STUDI E SAGGI

– 124 –

FLORIENTALIA
Asian Studies Series – University of Florence

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Valentina Pedone, *A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy*
Ikuko Sagiyama, Valentina Pedone (edited by), *Perspectives on East Asia*

Valentina Pedone

A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy

firenze university press
2013

A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy / Valentina Pedone. – Firenze : Firenze University Press, 2013.
(Studi e saggi ; 124)

http://digital.casalini.it/9788866554622

ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print)
ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online)

Cover desing: Alberto Pizarro Fernández, Pagina Maestra snc
Front cover photo: © Baoyan | Dreamstime.com

Peer Review Process
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Università degli Studi di Firenze
Firenze University Press
Borgo Albizi, 28, 50122 Firenze, Italy
http://www.fupress.com/
Printed in Italy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Valentina Pedone, *A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy*,
ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print) ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online) © 2013 Firenze University Press

PREFACE

This volume briefly presents the results of a number of studies about Chinese migration to Italy that I carried out between 2003 and 2013. In this span of time I had the chance to get an insight on Chinese migration to Italy and its evolution, not only by participating in several research projects (both academic and institutional) on the topic, but also by working as a cultural and linguistic mediator for Chinese families in public schools, hospitals, social services and so on in the city of Rome. What I hope to do with this book is to share some of the dialogues and ideas that I uncovered during these years and to present a few of the findings from the research projects I participated in.

Data discussed in the different chapters were mostly collected through ethnographic fieldwork, taking advantage of the most common tools used in this field, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Observations were carried out both in sites of migration in Italy and in sites of emigration in China. Interviews and questionnaires were often conducted in Chinese with first generation migrants and in Italian with their children.

Besides the chapters devoted to the discussion of data gathered from fieldwork (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5), an introductory chapter based on the scientific literature is offered (Chapter 1) in order to provide the reader with a basic background about the characteristics of a migration flow that has lasted nearly a century. The Chinese migration to Italy continues to grow steadily (although with some differentiation as we will see) and is still the most substantial migration flow from China to Southern Europe. Chapter 2 analyzes the history and characteristics of Chinese trade activities in Italy, focusing on Chinese importers based in Rome. This chapter also describes how Chinese migrants in the trade business organized their activities to take advantage of the specificities of the urban space where they have settled. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the perception that Zhejiangese migrants have of

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Italy, what they deem positive and negative about the country, what they appreciate and detest about it, and how they conceptualize it in relation to their self-perception of migrants from Southern Zhejiang. Chapter 4 deals with identity construction among youth of Chinese origin in Italy and it is based on two studies carried out nearly ten years apart, one involving children of Chinese migrants living in Rome and the other involving teenagers of Chinese origin coming from different parts of Italy and temporarily staying in China. Chapter 5 focuses on language use. It analyses the language repertoire of Chinese migrants in Italy and then provides an interpretation of how the different languages in their repertoire (namely Italian, standard Chinese and at least one Chinese dialect) serve different purposes in daily communication. In this analysis a distinction is made between Chinese adults, usually with a low command of Italian, and their children, mostly balanced Italian/Chinese bilinguals. The last chapter, Chapter 6, is not based on fieldwork but on a brief examination of a body of literary works written in Italian or in Chinese by authors of Chinese origin who live or have lived in Italy. I called this body of works 'Sinoitalian literature' and in this final chapter I attempt to provide an overview on the main characteristics of these writings, outlining some of their unique aspects.

The topic of Italian migration has already been addressed by a number of high profile scholars who have mostly investigated its economical and sociological aspects. With this volume I do not aim to add on to those studies, but rather I try to assume a different angle, making an attempt to begin reflecting on the cultural outcomes of Chinese migration to Italy and on the influence that Chinese (more precisely Southern Zhejiangese) culture could have on Italian contemporary culture and vice versa. While it is merely descriptive, I hope that this work can still contribute to the building of a more complete portrait of Chinese presence in Italy and of its potential on the cultural side.

Finally, I would like to thank Marco and Irma Sannino, Sue Anne Zollinger, Eduardo Barberis, Federico Masini, Alessandra Brezzi, Fabio Berti and Junko Tajima who helped me with this volume in different ways.

CHAPTER 1

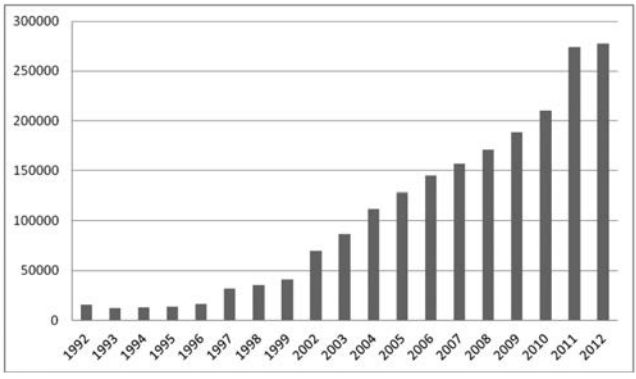
GENERAL FEATURES OF THE CHINESE MIGRATION TO ITALY

Some distinctive features

The Chinese presence in Italy today numbers at about 277,570 individuals[1] and it is the fourth most numerous nationality present on Italian soil, after Romanian, Albanian and Moroccan.

The following table (Tab. 1) reports the trend of growth of the population of Chinese citizens in Italy over the last 20 years[2]. Although, as we will see, several studies and interviews with Chinese migrants suggest a slowdown in departures towards Italy, the migration chain, which implies that once settled each migrant will be joined by his/her relatives, keeps the number of Chinese migrants who arrive yearly in Italy growing steadily.

Tab. 1 - Growth of Chinese population in Italy



Source: Istat

[1] Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics)/Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs (data updated to 12/31/2011).

[2] Data for 2000 and 2001 are not available.

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The way in which the Chinese group settles in Italy shows peculiarities that distinguish it in various ways from other migrated groups, although there are certain aspects of their settlement that are shared with migrant groups of other nationalities. Among the most characteristic traits of the Chinese migrant group is the extraordinary homogeneity in their area of origin (see next paragraph); at least 70% of Chinese living in Italy come from the rather circumscribed area of Southern Zhejiang. Many other characteristic elements of the Chinese settlement in Italy are likewise connected in some way to shared cultural traits or to specific economical and social conditions found in the areas of origin. These traits are identified exclusively among the migrants that come from Southern Zhejiang or from the adjacent province of Fujian, which shares many historical and cultural traits with Southern Zhejiang.

Typical of migration from this area is the tendency to start and run small family run businesses. In Italy today there are 49,540 owners of individual businesses that are of Chinese nationality. The general incidence of Chinese self-employed workers among the total number of the employed Chinese nationals is very high. In fact they make up the highest percentage among all ethnic groups in Italy (around 50% of the total of the officially employed)[3]. Chinese in Italy are in fact mostly entrepreneurs and, if they are not self-employed, they live only transiently in a stage where they are dependent upon others for employment. The desire to become *laoban*, owner, is deeply rooted in migrants coming from Southern Zhejiang and it seems to be the ultimate goal of their entire migratory project. To become an owner, although with few or no employees, is the main form of status for the majority of Chinese in Italy. This feature distinguishes the Chinese group from a good part of other migrated groups in Italy, who, in contrast, often prefer or are content with waged work or simply have different priorities.

Chinese migration to Italy is characterized by the presence of a high number of enterprises with Chinese employers and Chinese employees. In the case of manufacturing activities it is mostly workshops with Chinese owners and workers, which function as contractors for Italian buyers. For those working in trade, the most

[3] Data provided by CCIAA (Italian Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Craft trade and Agriculture).

relevant actors are importers, wholesalers and retailers. Also in this case the business network is comprised completely of Chinese individuals, who may occasionally have Italian clients or clients of other nationalities (mostly wholesalers or retailers, especially peddlers). Finally, in the world of catering-related businesses, not only are the owners and personnel Chinese, but so are the suppliers of ethnic foods. Now, with nearly a century of migration in combination with the outstanding entrepreneurial spirit of those who migrated and their ability to form intra-ethnic networks through family and friends, the Chinese migration project has given birth to a lively and composite ethnic economy. An economy that is able to receive and introduce in the job market the newly arrived migrants with a rapidity and an effectiveness that have no match in Italy.

The strong inclination to reconstitute the family unit in the target country is also typical of Chinese migration from the Southern Zhejiang and Fujian areas and it is not necessarily shared by other groups of migrants in Italy or even by migration flows from other regions of China (Campani *et al*. 1994). In addition, the family-based migration pattern contributes to fairly equal balance between the number of men and women that is characteristic of this group compared to others.

Another distinctive trait that characterizes Chinese migrants in Italy is their very pronounced mobility and their ability to maintain a relationship with their country of origin, which, in turn, allows them to structure their existence in a transnational dimension (Ma Mung 1992; Pieke *et al*. 2004). In Italy the foreign group that records the highest number of residence permits that were applied for in one province and then renewed in a different one, is the Chinese. As a matter of fact, 62.2% of Chinese residence permits are renewed in a different province than the one of entrance to Italy. In comparison, the nationality to record the second-highest number of this kind of phenomenon, Bangladesh, has 'only' 32,8% of permits renewed in a province different than the one of entrance. Similarly the Chinese nationals are also the foreigner group that moves the most across municipalities; in 2011 for each one thousand Chinese citizens, 79.6 changed their municipality of residence (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2013). Frequent transfers from one city to the other must be interpreted as a consequence of the strong entrepreneurial character of Chinese migration to Italy: families relocate very easily,

searching for better conditions for the success of their business. It is quite a common condition for Chinese who have been in Italy for more than ten years to have changed cities three or four times. Also included in their movement patterns are many cities in the South of Italy, which is rare for other migrants (Istat 2008). The weak connection of the first generations with the single place of settlement is counterbalanced by a strong connection with the areas of origin, kept alive through the fruition of Chinese media (ethnic press, but also websites, internet chats and so on), through trips to China (for those families that can afford it), and by conceiving the migratory project as a transitory phase – an investment abroad of one's time and work in the hopes of enjoying the fruits of this labor within the frame of their culture of origin.

The mobility of this group is not restricted to Italy, Chinese families also move easily within Europe. As already noticed by Li (1999b), Europe is a single entity in Chinese migrants' eyes and the transfers among various European states are not perceived as very different from transfers within a single country. In addition, the weak connection that is created between first generations and the host societies during their first years leaves great freedom of movement to individuals, and to entire family units, and they move around from state to state relying on help from relatives and friends scattered around the continent. Transfers are often triggered by the possibility to exploit more favorable conditions for one's business (for example the presence of a new market far from the competition, or a higher concentration of Chinese manufacturing businesses that are constantly in need of work power). Moves can also result from a realization of better conditions for obtaining a residence permit in one country instead of another. Some studies (Colombo *et al.* 1995; Li 1999b; Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013) stress that Italy was often chosen as a target country since in the past (in the 90s and 00s) it frequently offered amnesties to migrants, during which it was extremely easy to obtain a residence permit. Chinese from all over Europe would rush to Italy any time one of the many amnesties happened during those years.

One last characteristic that is found in the majority of Chinese families who live in Italy is that they conceptualize their inclusion in the host society as a two-stage process. The first stage is completely focused on economic emancipation and the possible accumulation

of wealth, while the second stage, which is usually delegated entirely to the second generation, constitutes a remarkable effort towards social and cultural inclusion in the host society. Briefly, parents firmly require perfect linguistic competence in Italian (besides in standard Chinese) from the second generation along with success in school, almost always wishing for them a career outside the ethnic economy (Ceccagno 2004b; Cologna 2001; Pedone 2006b). We will come back to the second generation in Chapter 4.

