italy, digital recording.

there is no mutual responsibility over this issue; that it is solely the responsibility of the Italian government. To me, this seems a very simple, unyielding conclusion to say that all of the problems stem from a lack of proper governance. Still, I find it very interesting, since this insistence on the need for law and governance in Italy is voiced by members of the immigrant Chinese community. The men also express their frustration over the fact that when the government does discuss the Chinese in Italy, it is only to use them as pawns: political parties capitalize on the Chinese presence, and policemen exploit the Chinese as a dependable demonstration of “enforcement.”

As law-abiding members of the overseas Chinese community, the men voice disappointment over the fact that many illegal Chinese migrants reside in Italy. What is the point of living according to the law if the other Chinese migrants can enjoy the same right of living in Italy without paying their dues? They believe that this has created an inequality within the Chinese community between the law-abiding and non law-abiding residents. Furthermore, they are frustrated with the newer immigrants, who they feel perpetuate negative stereotypes. Many Chinese, they tell me, have come to Europe to escape a bitter, hard life in China, yet they continue living similar lives, like mice, hidden away in dark corners. Such a life, they say, has no meaning, and in order to experience the rights of democracy, these non law-abiding residents need to honor their responsibilities. Still, they understand that, unlike themselves who have decided to make Italy their permanent home, many of the Chinese in Prato have no intention of staying. The idea of foreign-born people becoming naturalized into another society is difficult for the Chinese in Prato to relate to. As the men phrase it, the Chinese remit their wealth to China, ignoring any thought of Italy’s economic well-being, because they do not believe that the Italian government will give them anything. The men tell me that the influx of new Chinese

affects the politics, the laws, and the infrastructure for everyone – including long-residing residents as themselves – but the new Chinese are harming themselves most of all. Without health care, pensions, or regulations, the Chinese, they say, are working themselves to death, and the Italian government does not care at all.

With only thirty kilometers between them, these men believe that the issues of the Pratese Chinese community become the issues of the Florentine Chinese community. They tell me that there are simply not enough older migrants to share their knowledge and wisdom with the newer migrants. When the consultant arrived in 1992, an older immigrant who had migrated to Europe in 1959 gave him three pieces of advice: buy a ticket for the bus, do not spit on the ground but use a handkerchief, and do not speak loudly when eating. The consultant sincerely believes that the advice given by the older man facilitated his understanding of the basic societal rules in Italy. These men tell me that they feel as though they are back in China when they visit Prato's Chinatown: it is disorder and chaos. The Italians in Prato, they say, do not want a gathering of Chinese, but these men believe that the local government did not take preventive measures to separate them, unlike in Florence. While they acknowledge that it might not have been right for the Florentine government to enforce a separation, they are grateful that it did happen, forcing the Florentine Chinese to meet other people and to learn some Italian. In the end, they clarify their position, saying that while these are their opinions, the overseas Chinese in Prato will definitely disagree with their statements and claim that the living situation in Prato is "normal." The men are implying that such living standards are acceptable only in Prato, among people who do not plan to stay for long.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Interconnected Themes

What happens when different cultures overlap? In the previous chapters I explored one particular intersection between the Chinese and the Italians in Prato, but intersections such as these happen on a daily basis across the world. We often concentrate on the migrants' experiences and how they do or do not integrate into the host society; however, the migrants are not the only ones who must reassess their cultural identity when cultures overlap. The members of the local community must also determine the impact of accommodating and integrating the newcomers into their own cultural identity. Identity is dynamic and multilayered, molded through life experiences. Pride in one's own cultural identity is an important aspect of self-awareness, but, while overlaps tend to highlight differences rather than similarities, they also force people to reassess themselves within the current context. Globalization and modern technology has brought world regions closer together, and the greater ease in the movement of people serves as a reminder that boundaries and identities are fluid, not static.

Migration lies at the core of the European Union's quest to create a pan-European identity. Instead of having people refer to themselves as French or German, EU officials hope that, one day, people will eliminate national boundaries and call themselves "European." Contrast with the "other" has always served as a catalyst for self-identification, and the EU's policies for free movement, facilitating intentional cultural overlap, have created and shaped a particular experience. In the past, national identity was formed as much abroad, through colonialism and immigration, as it was at home, with its state-building efforts. Today, migrants within Europe provide exposure to the "other," and its policies have also prompted non-European migrants to enter. While such movement has encouraged new intersections of people, a new question to consider is whether or not the influx of migrants affects the elite EU concept of

identity and how this translates to the populace below. Many of the citizens in Europe do not believe that a pan-European identity is a realistic or immediate possibility. Both Gianna, who has never traveled far, and Hanna and Matthias, who have traveled extensively, identify themselves with nation over Europe as a whole.

At the root of many cultures is a shared, common language that facilitates communication among members within the same group. Language is a basic source of tension and misunderstanding, and it was cited in every interview that I conducted. Aside from being a Chinese-American in Italy, my distinguishing trait for both the Chinese and the Italians was the fact that I speak Italian. Many of the Chinese I interviewed recognize the importance of learning Italian, but they find it too difficult to devote a significant amount of time towards it. They wish that the Italians could understand that after working 16-18 hour days, they barely have enough time to eat and sleep, let alone to venture out and practice speaking a foreign language with someone who may or may not be receptive. Even after ten years in Italy, some of the Chinese I met still cannot speak more than a few necessary phrases. The Italians have difficulty with this fact since the Chinese are in Italy after all – should they, the Italians, be the ones to learn Chinese? Many of the misunderstandings could be clarified and put into perspective if the respective sides could communicate with one another. As Mr. Cai and others stated, both the Chinese and the Italians have a mutual responsibility to understand the other's culture. People have the capability to shape their experience through their actions.