Areas of origin

Official national figures about place of origin of Chinese in Italy are unfortunately not available. Nonetheless, on the basis of various surveys (among others see Di Corpo 2008), we can estimate that about 70% of Chinese in Italy come from Zhejiang province, while two other minor flows originate in Fujian province and in the North-Eastern part of China known as Dongbei (lit. North-East), which includes Jilin, Liaoning and Heilongjiang provinces. According to Cologna (2005), these two other flows together form only about 10% of the whole Chinese population living in Italy.

More precisely the migration flow from Zhejiang involves almost exclusively some areas of the Southern portion of the province, especially the Wenzhou prefecture and the Qingtian County. Qingtian County is located in South-West Zhejiang. It is a mountainous area that borders the Wenzhou prefecture and it is crossed by the Ou river and its many tributaries. Because of the morphological features of the area, agriculture has always struggled to produce enough for its villagers, and the county has always been characterized by fierce poverty. The only other means of subsistence for local people was the manufacturing industry of carved soapstone that has been producing crafts and jewelry since the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). This local product became quite popular among European visitors to China already in the XIX century and the first Qingtianese in Europe made a living selling similar crafts as peddlers. The first group of Chinese to arrive in Italy in the 1920s was from Qingtian. They arrived not directly from China, but rather from other European countries that had been hit by the late 1920s depression. The first presence was rather scarce, it is estimated that by the 1930s there were 10,000 Qingtianese in Europe, of which about 1000 settled in Italy (Thunø 1999). Some of these Chinese migrants married Italian women and found employment in Italian manufacturing industry

(especially textile and garment industry). However, as years passed by, some of them preferred self-employment, for example as peddlers. With time, some of these pioneers were reached by their Chinese relatives and thus started the first ethnic businesses on Italian soil, following the pattern seen in other European countries with a longer tradition of Chinese migration, particularly France. The small Chinese-run workshop typically specialized in leather goods, and, later on in production of silk ties (Farina *et al*. 1997). Even though the Qingtianese is the oldest Chinese migrated group in Italy, it was outnumbered by Wenzhouese in the 1990s. Today the majority of Qingtianese in Italy are settled in Rome.

The remarkable development of the Chinese ethnic economy in Italy today was triggered by the arrivals of large numbers of Wenzhouese in the 1980s. Compared to the initial Qingtianese wave, the Wenzhouese migrants were more affluent and could invest in catering businesses (Farina *et al*. 1997). By the 1980s Italian tastes were more inclined towards exotic cuisine, and so the new Chinese restaurants were quite successful, finally making Chinese ethnic businesses visible to Italian society. Since both the Chinese restaurants and the small workshops working as subcontractors for Italian companies only employed Chinese, this sudden development of the ethnic economy fuelled the mechanism of chain migration, which explains why the Chinese presence in Italy is still extremely homogenous in terms of place of origin. Today, Wenzhou is the place of origin most represented among Chinese in Italy, although its migrating population only comes from certain areas within the prefecture, specifically from three adjacent areas – the region of Ouhai, the municipality of Rui'an and Wencheng county. Ruianese migrants today are concentrated in Tuscany, while Wencheng is the place of origin of many migrants living in Milan (Cologna 2003). Migration from Wenzhou started after the one originating from Qingtian and it followed the unprecedented development of the city, which started in the mid 1980s, during the time of Reform and Openness (*Gaige Kaifang*). The resulting new migration laws facilitated obtaining a passport for those who had a relative abroad. The city of Wenzhou has grown abruptly since then and has become one of the wealthiest and most developed cities in China. The fast development of the city of Wenzhou created a deep divide between those families that managed to take advantage of the economic development and those that did

not have sufficient resources to immediately enter the competition. This situation contributed to what the well known scholar Li Minghuan calls a sense of 'relative deprivation'[4] (Li 1999a; 1999b; 1999c): expectations and envy caused by a proximity to people who reached a rapid success. For this reason, the migration flow to Europe has been growing quickly right from the beginning of the 1980s, along with the development of the areas of origin.

Fig. 1 - Map of Zhejiang

Source: Zltrans

If Wenzhouese migration is a relatively recent phenomenon, Fujian, in contrast, has a rather long migratory tradition, which traces back to

[4] The concept of relative deprivation is well known in Sociology (see, among others, Merton 1938; Runcimen 1966; Walker, Smith 2001). Prof. Li is the first to apply this theory to migration from Southern Zhejiang.

the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), but has not involved Mediterranean Europe until very recently. Migratory flows from Fujian to Italy, moreover, do not involve the historical areas of migration, but they concern internal areas of the western part of the province, especially Mingxi county, under the jurisdiction of Sanming prefecture. With the era of Reforms and Openness inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, the coast of Fujian developed more quickly than its hinterland. During the Mao era, Sanming in particular was artificially transformed into a centre of heavy industry, but with the new economy that was based on the development of commerce and light industry, the area began to rapidly lose importance, while coastal areas became wealthier. This left many workers of the ex-government-owned enterprises suddenly unemployed (Pieke *et al*. 2004). Although there are also a few entrepreneurs among them, today Fujianese in Italy (along with migrants from Dongbei) mostly work as low age employees in Wenzhouese enterprises under very hard conditions, and thus occupy the lowest rung in the Chinese ethnic economy.

A small percentage of Chinese migrants arrive in Italy from the Dongbei area (the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang). Migration from this area developed even more recently, and just as the migration flow from Fujian, it also stemmed from the dismantling of state-owned enterprises begun under Deng leadership. The first migrants to Italy from this area trace back to the late 1990s. It is a migration wave formed mostly by so-called mid-career migrants, that is, people that were laid off (*xia gang*) from the numerous heavy industries characteristic of the area, which is rich in coal (Nyíri, Savaliev 2002). It seems that Europe is actually the second choice for those from this area, arriving in the old continent only after having had their visa for the USA rejected (Paul 2002). This migratory wave is not characterized by an entrepreneurial spirit as the ones from the South. It also differs in that it is comprised mostly of single men and women rather than entire families. These lone migrants often arrive to Europe by land, crossing the Russian border.

Appreciated for their pronunciation of Standard Chinese, women from Dongbei are often hired as baby-sitters of wealthy Wenzhouese migrated families. On the other hand, the lack of family protection, typical of this migration flow, makes these same women vulnerable to those who exploit women for prostitution. Indeed, Chinese prostitutes in Italy come primarily from these areas (Cologna 2003; 2005a).

Chinese migratory project in Italy

As anticipated, the Chinese migration to Italy for those who come from Southern Zhejiang is a form of entrepreneurial investment. Thus, it does not involve those families that are more disadvantaged as much as it involves the lower middle classes, who have the means to make a small initial investment. It is not a migration flow that stems from unfavorable political conditions or from poverty, but it is a migration that has very evident entrepreneurial features. Moving abroad is a real investment that allows the migrant to exploit more favorable conditions than he/she could find in his/her homeland. The goal is to attain a greater economical success than he/she could have access to if he/she stayed in China. It should be noted that ten years ago, the migrant from the Wenzhouese and Qingtianese areas with a relative abroad felt almost obliged to leave China in search of fortune. Recent interviews with Chinese migrants record the existence of a narrative among the Chinese in Italy depicting them as products of 'migration fate', as they were obliged by a form of filial piety to leave the country in order to guarantee support to their old parents (Fazzi, Martire, Pitrone 2012; Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013). Actually, several sources (Barberis 2011; Di Corpo 2008; Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013) show that Chinese in Italy report that they do not send relevant remittances back home, henceforth how this help to parents is provided, if it is really provided, should be investigated further. Now the advantages of migration and its aspect of social obligation in front of one's family are coming to an end. Today in the areas of origin the idea is rapidly spreading that it is more convenient to stay in China and exploit the new opportunities that Chinese development has to offer. We will return to this topic further on.

Until a few years back, and to some extent even today, the migratory project in Italy was marked by a series of steps that the migrant faces. Migrants are aware of the dark side this process, but also faithful to its end results (Ceccagno 2003a; 2003b; 2004a; 2005a; 2005b; Cologna 2005). The first step involves the acquisition of capital while still in China, which is used to pay relatives, co-villagers or acquaintances who will invite and receive the migrant when he first arrives in Italy. This is the so-called 'migratory debt' with which the new migrant arrives in Italy. According to recent interviews, today the average amount of this debt is about 10,000 Euros (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013). Generally, part of this debt is paid before the departure as a

form of deposit. It is gathered through informal loans, usually within the family of the migrant. The rest of the debt is extinguished through one's work, once arrived in the country of migration. The employer, that is the relative or acquaintance who invited the newly arrived, offers food and lodging from the very first day of permanence in Italy, but he also keeps part of the wages of the newly arrived until the debt is extinguished. Usually, the entire process takes two or three years of hard work. After this repayment period, the migrant can start accumulating capital which will allow him/her to open his own venture. To shorten the time as much as possible, the migrant usually asks for additional loans within the ethnic enclave in which he/she is inserted. Another way to accumulate new capital for the purpose of opening a new enterprise is marriage, since during weddings conspicuous sums of money are exchanged as gifts (Cologna 2006). The first years in Italy are not only dedicated to paying back the migratory debt, but they are also used for the creation of a social capital that in the future can be useful when one wants to upgrade to self-employment. Once he/she is independent, the migrant can invite some other fellow countrymen if it would be considered useful or necessary, thus enforcing the migration chain. It is necessary to point out that one who invites new migrants is perceived as a benefactor, since he/she offers someone the chance to enter Europe and try his or her fortune through the migration project.

Quite often the entire mechanism of the Chinese ethnic economy is misrepresented by Italian public opinion, which interprets the relationship between Chinese employer and employees in terms of 'master' and 'slave'. Several studies on the topic (Rastrelli 2000; Rastrelli 2005; Ceccagno, Rastrelli 2008) clarify that not only are there no premises from which to speak of 'trafficking' or 'slavery', but also that the relationship between employer and employees in Chinese ethnic economy is one of mutual interest. Rather, it is a relationship ruled by a very composite set of norms based on reciprocal trust, which makes it difficult to involve external parties in the system, since they would not know or share the many untold rules that exist within the system. On the other hand, the extreme flexibility and harshness of working conditions that the newly arrived are bound to face are very clear to them long before they leave China. These conditions are accepted as belonging to a necessary but transitory phase of the migration project. Hence, there is rarely a problem in

the relationship between employer and employee, between workshop owner and worker, between restaurant owner and waiter, between storeowner and clerk; because the employees see themselves in the bosses, they know that they will be in the same position at some point and they are grateful to their employers for making their new start possible. Indeed, until quite recently, the shift from employee status to employer status typically happened in only a few years, making a conflict between the two categories structurally impossible. On this subject, Ceccagno (2007) speaks of a «mutually beneficial agreement» between employer and employee[5].

With the aggravation of the economic crisis in Italy and growing competition, the migration project does not work as smoothly as it did some time ago and it does not guarantee the emancipation of status in as a short a time as it did before. Competition is strong both on Italian soil, among various Chinese enterprises, and also between Chinese enterprises in Italy and those in China. The Chinese enterprises react to competition with each other by continuing to lower prices and consequently also margins of profit. In contrast, enterprises based in China could give better profits to those migrants that, since the 1990s, began re-inventing themselves as importers of Chinese goods for the Italian and European markets (Ceccagno 2004a; 2005a; 2005b; 2012). One of the primary consequences of these two types of competition is that it is harder and harder to upgrade from the most humble jobs, which were once limited only to the first period of familiarization with the territory and with the ethnic network, to self employment. In the manufacturing sector, recent studies (Ceccagno, Rastrelli 2008) show that today it is specifically the migrants from Dongbei who are employed in the lowest positions within garment workshops, that have no real chance of vertical mobility.

The migratory path just described has some peculiarities that are not found among other migrated groups and it implies a series of consequences that may explain many of the characteristics of the Chinese presence in Italy. To begin with, Chinese, unlike other migrants, as a rule of thumb have a job, food and lodging from the very first day of their arrival in Italy, all provided by their employer,

[5] While this is the general situation, there are also reports of more problematic employer/employee relations; for example see the work of Wu Bin on Chinese in Veneto (Wu 2007; 2008).

who almost always is also the person who invites the new migrant. The Chinese group in Italy, in fact, is the one that has the lowest rate of unemployment (2.9%) among all groups of migrants in the country (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2013). Also the characteristic tendency to self exploitation of Chinese migrants, the strong flexibility in terms of work schedule, is interpretable within the framework of this project, since even during the phase of dependent work, the migrant is actually working for him/herself, getting closer to the moment of liberation from waged work and to self employment, which is the ultimate goal of the migrant from Southern Zhejiang from the moment he left China. It is implicit in this system that Chinese enterprises on Italian soil rarely become larger businesses; instead it is quite common to witness a continuous cycle of small enterprises coming into existence and ceasing to exist (Cologna 2005; Barberis 2011). More economically advantaged families (up to now it is simply those who arrived longer ago and thus had the chance to enjoy a more favorable historical moment) often engage in several businesses.

The most obvious consequence of this persistent self employment within the ethnic economy and of the frequent transfers is the delay in creation of solid links within the context of arrival. The first generations, which never had the experience of Italian public school, live in a linguistic universe that is almost completely Sinophone. This is especially true in the first years dedicated to the release from the migratory debt but often also later on (Chini 2004; Ceccagno 2001; 2003a). For them the main cultural horizon of reference is the Chinese one and quite often that is also the context within which to spend those status symbols that were earned abroad with such hard labor (Cologna 2005). Thus the external context is rather irrelevant outside of the economical opportunities that it offers, and in that sense these terms are similar to those experienced by other 'expat' communities all over the world.

Social stratification

Besides having a remarkable entrepreneurial character, Chinese migration to Italy also records a certain level of economic success when compared to other migrated groups, although it is also very stratified. There are no official national data divided by citizenship about the average income of migrants in Italy. Nonetheless, recent interviews (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013) claim that for Chinese

employees (in restaurants, workshops, stores, bars, hairdressers etc.) wages range between 500 Euros to 1800 Euros monthly. Those who are self employed, according to the same study, have average profits ranging between 1000 and 2000 Euros monthly, excluded those cases of particularly high success. According to data provided by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), Italian average salary in 2011 was 1286 Euros (1407 Euros for men and 1131 Euros for women), while for foreigners the average salary was around 973 Euros (-24%). The interviews seem to confirm an objective situation of advantage for the Chinese group compared to the other foreigners.

In Italy a certain public opinion observes the success of small Chinese enterprises with great suspicion, invoking supposed relations with Chinese Triads, which would protect and support Chinese activities abroad, using them as a front for criminal activities (Marsden 1997; Mirante 2008; Cingolani 2009). The reality is that the success of Chinese activities does not have anything mysterious about it. Rather, it is the result of a migratory project that is well established, and of the tenacity of the individuals who pursue it. In first analysis, it is necessary to discard the cliché, well spread in Italy, that Chinese migrants are an extremely affluent elite that prospers at the cost of Italian society. Chinese enterprises that have reached a real level of success are very few. An enormous number of small businesses constantly fail, close down, change sector, or change owner. The world of Chinese entrepreneurship is a very flexible world that must adjust to many variables, despite that it moves on very low profit margins. This is why it is very common for the same family to run more than one enterprise at a time, or to engage on different fronts, for example importing clothing, but also managing a restaurant, or importing different kinds of goods, toys, shoes and so on. By diversifying their activities, the family is able to mitigate the effects of a possible failure of one of the activities. Someone who is not particularly interested in these dynamics will hardly notice if one of the Chinese-run stores in the Roman neighborhood Esquilino (see Chapter 2) changed management many times, or if one single store is run by many, even seven or eight, different Chinese ventures. The entrepreneurial success of the Chinese group is a reality but it is also delicate, unstable, and precarious, and its actors only succeed at a very high cost.

Today the social pyramid within the Chinese migrated group shows a very composite stratification, which is strongly connected to the different occupations available within the ethnic economy. At the top of this pyramid there are the big importers, mostly located in Rome and Milan, and fast-fashion manufacturers, mostly located in Prato, but also in Naples (Sacchetti 2004). We will discuss the importers more extensively in Chapter 2, but here we will just point out that it is a few hundreds of Chinese businessmen who, especially in the first half of the 2000s after China entered the WTO, accumulated significant capital importing goods produced in China at a low cost, and selling them back in Europe through Italy. Chinese ready-to-wear manufacturing (or *pronto moda*, as it is called by locals) refers to Chinese final firms that emerged mostly in Prato at the end of the 90s. While in its first stage the Chinese presence in Prato's industrial district was mostly involved in small workshops that functioned as contractors and subcontractors for Italian manufacturers, a growing number of Chinese entrepreneurs became independent beginning in 1997 and started their own final firms, which specialized in the production of low level fast fashion garments to be exported all across Europe as 'made in Italy'. Today there are about 900 such Chinese manufacturers in Prato and although their businesses are now facing an abrupt crisis, they still represent the highest position that Chinese migrants can hold in the manufacturing sector (Ceccagno 2012). These two categories of entrepreneurs are, in general terms, considered the most prestigious and also the most successful. In general, among Chinese in Italy the idea that those who are involved in these activities are wealthier than the others is widespread. Different studies reveal that even these categories are going through a deep crisis (Ceccagno 2005a; 2005b; 2012; Ceccagno, Rastrelli 2008) and, according to recent interviews, these are the entrepreneurs who are leaving Italy to go to more favorable contexts or to go back to China (Pedone 2013). Below these entrepreneurs, which we might define as more 'aggressive', there is what can be considered something like a middle class of the Chinese enclave. It is mostly formed by small entrepreneurs, restaurant owners, store owners, hairdressers, coffee bar owners and so on. These are occupations that are gaining popularity among Chinese migrants and are chosen by the apparently growing segment of the Chinese presence in Italy which does not pursue the realization of noticeable economic success, as much as an ideal of life

that is stable and comfortable. These new kinds of values could also allow a certain degree of emancipation from the ethnic economy and thus a better social inclusion in the host society for this part of the Chinese migrated group (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013). The social class below this is made up of those who are not self-employed yet: workshop employees, waiters, and clerks. It is these newly arrived migrants who use their work power to pay back the migratory debt. Yet below this class there is another class of people, which includes workshop handymen, storehouse dockers, dishwashers, small peddlers and so on. Until ten years ago the vertical mobility within this pyramid was phenomenally good and a migrant was rather sure he could go through all stages quite rapidly, but as we will see further on, the situation today is radically different.

Evolution of Chinese presence in Italy

As already pointed out in the report edited by IOM and by the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration in 2008, the migration flow from China to Italy from the middle of the 2000s has begun to slow down (Di Corpo 2008). Although the number of Chinese that arrive in Italy every year is still growing, the study points out how a sudden increase in Zhejiangese remittances starting in 2007 could suggest the beginning of a counter migration, at least for those who came from that area. Even the Financial Times has recently published an article about the abandonment of Italy by Chinese migrants[6] and the phenomenon of the returning migrants has been observed in several different empirical studies (recently by Ceccagno 2012). Some recently interviewed Chinese entrepreneurs state that approximately one third of Chinese migrants who once picked Italy as their target country have already left the country to go back to China or look after better conditions outside the economic crisis-weakened Europe (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013). The estimates about the returns, according to migrants' interviews, grows further if we consider specifically only the entrepreneurs, two thirds of which would have left Italy in search of fortune somewhere else (Pedone 2013).

Considering that the Chinese presence in Italy continues to grow numerically, who are those that continue to arrive? Who has

[6] Dinmore G. '*Immigrants abandoning recession-hit Italy*', «Financial Times», 06/01/2013.

remained? Although there are no official data, we can imagine that the influx of new migrants originates from areas other than Zhejiang, that is, the migration flows from Fujian and Dongbei. So, today for those who leave China things cannot be as they were once, when anyone with a small capital and the desire to invest it could try to make their fortune by exploiting their spirit of self sacrifice and business talent. Now, the migrant might be someone with nothing to lose who sees migration as the only way to escape misery. Besides these new waves, the majority of the new arrivals are probably still made up of family reunions, such as children and parents of those Zhejiangese that got 'stuck' in Italy. The composition of the Chinese presence and its characterizing traits may be destined to change deeply in the next years, mostly as a consequence to the 'escape' of the fiercer entrepreneurs and to the rise in numbers of individuals who are not interested in entrepreneurship. In the next paragraph we will also see how those who stay might contribute to change the face of the Chinese presence in Italy.

Recent interviews (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013) stress how the remarkable development of the areas of origin is a sensitive topic for migrants today. Although the economic boom in recent years in Southern Zhejiang is partly a reason for patriotic pride, especially when compared to the situation of crisis that the migrants observe all around Europe, it is mostly a reason for distress for those who feel they have made the wrong choice migrating to Europe and thus losing the chance to take advantage of the boom back home. The development of the areas of origin contributes to explain both the slowdown in departures and the rise in numbers of *guiqiao* (returned migrants). Today, if one wants to do business, it is better to stay in or return back to China. It is in order to participate in this development that many families of migrants today encourage their children, although born or schooled in Italy, to try to make their careers back in China (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013).

Today to live and work in Italy is not a source of pride anymore; the myth of the rich Chinese abroad has lost its sheen. Not even those who stayed in China feel the admiration and the envy that once was addressed to *huaqiao*, Overseas Chinese. Migrants feel embarrassed before their friends and relatives who stayed in China. With the diffusion of new means of communication, through the many blogs, and through Skype and such, living conditions of Chinese abroad are

today much more easily known to those still in China than they were only ten years ago. The great development of Chinese tourism has made known, back home, how thousands of Chinese in Italy live and work. The comparison with the despised *nongmingong*, the migrant workers that reach big Chinese cities looking for employment, often reoccurs in the interviews with migrants.

The motivations to abandon Italy are quite evident, while those for staying can be more multifaceted. In the aforementioned study edited by Berti, Pedone, Valzania (2013), some small Chinese entrepreneurs in Prato claim that they stayed because they have family in Italy. Their kids are small and they do not want to interfere too much with their lives by moving somewhere else or going back to China. Some others observe that all their relatives are abroad and hence they have nothing waiting for them in China, not even a place to stay. For some, *mianzi*, 'saving face', still seems to be important, hence they do not want to go back to China as it would be a public admission of failure too hard to bear. Those who were born in Italy or arrived there during their school years naturally find Italy more familiar and thus tend to stay there, and there are also many people that having spent a long time in Italy do not have the strength or the will to start over again somewhere else.

Nonetheless none of the above reasons has ever stopped Southern Zhejiang migrants from moving around Europe. In general terms, those who stay seem to have somehow grown a sort of attachment to the host country. This seems to be the case, considering that until only a few years ago there would not be anything real to keep them from going elsewhere, at least according to the values and goals typically stated by people from these areas of origin. Despite all these apparent contradictions, there are still certain individuals that nevertheless recognize Italy as the country where they choose to live, at least until their old age. This might seem obvious at first glance, but it is not so clear-cut when one considers that for the migration flow generating in Southern Zhejiang, Italy has always been viewed only as a country where sojourning was 'convenient'. A place where one could quickly gather a capital, obtain a residence permit, and exploit some specific economic local conditions, all the while waiting to go somewhere else. If it really turns out that many people leave Italy in search of better options, those who stay could determine a change in the manner of inclusion in Italian society.

Since it would mostly be those families who have a precise will to live in Italy and not anywhere else, we can suppose that these families are therefore more available and open to Italian society and culture. If this is really the future scenario, the result could be a dramatic gap between the 'old' migrants (more aggressive entrepreneurs excluded) on one side, who are more and more independent from the ethnic enclave and included in Italian society, and, on the other side, the migrants who arrived with the new flows, lacking a network that protects them and as a consequence are more vulnerable and subject to illegal activities.

What future for Chinese population in Italy?