When I spoke to people in Prato about Sino-Italian interactions, each of the respondents took a side – they were either Chinese or Italian. What does being “Chinese” or “Italian” mean? A national identity is just as fluid as a supranational European identity. While people from both ethnic groups speak a standard national language, this was the language of a small minority

imposed upon the majority to unify scattered areas. The nations as we visualize them today only formed in recent times. Each country still has distinct provinces with their own dialects, foods, and customs. Should the Chinese or Italians ask among themselves where they are from, they will rarely say Italy or China but Lombardy or Tuscany, Zhejiang or Fujian. In one questionnaire, a university student did not check “Italian” as his identity but wrote in “Pratese.” Both groups have insular views. While the Chinese and Italians have migrated across the world, many of them still maintain the idea that their culture, their language, and their food are the best in the world. The majority of the Chinese that I interviewed understand that, as guests in a foreign nation, they need to respect Italy’s laws and customs, but while they see some value in the Western way of living, they still prefer their own. Their “own” way refers to a regional preference within a collective national generalization.

Despite aspirations for a new and better future, many interviewees could not help but express nostalgic sentiments for an idealized past. The reality is that there are two culturally different groups in Prato who hold similar, though varied, ideals and values for the future. The social fabric of today, like identity and migration, is constantly morphing in response to various pressures and challenges. Prato is a living, breathing laboratory for a cross-section of EU tensions although it retains particular defining characteristics. The ultimate question remains: have the groups transformed as a result of this new conjecture or are they still acting within their historically predetermined patterns? As a pressure-cooker of ethnic tension, the heightened cultural awareness within Prato entails a reassessment of perceptions and trust towards different groups. The intersection of Chinese and Italians has enforced self-identification and self-segregation, but there is no way that they can fully divorce themselves from the other. Daily life

processes intertwine people together, and despite any wishes or hopes to the contrary, the Chinese remain a constant presence with Pratese society.

I arrived in Prato with a set of questions, but, I can honestly say that I was not anticipating any particular answer. My goal was to learn about the people and how they viewed themselves within this context. I was not disappointed, but I also realized that my own identity affected both the answers I received and how I processed these answers. As a Chinese-American, the Chinese I interviewed could relate to me as an ethnic compatriot, while the Italians I interviewed appreciated my willingness to try and communicate with them on their terms, in their language. As a second-generation immigrant who has spent a lifetime balancing between East and West, I can sympathize with both groups' positions, but as an outsider to this particular situation, I maintained a level of objectivity which eludes them. I do not have a proposed solution to resolve or ameliorate the tensions within Prato, but I believe that consideration towards one another through effective communication remains a vital way for the Chinese and Italians to begin resolving these tensions. Furthermore, I believe that a productive exchange requires discernment through an appropriate context, and for Prato, this has been achieved through an explicit look at the historical migration patterns that influenced the people I interviewed. Despite different linguistic and cultural traditions, I hope that by sharing the personal stories and opinions of the people I met, it will allow readers to attain a greater understanding of one another and find points of commonality between their experiences.

Epilogue

What we can't do is try to seal off parts of our lives. We can't say "This part is personal," and deny that it has any political significance. We can't say "That part is political," and thereby suppose it's immune from the call to discipleship.

...

These are supposed to be political questions but issues are only generalizations about people. The political is intensely personal, when we really allow ourselves to see it.

- Reverend Dr. Samuel Wells³¹⁶

Fifteen months after mailing letters of introduction to potential thesis advisors, my journey of self-discovery reaches a moment of rest. The intellectual and personal reasons that inspired me to embark on this journey intertwined with one another long before I was consciously aware of it, and they have pushed me forward throughout the year. I knew that writing a thesis would not be an easy process. After my experiences in Italy last summer, I faced an ever greater challenge, to put me and my research back together. Without a road map, or any inclination of the right path, I needed to find a way to come to terms with my past in order to face the future. I have been able to do so through the support of my friends, my growing faith in God, and in writing this thesis.

On Palm Sunday, I sat in Duke Chapel half listening to the sermon, my mind preoccupied with upcoming deadlines for the thesis. In honor of Holy Week, Dean Wells was preaching about the Passion Story, entreating us to use Holy Week as an example of how we should live throughout the year. Just as a life of discipleship means seeking a Christ-centered life each day, our personal lives are reflected in greater political issues. Dean Wells caught my attention when he said "What we can't do is to try to seal off parts of our lives...issues are only generalizations about people." Reflecting on the sermon afterward, I realized that he had succinctly stated my year-long quest for understanding. I wanted to tell stories of real people in order to give a face

³¹⁶ Samuel Wells, "The Personal is the Political (Matthew 26.14-27.66)," (Sermon, Duke University Chapel, Durham, NC, 28 March 2010).

and a voice to the political issues that they had influenced. In spending time with them and studying their lives, I had become a part of their story, as they had become a part of mine. The thesis-writing process has provided me with the opportunity to recognize my intellectual and physical capabilities and to come to terms with my own experiences. “The political is intensely personal,” and this year has been a symbiotic journey in challenging, reconciling, and healing the fragments of my life and my research.

For the first time in a long, long while, I am at a good, healthy place. Challenged to integrate multiple cultural experiences alongside my own, I have grown tremendously in the process. The people and experiences I encountered this year have allowed me to discover self-confidence in my own abilities and faith in God’s greater plan.

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