At national level, since the year 2004, trading activities have surpassed manufacturing activities for the Chinese in Italy, although in some specific areas that are characterized by productive activities, such as Prato, the majority of Chinese enterprises are still in manufacturing (Ceccagno, Rastrelli 2008).

There are also a number of new activities run by Chinese that are spreading around the country and often substituting the traditional occupations that are facing crises. For example, some of the most popular of such activities are service centers, bed and breakfasts, hairdressers and so on. Especially important is the boom of Chinese-run coffee bars that have mushroomed all over the country in the past few years (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013).

It should be noted that some of these new occupations are detached from the ethnic economy. Unlike the longest-running types of occupations so far, that is *pronto moda* and import-export activities, a good share of the new enterprises do not rely on Chinese middle men. Nor do they rely on relations with China and do not rely on a Chinese customer base. Coffee bars and hairdressers, in particular, take advantage of ability to blend in the social environment in which they are inserted and do not need the ethnic network to exist. As already observed, stores of household products, clothing stores, hairdressers, coffee bars, bed and breakfasts and service centers all share in the fact that they do not admit the chance of great economic success. They are occupations that at their best can guarantee a stable income, but certainly do not offer the same possibility of moneymaking of *pronto moda* or import-export.

New entrepreneurs, or those entrepreneurs who are forced to start over in a different sector, seem to start new activities with a

completely different spirit than in the past. On the other hand it is also predictable that their system of values is somewhat different, since if they were interested in 'exploiting to the maximum' their own entrepreneurial talent at any cost, they would already be back in China or would have gone to South America or to Africa, the new migratory targets for the Chinese group today.

The study by Berti, Pedone, Valzania (2013) focuses on this new middle class, formed by small entrepreneurs that most likely will have a more and more important role within the Chinese migrated group in Italy. The interviews with 21 of these small entrepreneurs reveal a set of values that is rather unexpected for the Chinese group. When asked about advantages and positive aspects of their present occupation, in comparison with both dependent work and more aggressive entrepreneurship, the new small entrepreneurs insist on the importance of having more freedom, of having more free time, of having less harsh work conditions. The advantage, in sum, is enjoying a higher quality of life, an idea which is openly opposed to the mere accumulation of wealth in the answers of the interviewed migrants. Another new value that emerges from the interviews is that of economic stability and safety. This new middle class states that they prefer a more cautious work choice, which may not assure outstanding incomes, but that leaves space for life projects outside of working. In short, they want job stability and also a life that allows for personal realization in different contexts.

In this perspective the apology of family life that comes out in the words of the interviewees is easier to understand, as well as the emphasis on spiritual life represented by the many references to religion (protestant Christianity, as it is often the case for Zhejiangese in Italy). These values are presented as an alternative to the materialism and careerism that fueled the migratory wave originating in Southern Zhejiang in the 1980s. The sacrifice for the mere economic profit has become a path that can be avoided and it pertains now only to those who are especially ambitious. The first signs of a polarization between those ambitious entrepreneurs who overshoot and the new small store owners can already be observed today. While before, being a small entrepreneur was only a stage in the path that lead to real success, today there are even those who claim that being employees is better than being employers, because when one is an employer has too many worries; a concept that would have been unacceptable,

according to the interviewees themselves, for anybody coming from Southern Zhejiang until just recently.

Who brought these new values to the table? First of all, these new values emerged recently in such an evident manner because of natural selection - the crisis drove the more ambitious entrepreneurs elsewhere. In the negotiation of new values, particularly for some of the aspects that are more similar to the Italian values, the role of second generations and of those who were schooled in Italy was certainly crucial to the change in opinion. On the other hand, there is no reason to exclude the idea that there could be some contamination of the first generation by the values of the host society as well, especially for those who have spent a long time in Italy. In any case, it is important to consider that some values that are less traditional are also spreading in the areas of origin and hence there could also be some influence of this kind in the reassessment of the values of the middle class that is rooting in Italy today.

In conclusion, the new Chinese businessmen and the so-called middle class well represent a likely evolution of the Chinese presence on Italian soil. The raising of this typology of entrepreneurs could lead to the establishment of a Chinese presence with a hybrid set of values, well-rooted in the host society and herald of a mixed culture. If this scenario becomes a reality, the new challenge will be promoting a deeper social inclusion for the new migratory flows from China and managing to face the economic damage caused to the Italian economy by the departure of those Chinese entrepreneurs that were more skillful and ambitious.

CHAPTER 2

CHINESE IMPORT-EXPORT ACTIVITIES IN ROME: A CASE-STUDY

Since the first arrivals at the beginning of last century, the two primary economic endeavors undertaken by Chinese people living in Italy are manufacturing and trade. In the Italian collective imagination, the first visible Chinese in the first half of the last century were silk ties vendors who would sell their goods on the streets of bigger cities (Farina *et al*. 1997; Colombo *et al*. 1995).

Today one fourth of foreign traders in Italy are Chinese (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2013), which once again demonstrates that the Chinese presence in Italy is characterized by a very strong entrepreneurial spirit, typical of the areas of origin. Prior to the 1990s this talent for business was exploited by entrepreneurs mostly in the sectors of manufacture (leather goods and garments) and catering. However, during the 2000s, following the entry of China into the WTO and the general development of the areas of origin, which witnessed the booming of an enormous number of small enterprises dedicated exclusively to the production of items for the export (Fig. 2), many Chinese entrepreneurs in Italy switched from manufacturing to retail, wholesale and import-export business

At a national level, by the end of 2011 there were 22,524 business associates of Chinese nationality engaged in trading activities (both wholesalers and retailers) in Italy. Meanwhile business associates of Chinese nationality engaged in manufacturing activities were 'only' 16,122, as far as the traditional sectors of textile, leather and garment industry are concerned (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2013). The boom of Chinese-run retail stores all around the country, which became visible at the beginning of the 2000s, would have not been possible if not for large importers located in Rome, who ignited this new industry. We will see, in fact, that the goods sold in Chinese-run stores across Italy are mostly manufactured in China, except some

Valentina Pedone, *A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy*,
ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print) ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online) © 2013 Firenze University Press

of the clothing, which is manufactured in Chinese workshops in Italy, especially by Chinese manufacturers in Prato.

Fig. 2 - Small shoe factory in Wenzhou that produces only for Eastern Europe

Source: personal archive

The types of products offered in these stores are quite limited - mostly clothing, shoes and purses, or miscellaneous home supplies, knick-knacks, small electronic commodities, and so on. The diffusion and the success of these stores has had a particular importance for Chinese in Italy, as it allowed them to face the crisis of Chinese ethnic economy that was caused by the extreme competition that arose in manufacturing at the end of the 1990s. Through the stores, many Chinese migrants started moving from the areas with a longer migrating tradition (such as the cities in Northern and central Italy and their industrial districts), where the competition was unbearable, to the virgin markets of Southern Italy. Today, Chinese presence is among the few migrated presences that is also widely spread in the South of the country (Istat 2008), an area where, to some extent, Italians still migrate from, due to its relative poverty. The presence of Chinese stores, except for a few clusters of shops in some urban areas, is usually well accepted in the socio-economic texture of the country. Indeed, it has become a solid component of the average Italian retail offering, so that today it is common to say in Italian 'to go to the Chinese', referring to this kind of stores.

In the following pages I will present the history of Chinese imports to Italy through the voice of some of its actors. I will also

describe the role that a group of about 500 Chinese entrepreneurs-importers who lived in Rome had, and partly still has, in building the network of stores that today covers the whole country. Aside from detailing the diachronic dimension of the phenomenon of Chinese imports, reconstructed through interviews with Chinese businessmen, this chapter also describes the way in which today the city of Rome is exploited by bigger and smaller Chinese businesses. These businessmen 'use' different parts of the city, taking advantage of some strategic aspects while trying to face those hardships that entrepreneurs of any nationality in Europe are facing in recent years[1].

Evolution of import-export activities

The oldest core of Chinese in Rome, if we exclude a few rare pioneers, traces back to the 1980s. During that decade and especially after the amnesty of 1986[2], some Chinese migrants who already had lived in the Milan area, often working as peddlers or in small Italian factories, moved down to Rome. Having gathered a small capital, these migrants saw in the city a strong potential to succeed in the catering business, due to the remarkable quantity of tourists that visit it every year. These families were the first to become visible to local residents through an ever increasing number of family-run restaurants. At the beginning restaurants started appearing only in central areas of the city, but later they gradually kept spreading all over the city in order to serve local client bases and to escape competition. Throughout the 1980s, the only possible employment for Chinese migrants in Rome, who incessantly arrived in Italy through family reunion, was catering. The only trading activities active in this phase were that of food supply connected with Chinese restaurants. Chinese restaurants, in fact, besides fresh foods, also needed some special ingredients that were first imported mostly from other European countries (primarily France) in which this business was at an already advanced stage, but then slowly started being imported directly from the motherland (Mudu 2007).

[1] The observations on the use of different areas of the city by Chinese wholesalers and retailers are based on ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out with the colleague Giulio Lucchini in 2010. Part of these results were published previously in Pedone (2010; 2012).

[2] Law 943/1986.

Import-export activities unrelated to the catering business started in the early 1990s. At the beginning it was only the experiments of occasional entrepreneurs, older residents who did not belong to the Zhejiangese migration wave that started hitting Rome at the end of the 1980s. The types of imported goods that these few (less than ten) businessmen dealt in were traditional Chinese valuable objects, an idea probably inspired by similar experiences observed in France and in other countries with a longer history of Chinese migration. Since the market did not react as hoped, the same importers of high level goods started buying cheaper goods in China to be sold in Italy:

> My uncle opened a novelty store here in 1990, he was also selling wholesale; at the beginning he sold Chinese novelty, then he sold bonsai. The clients were Italian. I took over my uncle's store, but I realized the business was not really good. We would sell furniture, cloisonné, refined stuff, but we would not sell much. Then we started selling more average things, at a lower price, 2000-3000 Liras[3]. This way it started going very good, because we were selling a lot (Service center owner).

The success of these new importers caught the attention of the many Chinese migrants who had arrived in Rome hoping to strike it rich in the catering business, after gathering money working as employees elsewhere. These first rudimental forms of import were often not completely legal, especially as far as tax payment was concerned:

> Then other Chinese saw us and saw that we were making good money, so they copied us. You know, they come from Zhejiang, from Wenzhou, they really have this culture of going abroad. They are a bit coarse, they saw that our activity was going well and they copied us. Except that we were regular, we paid the custom fees and stuff, and they? How did they compete with us? With suitcases. They imported very small goods, snatching them in suitcases. Rings, trinkets. Then in 1994 we realized we had to shut down business, because the competition was too fierce; they were bringing stuff here, without paying the taxes, and they were selling them on the streets, without issuing any receipts and again without paying any taxes. We could not compete. Who were they? They were ex-workshop employees, they used to make purses, but as soon as they got enough money, they started these kinds of activities on their own (Service center owner).

[3] 1-1,5 Euros

At the beginning, the imported goods were limited to lighters and small objects to be sold by peddlers, but the profit margin was very small. Later, someone tried to exploit Chinese folklore and tried to sell traditional silk dresses, silk shirts, handkerchiefs and other silk products. Already during the mid 1990s some of these businessmen realized that rather than import 'exotic' goods, which were hard to sell, they could exploit the fact that common everyday goods would have had a much lower price in China and so they could be imported without having to worry too much about how to find a market to sell them. This way, more and more families entered this business, reinvesting capital that was earned with the first imports, trying every time a different deal, especially in the clothing sector. Sometimes it worked out fine, while other times a batch of goods had less success. From this moment on, the goods started being manufactured in China specifically for export.

> Chinese import-export started here in 1993-94, here in Piazza Vittorio, and it consisted in selling just one, two, maximum three items. For example they started with lighters, and then somebody started importing Chinese embroidered shirts. By 1995-96 the range of items sold was wider. That's when the first handkerchiefs hit Italy, and then it was shirts and trousers with Italian patterns. In 1996 this kind of import started. From 1996-97 on, any kind of clothing item was imported to Italy, jeans, t-shirts, all kinds of items… I was the first one to import shoes, it was 1999. I started a company with a friend and we started importing shoes, back then it was only sports shoes (Chinese importer in Rome).

At the end of the 1990s imports of jeans, T-shirts, shoes, and clothing items of various kinds were thriving and virtually any Chinese family in Rome with some savings could try their fortune at selling goods imported from the motherland. As far as clothing was concerned, the items were (and still are) manufactured in China by the importers themselves, who have direct contacts with the factories and can decide quantities and types of items to be produced.

> All importers have direct contacts with the factories. Some even buy fabric. They buy fabric and give it to the factory. The factory only provides the workforce, some of them, not all of them. Those who have more personnel have an office in China… We also have an office over there, but we use it only to contact the factories,

> we do not buy the fabric. But we have an office that manages the quality control, they follow the whole process of manufacturing (Chinese importer in Rome).

It is clear that in these kinds of businesses, the real asset of an enterprise is not the monetary asset as much as it is the relational asset, that is, the social capital that the various families have built in time. It is a network that stretches all the way to China and helps cement a better deal in China, but it is more than anything a network of acquaintances in Italy that allows the entrepreneur to quickly collect the money necessary for a purchase through fiduciary loans, and that allows him to sell the goods in the fastest time as possible, both retail and wholesale.

It is during the 1990s that Piazza Vittorio (a wide commercial square in the downtown neighborhood of Esquilino, close to the main railway station in Rome) begins to play a crucial role for Chinese trading activities in Italy. The concentration of stores run by Chinese importers in one single area allows their customers, who are often wholesalers themselves, to easily compare goods and prices. On the other hand, the proximity with the railways makes these stores even more sought after, since they can be easily reached from anywhere in the country. Henceforth, at the end of the 1990s, Piazza Vittorio and a battery of a hundred families almost become a legend, the echo of which travelled to the rest of Europe. In the early 2000s, the client base became international. At first it was the same Chinese of Piazza Vittorio who looked for customers abroad, beginning with Greece. Then the news quickly spread and the Chinese who were resident in France, Spain, Portugal and Germany came visiting *Weituoli'ao*, as Piazza Vittorio is commonly referred to among Chinese traders all over Europe. From the airport they easily reached the many expo-stores that are located in Piazza Vittorio, placed their orders, and soon afterwards the goods left the storehouses and were sent to the rest of Italy and Europe. Clients at this point were not only Chinese wholesalers, but also wholesalers of other nationalities.

> In 1998 there were no importers who traded to foreign markets yet…wait, in 1998 the importers in Rome started supply imported goods to Greece. It was the first European country, then from 1999 the contacts with Spain, France, Portugal and Germany followed. It is a huge traders' net that originates in

> Piazza Vittorio. Why Greece before any other country? It was not Chinese in Greece who started buying goods in Rome, it was Chinese in Rome that moved to Greece looking for a new market. In Greece there were really few Chinese, so the ones coming from Italy were like pioneers and brought everything with them. They sensed that Greece was an empty slate, that nobody was there yet, and then they started opening that market. From that point up to 2005 or 2006 the market grew uncontrollably, it was a golden age. The market extended, there were contacts with many different markets in Europe and it was only Chinese from Italy managing them (Chinese importer in Rome).

The trading activities that took place during these years had a real international dimension, but the monopoly of the importers in Piazza Vittorio did not last long, and around 2002 it began to decline. There was an intensification in customs control at the Naples harbor, where Chinese in Piazza Vittorio clear customs with their imported goods. Such intensification sprang from the openly anti-Chinese policy of the then Minister of Economy, Giulio Tremonti, who fostered public fear of China's economic growth, using it as a scapegoat to be blamed for the Italian economic crisis. As procedures became longer and more burdensome, the flow of goods slowed down abruptly. According to an interview with a COSCO (China Ocean Shipping Group) manager in 2004, over 80% of the containers that arrived from China had to go through a load check, while before a simple document check was considered enough. This procedure slowed down the volume of the cleared containers to only 40 containers per day, while the year before the rate had been 150 containers a day (Sacchetti 2004). Some importers started looking around, searching for more favorable contexts:

> Traders are like water, they flow away easily. If in Rome the rent is too high and the business is not good, the traders move away. Many of them went to Spain or to Germany. For instance when the customs check became too strict, importers had their goods sent to Germany. Then they got the goods sent from Germany to Rome. They also started clearing customs in Spain and then sending the stuff to Rome. This way Spain earned the customs money that was destined to Italy, the goods arrived here anyway, and the Chinese importers made money anyway (Ethnic newspaper publisher).

It was not only the frenzy against Chinese containers lead by the Italian government[4] that caused the downfall of Chinese imports to Rome. The other element that instigated the end of the dream was the cutthroat competition that arose among importers. Many Chinese families abroad started buying goods directly from China rather than buying from importers in Rome, and thus avoiding paying an extra charge to middlemen in Rome. In 2003 a hub like the one in Rome started to develop in Barcelona.

> Around 2002, Chinese in Spain started going directly to China and stopped buying from Chinese in Italy. Wholesalers also started going to China. Gradually the Chinese in France and Greece all started going to China… in Rome there is still a wholesale market, but if before you had two clients, one of the two starts going to China by himself and thus you lose something. From 2002 to 2005-6 we lost so much, for example 80-90% of the goods destined to Spain are now directly imported there. There are only 10-20 clients that still come here from Spain, very few. Chinese in France are virtually all by themselves now, there is nobody left. That is also because France has its own fashion, it is rather peculiar, so they do not come here for supplies. On the other hand Chinese in Greece still come here for clothing, but for other items, such as toys and things like that, they don't come here anymore, they go directly to China. But for clothing they do come here, because for clothing and fashion they are a bit backwards, so they do not have good products. While in Italy fashion is way better (Chinese importer in Rome).

The presence of Chinese traders in Eastern Europe also continues to increase, it represents a yet unexplored territory that, with the recent admission into the European Union of Bulgaria and Romania, can prove to be a still virgin market with a good strategic position.

> From time to time they put an ad in the paper and invite Chinese importers to go there; they say the rents are low. Big shopping malls in Poland, for instance, offer free space for the first year. Many Chinese went there to see how the situation was, whether there were customers, whether there was a market, because it is not easy

[4] Italian political powers have often resorted to stigmatization of Chinese migration in order to gain popular consensus. On such procedure in a local context see Bracci (2012).

> for them to move. If they have a store here, first the wife stays here while the husband tries to move there and comes back here once a month. Then, when and if the other business abroad works out, they finally sell their store here and move there indefinitely (Ethnic newspaper publisher).

> Buyers today come from Romania, from the new countries, from Albania and Hungary. They are not Chinese or else they'd go directly to China. They are Romanian, locals, they are retailers or small wholesalers, they cannot go to China because they would have to buy too many items. The price is obviously different if you buy 30,000, 100,000, or one million items. So they have to buy here, because they can buy fewer items at a more convenient price. In 2008 there were not Romanians yet, they exist now because Romania entered the European Union. In Poland there is a big wholesaler that put an ad in the Chinese Yellow Pages of Italy (Service center owner)

In addition, there is a growing presence of wholesalers and importers in Hungary, notably at the Four Tigers market in Budapest. The remarkable size of this market means that it now fulfills a similar role played by Piazza Vittorio in Rome in the mid 2000s, but for Eastern Europe (Ceccagno 2003b; Nyíri 2007). Hence, from 2005 on, international trade of Chinese goods transiting through Rome reduced by more than 80%, according to interviewed importers. Nonetheless, the wholesalers in Piazza Vittorio are still the main providers of Chinese goods for the Italian market, supplying more than an half of the Chinese goods that are sold in the country. However, in the last few years a similar hub to the one in Rome has been developing near Milan and many wholesalers there manage to buy goods directly in China, without consulting with the Chinese importers in Rome, who thus have reportedly lost about 40% of the customer base they had in their golden age.

To face the 2005 crisis, importers in Piazza Vittorio developed a new strategy. Since family after family was trying to make it big with the exact same strategies, the old school importers decided to join forces, instead of fighting one another, in an attempt to combat the crushing competition. The chosen strategy was that of specializing each in a different type of item, this way not only different companies would not compete, but each company could also buy bigger quantities of each item, causing the price to decrease further.

> In 2005-6 there was a huge change. What change? Each of us specialized in a different item. For example I import pajamas and only pajamas, those who deal shirts only deal shirts, those who deal jeans only deal jeans. So now the imports are specialized, this is our strategy to fight the effects of competition (Chinese importer in Rome)

Nonetheless even this innovation was not enough to stop the decline of Chinese trading activities in Rome, since in addition to the disproportional customs checks and the crushing competition, in 2007 the world economic crisis also started making its effects evident. Business became harder and harder:

> Sometimes you win sometimes you lose, and goods become old very quickly. Sometimes if you don't sell a clothing item in the first three months then you won't sell it at all. You get that from big clearances. When during a clearance an item reaches 70% off, it means nobody is earning anything on the item anymore. We just sell them to make room in the storehouses. You can still try to sell in another country something you can't sell in Italy anymore. For instance this happened with coats that somebody thought they could sell in Italy, but it was too warm here and so they tried to sell them to Germany and Russia. They learned a lesson now (Service center owner)

Sales started plummeting, reportedly dropping to -50% in 2009. Importers in Piazza Vittorio desperately looked for new strategies to go back to the economic status they had worked so hard to earn, and then so easily lost.

> It is the same all over Europe, we are in touch with Spain; Spain is an important market, since they not only cover Europe, but they are also close to Africa, through Morocco. Hence we asked them how business was going and they said that business is half of what it used to be. In Rome also is half of before. We also asked those who unload containers, they know how many goods arrive here. How many containers are unloaded every day? We asked them. They say 40-50% less than in 2007-8! People do not consume. We have relations with people all over Italy, we have contacts in Torino, Palermo, Padova, Milano, Bari, they are our retailers and they say that sales have reduced a lot. I hope this crisis gets to an end or else… if a certain item coming from China costs so little and people still don't buy it, it means that people really have no money at all (Chinese importer in Rome).

For some importers the only solution is to leave Italy:

> Yes, some people went back to China, some moved to Germany or Spain. Many left after 2005, in 2008 for the crisis. They started their stores abroad in 2005 and once the new stores were going good they left their old stores here. They always make an attempt first. They always have two different businesses (Ethnic newspaper publisher)

Importers that stay, on the other hand, today are trying yet a new strategy: instead of thinking up new ways to further lower prices, they decided to try and raise the quality of imported products. To reach this goal, they invest in hiring Italian stylists and invent their own brands, with which they produce whole lines of clothing. Even the interior of the new stores/show rooms are more well-finished, the whole business seems to be willing to upgrade in order to survive.

> From last year (2008-9) there has been a new change. What change is that? That everyone starts making his own brand, his own clothing line. For example one makes the whole set of jacket, shirt and trousers. This will become like Italian brands. This is a good development. They still rely on factories in China they trust, but here they hire Italian stylists. Stylists already existed in our environment from 1999, but before importers would go to them only to ask for advice, or maybe for a single item. They would not ask for help with designing an entire line. Now, since 2008-9 (one person even as early as 2007), they started producing an entire clothing line (Chinese importer in Rome).

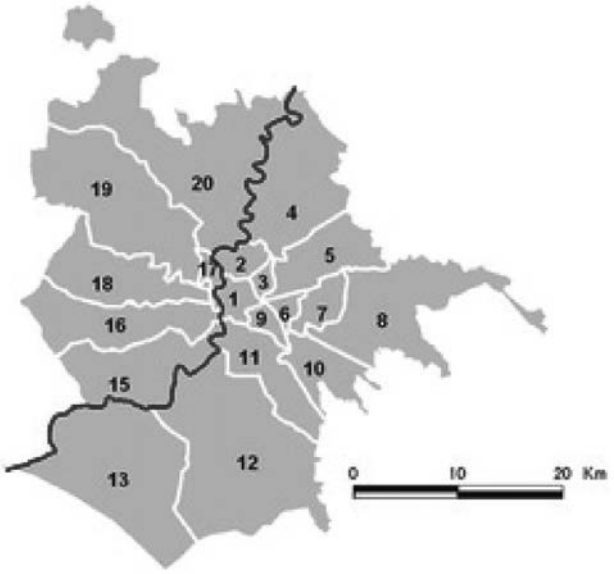
> Importers already reacted, they are changing their model of development, because of the fierce competition they need to lift up the quality. They called on Italian stylists and collaborators, sometimes they started companies along with Italians or with people of other nationalities, they increased the quality. The strategy of lowering the prices does not work anymore. They need to focus on quality, differentiate the imported goods, because if everybody imports the same things the competition becomes too strong. This is why I say things are looking good after all, because things started changing and that is a sign of good health (Service center owner).

Critical areas of the city of Rome for Chinese trade

The Chinese group is distributed on Italian soil not just according to local resources available in different areas of the country, but in bigger cities it may even find different ways of distributing based on

the characteristics of different areas within the same city. As a famous Chinese adage states, 'Chinese people are like water, which takes the same shape of its container': Rome is a very typical example of a city in which Chinese migration took distinct shapes, all very clear and easy to recognize.

Fig 3 - Rome urban sectors



Chinese importers in Rome are all located in the Piazza Vittorio area (Fig. 3, urban sector 1), in the Esquilino neighborhood. However, just a portion of them run the many stores located in the streets of the neighborhood. According to interviews made with the importers, Chinese stores with a bricks and mortar storefront actually represent only 25% of the total Chinese activities in this area.

Given the high demand by Chinese businessmen, stores in this area are usually remarkably expensive, even though the neighborhood is often described by local press as an example of urban decay. Many importers prefer avoiding the high costs of renting a store here and only keep a small office in this area, where they can show their customers a small stock of the goods they sell. Most of the rented stores in the area are actually run by several owners who thus split the costs, or by one primary owner who sublets space inside the store to others.

Fig. 4 - Chinese stores in Piazza Vittorio.

Source: Google maps

> It works like this: if you are a second sub-letter then you are renting the space from someone else and then you're re-renting it to other people. The price you set for rent doesn't need to be the same for all. If someone makes an offer of 1000 Euros for a wall, you can lock that deal and then make another one at a different price for a different space. Nobody will ever know how much the others are paying. Nobody will ask. It's just the way it works. (Ethnic newspaper publisher).

Since it is forbidden in Rome to sell wholesale within the city limits, all the stores in Piazza Vittorio are officially retail stores. However, their main income does not come from retail customers, but from resellers and store-owners that come from other cities and even other countries. They visit these stores as if they were show-rooms, ordering huge quantities of goods from the samples they see on display. According to informants, some high-level importers also supply big Italian resellers and malls, but the majority of their customer base consists of Chinese resellers located in Italy.

> Nowadays, in every city of at least 2000 inhabitants there's at least one Chinese store, and in the bigger ones, most likely, there is a wholesaler too. Every town bigger than 30,000/50,000 inhabitants has at least one wholesaler. Most of them are ex-factory workers who lost their jobs or couldn't survive in the old migration cities. For example wholesalers that sell to peddlers, let's say in Catania for example, they charge 20% for the goods they buy in Rome […] In Rome they exclusively sell to wholesalers. You cannot buy less than 20 boxes, prices are low but quantities have to be big, they sell clothes, novelties, jewels. A wholesaler in Catania could

> never buy directly from China, that would be too expensive and they would not know what to do with that much stock. In Rome, a wholesaler can move 30 containers in one year. The Catania wholesaler must buy from the ones in Rome, and that is more convenient for the kind of business he has (Service center owner).

The fact that the vast majority of the stores in Piazza Vittorio are shared by different sellers in order to split the costs, and the fact that their existence mostly depends on wholesale customers, whose purchases are not as frequent as retailers', help explain why Chinese stores often appear empty or at least not as 'active' as one would expect necessary, considering the high costs of the neighborhood. While the Esquilino neighborhood, and the Piazza Vittorio area in particular, are somehow the 'core' of national Chinese (and previously also European) trading, the warehouses of imported goods are usually concentrated in the suburbs and especially along two main roads, Via Casilina and Via Prenestina (Fig. 3, urban sector 6). Along these streets, whose peripheral segment has always been traditionally occupied by factories and big wholesale warehouses, Chinese importers stock those goods owned by the businessmen of Piazza Vittorio (Fig. 3). As they already have a small show-room there, entrance into these big warehouses is usually not allowed. They also are not as close together as the Piazza Vittorio stores are. While proximity of the storefronts in Piazza Vittorio facilitate the customer shopping experience, what is important for the warehouses is that the rent is much cheaper than downtown, and that they are well connected both to the city and to the highways that lead to other towns in Italy.

Fig. 5 - Storehouses area in via Prenestina

Source: Google maps

Another area with a particularly high concentration of Chinese activities is that around Via Dell'Omo (Fig. 3, urban sector 7), along Via Prenestina. In the relatively small area between via Dell'Omo and the Roman Freeway Ring Road (GRA) many huge halls and warehouses are located, a good portion of which, by the mid 2000s, were purchased by Chinese importers.

Fig. 6 - Storehouse in Via dell'Omo that allows free entry to VAT number owners

Source: private archive

Most of these buildings function only as warehouses and cannot be visited, but a few of them are open to customers, and they do wholesale directly from the warehouse (Fig. 6). Goods sold this way include: novelty items, home supplies, small electronic commodities and the like. This area is typically populated by Chinese truckers, Chinese warehouse workers, and direct-sale customers: usually small retailers: Chinese, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, or North African traders who own stores in other Italian cities. This type of customer is allowed to shop for their goods conveniently without having to drive to town. In the same area, there are also small plots of land where goods are stocked in the same containers that brought them to Italy (Fig. 7).

The transportation of goods is also managed by Chinese migrants. These truck drivers are mostly individuals coming from the Dongbei area. As observed in Chapter 1, migrants coming from these areas tend to occupy the lower work positions within the ethnic economy, in the trading business they usually are warehouse workers or truck drivers.

Fig. 7 - Containers used as storehouses

Source: Google maps

In the last three years (2010-2013), another wholesale cluster was born in Rome, which is especially directed to peddlers who work in Rome. In Via Casilina, but in a portion of the road which is more central than the one where warehouses are located, is an area of approximately one square kilometer housing a couple of dozen unmarked Chinese-run stores (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8 - Chinese stores in via Casilina that target Roman peddlers

Source: Google maps

They exclusively sell novelty, purses, jewels, home supplies, small technological devices, lighters and so on. They do not deal in clothing. Their suppliers are the warehouses in Via Dell'Omo, their customers are the peddlers working downtown, who find it more convenient

buying there, at prices that are a little higher, than driving all the way to Via Dell'Omo themselves. According to those interviewed, an item sold for 15 Euros downtown, can be bought here for 3 Euros. These small wholesale stores also feature a larger variety of items than the big warehouses do, allowing customers to pick a wide variety of items in a very short time.

Another peculiar reality in the context of Chinese trade activities in Rome is Commercity, a large facility specifically dedicated to wholesale trading, located in Via Portuense (Fig. 3 urban sector 15). Commercity is a huge compound, well connected to both the Naples and Civitavecchia harbors and to the Rome airport, Leonardo da Vinci. In the times of huge growth of Chinese trade in Rome, this area was used extensively by Chinese importers, who were primarily attracted by its proximity to the airport. The attempt to transfer Chinese activities from the center to the suburbs was actually warmly welcomed by the city administration, insofar as much of this process can be considered partially imposed and not completely spontaneous[5]. Although when Commercity opened the big importers did try to take advantage of it, the market changed abruptly over the years, and even such a big facility had to change to suit the new business needs. Thus Commercity today is indeed populated mostly by middlemen rather than importers, specifically by traders who buy from wholesalers and resell to a small customer base made of retailers located in Rome and Lazio region (Fig. 9). While warehouses and direct-sale stores located in the East suburbs of Rome mostly deal with novelty items and home supplies, Commercity usually sells clothes and shoes to those resellers who have steady stalls in street markets. They also sell to quite a few Italian retailers who own small clothing stores, although occasionally the bigger and more famous chains get their supply here as well. The main difference with buying in Piazza Vittorio is that every middleman here buys from several wholesalers, which allows him/her to offer a wider variety of items for a higher price. The majority of goods that are sold here by middlemen are bought from local Chinese importers but, according to the interviews, every middleman buys from 10 to 20 different wholesalers, and some of them also carry goods bought from manufacturers of the *ready-to-wear* industry in Prato.

[5] A similar attempt to displace of Chinese commercial activities from downtown to the suburbs has also occurred in Milan.

Fig. 9 - A middleman store in Commercity.

Source: Commercity website

Finally, a mention of yet another commercial activity that seems to have spread quickly within the Chinese community in many Italian cities in the very recent past: the souvenir sale. In the last few years a major increase of Chinese-run stores specialized in souvenirs has been recorded in Rome (Fig. 10). Goods are imported from China, bought in big expos where enormous quantities of souvenirs related to any place all over the world can be found. The city-market of Yiwu, in Southern Zhejiang, is a typical example of that sort of expos. These new businesses took over the many Italian stores downtown that went bankrupt in the last years due to the general economic crisis, and they are now exploring the economic potential of tourism among Italian cities.

Fig. 10 - Shop of souvenirs imported from China in Rome

Source: www.virtualtourist.com

Rome offers an excellent example of how the Chinese ethnic business can expand if there are the right conditions. Over 12.000 Chinese nationals live in Rome today (Istat) and there are more than 2.800 Chinese enterprises (Chamber of Commerce of Rome) that carry out trade activities (both wholesalers and retailers), which means that roughly one out of every four Chinese people in Rome are in this kind of business. Different phases of the trading activities, from selling on Italian streets to importing from China, are all run by Chinese migrants. It is common that the same person or family experiences at different times some or all of the different occupations within the Chinese trade business, in the constant attempt to elevate ones economic status. The extreme flexibility of these activities, which change owners, close down, open again, change goods, customers, suppliers and so on, is partly their strength. In addition, there is a visible rapidity with which different areas of the city became home to different segments of the Chinese trade mechanism. Flexibility is a key factor when one is dealing with very small margins of profit, as it is the case for these Chinese businessmen. While the importers rely mostly on their *guanxi* (connections) among Chinese manufacturers in China and (mostly) Chinese sellers in Italy and Europe, retailers deal with Italian customers on a daily basis. Those at the highest level of the social pyramid within the Chinese ethnic enclave in Rome, the importers, do not have real motivations to learn Italian or to actively pursue inclusion within the Italian society. Now that business is not as thriving as once was, it is possible that the group formed by the many retailers, along with the owners of the many coffee bars, hairdressers and such, who are constantly in contact with Italians, will rise as an example of possible integration beyond the economical one, consituting a model that could be welcome both inside and outside the Chinese group.

CHAPTER 3

THE PERCEPTION OF ITALY BY CHINESE MIGRANTS

In order to investigate what Chinese migrants deem relevant about Italy, I analyzed data that were collected at different times (mostly interviews carried out in the past ten years) and in different areas (Wenzhou, Prato, Rome). Perhaps surprisingly, despite that the data are very heterogeneous, the analysis of the collected material points to a rather homogenous perception of Italy among Chinese migrants across the two continents. This homogeneity points to the existence of a common discourse about the country within the Chinese community.

How is Italy conceptualized by Chinese migrants in Italy? What is considered relevant about the target country? These are the questions addressed in this chapter. Only the views of the Wenzhouese group are highlighted here, as it is still notably the largest group in Italy. Since the Qingtianese group shares an interweaving past with the Wenzhouese in the history of their migration to Italy, it is reasonable to imagine that similar views exist among these two groups. In contrast one might detect different views in the typical discourse about Italy among migrants from Dongbei as they have a very different history of migration to Italy.

Previous research about Chinese migrants perspective on Italy

A pioneering work that reports the voice of Chinese migrants in Italy is *Wenzhou-Firenze* (Colombo *et al.* 1995). This volume touches on various aspects of Chinese migration to Tuscany in the early 1990s, when Prato was not yet the center of Chinese migration in the region. Some of the elements discussed by the Chinese interviewed in *Wenzhou-Firenze* are: impressions about how Italians deal with the law, how they spend their leisure time and their attitude towards Chinese migrants.

The next study to feature Chinese views on Italy is *Italian Chinese* (Ceccagno, 1998), in which the author reports parts of six interviews

Valentina Pedone, *A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy*,
ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print) ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online) © 2013 Firenze University Press

with Chinese immigrants in six short paragraphs titled *Italians as seen by Chinese*. The topics touched upon include differences and similarities between Italians and Chinese in public behavior, man/woman relationships, religion, and family life.

Nearly a decade later, another work, called *Exclusion and integration* (Berti 2000), was published, which reported on data about the perception of Italian society by Chinese immigrants. This volume presented the results of research carried out mainly through a questionnaire submitted to immigrants from different areas of the world with over 50 Chinese respondents. Questions dealt with various themes, and some elicited from the respondent a judgment on the cultural values of the host society (such as degree of loyalty, honesty, respect for others and so on).

A collection of papers about Chinese migration to Prato, titled *Living outside the walls: The Chinese in Prato*, was published in 2009. One of the papers included in this volume (Tarantino & Tosoni 2009) analyzes the representation in the Italian-based Chinese ethnic press of the street conflict involving Italian police and Chinese immigrants that took place in Milan in 2007.

The most detailed work on the subject, *How they see us and how they talk about us: Social representations of Chinese migrants in Rome*, stems from a research carried out through 48 in-depth interviews with people of Chinese origin in Italy (Fazzi, Martire, & Pitrone 2012). The topic of the interviews was specifically the perception and conceptualization of Italian culture and society. Sub-topics included judgments on Italian families, schools, institutions, politics, work ethic, lifestyle, man/woman relationships, friendship, customs and so on.

Another very recent work, *Selling and buying: Social mobility processes among Chinese in Prato*, reports, among other topics, on the point of view of Chinese residents on how Italian institutions and people in the small Tuscan city are reacting to the Chinese presence (Berti, Pedone, Valzania 2013). A specific focus is given by the interviewees to differences in attitudes towards work and leisure between Chinese and Italians.

Apart from some specific details, all of the above-mentioned works agree on certain viewpoints that appear to be shared within the Chinese population in Italy. In very general terms, Italy appears as a rather poor country, whose economy is slowly but surely plunging down. Streets are dirty compared to other countries in Europe and buildings are not well kept. Italians are lazy, spoiled, racist and

chauvinist. There is lack of public safety in Italy and Italians have the tendency to cheat and take advantage of others. On the positive side, Italy is acknowledged to be artistically beautiful and its climate and pure air are often praised. People are considered warm and romantic and the social and health system is especially appreciated. As we will see, some of these views also emerged in the interviews conducted during fieldwork in China. However, overall the answers of the subjects in Italy tended to indulge more in the observation of the daily behavior of Italians and on individual virtues (or lack thereof) of Italian people, while the comments received during the fieldwork in China referred mostly to the Italian society and system in general terms and how they respond to the needs of Chinese immigrants.

Italians in the pages of Sinoitalian literature and Italian-based Chinese ethnic press

An analysis carried out on a selected corpus of three novels (Zhai 1999; Hu 2009; Long 2009), a collection of memoirs (Liu Ruting, Shi Kedong, Wen Chengde, 2008), and four short stories (Ying 2008; Huang 2009; Jin 2006; Weng 2008) published by authors of Chinese origin in Italy stressed the presence of some reoccurring themes[1]. Similar remarks about Italy and Italians are also found in the Italian-based ethnic press, especially in the magazine *Cina in Italia* (China in Italy)[2], a bilingual monthly magazine edited by author and journalist Hu Lanbo, especially devoted to life of Chinese immigrants in Italy. This magazine, compared to the rest of the ethnic newspapers, gives more space to the readers, who very often publish in it their view about their host country and their stories of migration[3]. As anticipated, the themes that occur in this kind of spontaneous data collected in Italy deal more in detail with the judgment on the individual behavior of Italians, compared to the comments gathered during the fieldwork in China which focus on Italian society as a whole. What makes the remarks about Italy found in this kind of material especially interesting is the fact that they constitute spontaneous data, since they are not elicited by interviewers and thus they give a better insight on how important some views are deemed within the Chinese migrated group.

[1] On Sinoitalian literature see Chapter 6.

[2] The magazine has a different name in Chinese, *Shijie Zhongguo*, World China.

[3] For an overview on Italy-based Chinese press see Santangelo (2006).

The Italian family, when compared with the Chinese family, is judged by Chinese as being less stable. Most sources find the reason for such frailty is in Italian male behavior and Italian individualism in general. For instance, some writers tell stories of Italian husbands who only care about their own benefit and neglect that of the couple or of the family (Ying 2008 and Zhai 1999, among others). Some comments have stressed an unnatural dependence of grown Italian men on their mothers, which is also considered a cause of instability in the family, as it is Italian male chauvinism (Hu 2009 and Zhai 1999, among others).

In daily relations Italians are seen as exceptionally warm and friendly by most sources, nonetheless many observe that this openness is often perceived as excessive (for example Ying 2008), some perceive it as a sign of superficiality, and a consequence of a general tendency to not take anything seriously (Long 2009, among others). On the same note, several Chinese sources see Italians as lazy, not capable of hard work, excessively prone to indulge in food, vacations, expensive clothes and the like (Huang 2009).

Connected to the observed individualism and perceived inability to commit to any shared project (e.g. marriage), is the observation of lack of civic sense and little respect for public places and goods (Liu Ruting, Shi Kedong, Wen Chengde 2008). As some observers point out, this is also why the police in Italy are not reliable and the streets are not safe (Jin 2006; Deng 2008).

In many of the writings by Chinese in Italy there are complaints about how the Italian police do not enforce the law firmly enough. The whole public sphere appears unreliable (too much bureaucracy, constant changes in laws and regulations, little care for crime) and many denounce this unreliability and state that they do not trust Italians, for they often try to steal from Chinese or take advantage of them, even public officers (Jin 2006; Yi 2007; Hu 2007).

What the Chinese praise about Italians is their generosity and quickness to befriend with others, although this is also interpreted as a symptom of their refusal to take anything seriously (in relationships, in work, in school, in politics and so on). On the other hand in the ethnic press and in Sinoitalian literature, some Chinese immigrants praise Italian schools as being especially open and warm to children of foreign origin and find public healthcare, and the Italian public welfare system in general, to be excellent and better

in concept and realization than in their country of origin (Hu 2009; Weng 2008; Ruo 2011).

The power of the Wenzhou spirit

In July and August 2011 I carried out six weeks of fieldwork in the Ouhai district of Wenzhou China. Ouhai is one of the three districts within the Wenzhou urban area (the others being Lucheng and Yongjia). It is the largest of the three (more than 600 km²) but also the least densely populated, as it includes large portions of cultivated fields as well as mountainous areas. Ouhai is home to many bigger factories of nationally-famous brands (mostly light industry: lighters, glasses, locks etc. along with leather goods and textiles), but it also features many family-run factories, or smaller scale factories that very often produce goods to be exported abroad. During the fieldwork I carried out extensive observations of daily life in Ouhai and Lucheng districts, visited a local Protestant church, a Buddhist temple and the Wenzhou History Museum, and engaged in a number of casual conversations with Chinese migrants to Italy who were temporarily back home for the summer, as well as other Wenzhouese who had relatives or friends in Italy.

What needs to be taken into account when approaching the perspective that people in Wenzhou *qiaoxiang* areas, the areas of origin of Chinese migrants, have about Italy is the pervasiveness of the discourse about Wenzhoueseness on one side and the perception of Europe as a whole, and how it is in some ways connected to *Wenzhoueseness*, on the other (on similar issues see Li, 1999b). Wenzhouese are described as 'extremely peculiar' by common people, by media and by a whole subgenre of very popular reportage works devoted specifically to the characteristics of the Wenzhouese (among many others see Gao 2007; Yang 2010; Ren 2011; Zhou D. 2011).

The idea that the Wenzhouese are unique is certainly also nourished by the public support of the Wenzhou model of industrial development, a model that is based on the development of large numbers of small and medium family-run enterprises[4]. The objective success of many of such enterprises along with a pervasive narrative about Wenzhouese special talents contribute to the myth of

[4] On the Wenzhou model, or *Wenzhou moshi*, see, among others Liu (1992), Parris (1993), Li (1997), Tomba (1999).

Wenzhoueseness, the ability to produce wealth from scratch as an innate disposition.

In Table 2 there are just a few of the comments or remarks describing this idea, that I gathered while in Wenzhou:

Tab. 2 - Common sayings about Wenzhouese

Wenzhouren de xueye li dou liutang zhe tongqian de weidao	The blood flowing in Wenzhouese veins tastes like copper coins
Nali you shichang, nali jiu you Wenzhouren	The Wenzhouese are where the market is
Nali meiyou shichang, nali jiu hui chuxian wenzhouren	Where there is yet no market, Wenzhouese will soon appear
Meiyou Guangdongren bu gan chi de dongxi, meiyou Wenzhouren bu gan zhuan de qian	There is nothing Cantonese do not dare to eat and there is no kind of money Wenzhouese do not dare to earn
Wenzhouren zhidao xiaoqian shi daqian de zugong	Wenzhouese know that a small profit is the relative of a big profit
Qiong ren zhao gongzuo, Wenzhouren zhao shengyi zuo	Poor people look for jobs, Wenzhouese look for businesses
Wenzhouren baitian dang laoban, wanshang shui diban	During the day Wenzhouese are business owners, at night they sleep on the ground
Wenzhouren de yanguang mianxiang quan shijie	Wenzhouese cast their eyes on the world as a whole

Similar ideas are shared by those Wenzhouese who migrate to Italy, who, like the Wenzhouese in China, devote their efforts to the collection of wealth through family run enterprises. Somehow, the Wenzhouese migratory project to Europe is an emanation of the Wenzhou model and it is fueled by the optimism that springs from the trust in the potential of the «Wenzhouese spirit» Wenzhou jingsheng.

The migratory project is just another version of the family-run business typical of the Wenzhou model. As already pointed out in Chapter 1, this kind of project leaves virtually no space for cultural contamination by the foreign environment. Economic emancipation comes first and it is pursued by exploiting the presumed innate talents of the Wenzhouese.

The common idea that «Wenzhouese are where the market is» pushes Wenzhou migrants to conceptualize Europe as a homogenous item where the migrant can move around perpetually, looking for a favorable environment[5]. During my fieldwork in Wenzhou I was particularly impressed by two places that somehow could be considered symbolic of this view of Europe - the History Museum of Wenzhou and the Europetown neighborhood in Wenzhou. The photograph below (Fig. 11) shows a view of the area in Wenzhou called Europetown, where reproductions of European monuments and other European-looking items are displayed.

Fig. 11 - Replica of the Arc de Triomphe in Europetown, Wenzhou

Source: private archive

There is no European food available in this area, no European people live here, no particular European products are sold and no reference to any specific country in Europe is traceable. It is a Wenzhou space with a few European looking items on display, such as replicas of famous European monuments or similar architectural

[5] On the same topic see also Li (1999b) and Ceccagno (2003b).

details and western looking constructions. At the entrance to the area there is a sign stating 'Europetown' (*Ouzhoucheng*) that resembles the Chinatown gates found in cities all over the world.

Next picture (Fig. 12) shows part of a display titled 'Wenzhouese today' that can be found in the History Museum of Wenzhou. The display comes at the end of a number of displays depicting various stages in the historical development of Wenzhou and its people. It represents a Chinese restaurant abroad and it features two Wenzhouese men and a Caucasian family, one of the two Wenzhouese supposedly the owner of the restaurant and the other a waiter.

Fig. 12 - Display titled 'Wenzhouese today' at the History Museum of Wenzhou

Source: private archive

In addition to the importance of the historicalization of the Wenzhouese migration abroad as a defining event of the Wenzhou population, it is also interesting to notice that even though the scene is supposed to take place abroad, the space is again almost completely non-foreign.

Different families, similar tales

Aside from the observation of life in Wenzhou-Ouhai and occasional exchanges with locals[6], I was introduced by Prof. Yan

[6] During my permanence in the area I engaged in casual conversations with six migrants who live in Italy and were back to Wenzhou for summer vacation. Four of them were with their children and I found out they lived in Italy because they would

Xiaopeng (Wenzhou University) to a group of five migrants and relatives of migrants. We had two different meetings that took place in the subjects' homes. The atmosphere was very familiar and to some extent the meetings could also be considered to be focused group discussions because different people (especially Prof. Yan) took part in the discussion. Nonetheless it was typically the owner of the house that answered most of my questions, while others would just comment. In the interviews I adopted a biographical approach, topics being history of self, of the Italian experience, judgments about Italy and about Italian society.

The first meeting was attended by Mr Xia, two other people who have relatives in Europe, Prof. Yan, and myself. The second meeting was attended by Mr Liao, his wife, Mr Xia, two other people who have relatives in Europe, Prof. Yan, and myself. Despite the fact that everyone was encouraged to speak up during the meetings, it was mostly Prof. Yan, Mr Xia, Mr Liao and myself who lead the conversations. Nonetheless the other participants took part in the exchange by adding occasional comments, nodding, helping rephrase or the like.

The two main respondents have very different backgrounds, one is a *guiqiao*, a returned migrant, while the other is a *qiaojuan*, a relative of migrants. The different experiences with migration, along with the differences in status, prove how some concepts and interpretations of life in Italy are object of common narrative throughout the Wenzhou *qiaoxiang* population.

Xia 'aocun

The two families live in the small village of Xia'aocun, in Chashan, Ouhai. Of its total population of approximately 30,000 people, about 8000 are migrants. Roughly 4000 live in Italy, 2000 live in France and the rest reside in over 20 different countries in Europe (mostly the Netherlands, Spain, Greece and Eastern Europe, almost none in the UK and very few in Germany)[7]. As many similar *qiaoxiang*, which developed thanks to the financial contribution from migrants

call their children by their Italian names. The other two worked in stores in downtown Wenzhou.

[7] These approximate data were given by one of the subjects, here Mr. Xia, who is the president of the League of the returned overseas Chinese of the Chashan area (*Wenzhoushi Ouhaiqu Chashanjiedao guiguo huaqiao lianhehui*).

working abroad, Xia'aocun does not have a real center but it is formed by a few streets, mostly roughly paved, that cross cultivated fields. On such streets, in a rather dispersed manner, there are several private mansions built by overseas migrants. Each of these mansions belongs to a single family of migrants, they are three or four stories tall and their shape is quite often a mix of traditional Chinese elements, such as *dougong* (traditional interlocking wooden brackets), adorned gates, occasional glazed tile roofs, together with western elements such as neoclassical colonnades, domes, steeples. The result is very peculiar and it clearly expresses a status of wealth (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13 - Some examples of mansions belonging to returned migrants in Xia'aocun, Wenzhou-Ouhai

Source: private archive

Besides these kinds of independent buildings, the streets are delimited by stripes of three story bare cement buildings divided in single apartments. The façade of this kind of buildings is very simple without any decorative item whatsoever. Street level apartments often host small local business or small family run factories.

Rich mansions, factories, lower class condos, occasional Christian churches, open air food carts and restaurants fill the dusty paths that unexpectedly cross the cultivated fields in this area, which are also characterized by a massive presence of channels, rivers and ponds (Fig. 15), perfectly providing, at a glance, the dreams of emancipation from the field or the street to the mansion, which have fuelled the hopes and ambitions of many migrating families (see Li 1999b).

Fig. 14 - Common apartments in Xia'aocun, Wenzhou-Ouhai

Source: private archive

Fig. 15 - A channel in Xia 'aocun

Source: private archive

The tale of Mr. Xia

Mr Xia[8] is a local authority and is a very respected and admired individual within the local community. He owns one of the most impressive mansions on the street and holds important positions in five different *huaqiao*[9] associations both in Italy and in Wenzhou-

[8] Names of respondents are fictional.

[9] *Huaqiao*, overseas Chinese, is usually used to refer to first generation migrants. The term *huayi* is often preferred for the following generations, while *huaren* refers to ethnic Chinese in general. The distinctions among the terms are sometimes blurred.

Ouhai[10]. The walls within Mr Xia's villa are covered with red banners embroidered with golden characters and given to him as a token of gratitude for help received. In the years, Mr Xia has helped many fellow countrymen in many ways and contributed, among other things, funds for an elementary school. It is evident that he is a man of great social status in Xia'aocun.

«I love cappuccino!» declares Mr Xia at the beginning of the meeting and kindly offers his stash of Italian dehydrated cappuccino to all the guests. In his fifties, Mr. Xia, as another participant to the meeting who is back from Europe as well, wears snow-white pants and bright colored shirt, in a fashion that, according to my informants, is very unusual in China for a person that age, but it is common among overseas Chinese.

He confesses he does not speak much Italian, despite the fact that he had lived in Italy for over 20 years. He arrived in 1989 in Rome but soon moved to Bari, in southern Italy, and started selling lighters on the street. During his permanence in Italy he moved to Naples and then back to Rome again, without really rooting anywhere. He tells us he took any job that was available to a Chinese in Italy: he started as a peddler, then became a dishwasher, worked in a restaurant, became a convenience store owner in Bari, opened a clothing store in Naples then dealt with leather goods in Rome and finally became an importer from China. He insists that life was very hard for him and that he earned everything that he now has with unspeakable sacrifice: «I started as a peddler, do you understand what that means?».

Mr Xia has three daughters, two of them today have their own store in Rome and bought an apartment there, while the youngest (the only Italian born) moved to Beijing to attend high school and college. According to Mr Xia, she decided to go to China to avoid the morally questionable behavior of her Italian classmates, who were «too keen on smoking, sexual intercourse and drug consumption».

[10] *Yidali Luoma daye laijinchukou maoyi jituan*, *Luoma Zhejiang huaqiao huaren lianyihui*, *Ouhai Wenzhou huaqiao huaren lianyihui*, *Wenzhoushi Ouhaiqu guiguohuaqiao lianhehui*, *Wenzhoushi Ouhaiqu Chashanjiedao guiguo huaqiao lianhehui*.

Mr Xia's point of view on Italy

The most evident observation about Italy is that its economy is plunging down, making it a less and less desirable target for Chinese migrants. Italy is judged mostly on terms of chances it gives or does not give to Chinese migrants to earn money.

> In Wenzhou qiaoxiang whenever asked about personal knowledge of Europe the interviewees would without exception immediately talk about how high the wages are that people can earn there (Li 1999, p. 185).

In the words of Mr Xia there is a sense of reproach against Italians mixed with a certain Wenzhouese pride. He explains how Italians lost an opportunity to enjoy profit from Chinese migrant importers when they imposed the new abnormally strict set of regulations for custom clearance in Naples harbor, causing all the Italian-based overseas Chinese importers to move their business to Spain through Barcelona harbor (see Chapter 2). In Mr Xia's eyes Italians partly deserve the current economic situation, while Chinese migrants no longer find Italy to be a desirable destination. He tells us from 2010 to 2011 over 60% of the Chinese migrants who were in Italy moved their businesses to new countries, especially to Africa, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union: «On flights to Italy from Wenzhou today you only see grandmas and grandpas who go visit those relatives who migrated years ago, new migrants go elsewhere». In Mr Xia's view, Italy has started issuing countless rules and regulations against Chinese since 2006; only those migrants who already had stable activities by then or the few who have low expectations stayed, many Wenzhouese entrepreneurs left searching for better occasions in virgin lands.

The opinion that Italians are shortsighted about the advantages brought to the country by Chinese enterprises has a counterpart in the discourse about the Wenzhouese capacity of creating wealth from nothing, without ever giving up and without ever rooting anywhere; «Wenzhouese cast their eyes on the world as a whole» says Mr. Xia. The only tie that seems unshakable is that with the native village[11]. Another comment on Italy refers to the life of Chinese immigrants there. Life is incredibly hard for Chinese

[11] On Chinese mobility and migration narrative see Nyíri (2001); (2010).

migrants in Italy, repeats Mr. Xia. Working hours are impossible (an average 18 hours a day, in Mr Xia's words) and while only a few years ago migrants in Italy could accumulate some wealth through hard work, now the economic crisis has affected even those profits gained through hardships. On the other hand, in Mr. Xia's eyes, Italians look for a scapegoat to blame for the economic crisis and often find it in Chinese migrants. He thinks Italians could never work as much as Chinese migrants, «They are not hard workers».

When asked more about Italians Mr Xia's first observation is that Italians are dishonest. He finds them inclined to cheat and swindle and proves his judgment by telling a few episodes in which different Italian business partners betrayed him, running away with his money or simply not giving back money they had borrowed from him. The overall picture is that of a people who would rather take the easy way of cheating than work hard to earn money. This opinion, along with the complaint about the groundless rules and regulations, gives a portrait of a rather unfair society where justice is not for all.

It is not surprising then that the few good things about Italy are completely incidental. Mr Xia likes the delicious food, the foamy cappuccino he brought back from Rome, and the beauty of cities. Compared to China streets are cleaner, traffic is more controlled and people stand in line in public offices. These are the few positive remarks that Mr. Xia had after 20 years of life in Italy.

The tale of Mr. Liao

Mr. Liao does not have a business card, he does not like to attend to public meetings or take official positions in the local community. He is an old-fashioned man, living a simple life, in an almost traditional manner, and he is very proud of that.

Mr Liao's apartment is not far away from Mr. Xia's mansion, on the edge of an unpaved road that crosses a huge cultivated field. The one where Mr. Liao lives is not a tall building. His family owns two stories in a white cement house. «This is a traditional Wenzhouese house. It was built in the late seventies. It's one of the oldest buildings in the area», Mr Liao says proudly. On the side of the apartment there is a small factory, very similar to those seen in Prato, or anywhere that Wenzhouese entrepreneurs settled down. In this context these kinds of factories are considered a symbol of local entrepreneurial spirit, a sign of development and modernity. Some of them have large colored signs

outside advertizing the kind of goods that are produced within, their contact numbers and the countries (mostly European) that they have deals with.

The interior of the house is also very traditional. The walls are nearly empty. There are only a few traditional paintings hanging and a large Mao Zedong portrait in the hall, something rarely seen in Chinese cities today. The furniture is also traditional Chinese and the whole atmosphere is rather peculiar for today's China, as the apartment seems frozen in time. The general impression is of humbleness but also of great dignity. There is a little backyard, typical of traditional Wenzhouese houses, where Mr Liao and his wife grow flowers and plants. The white wooden gate that faces the yard is decorated with two simple red paper scrolls (duilian) that say: «May the plum flower display its five petals and the bamboo leaves celebrate our numerous children»[12].

Mr Liao sits by his wife and sips his tea while he tells his story. He wears simple grey clothes and leather sandals, his wife wears black. They are in their sixties. He barely speaks Mandarin, he can only speak Wenzhouese.

Mr Liao retired after a life of hard work, he never moved abroad because he loves his life in China too much. He prefers a simple life and has never felt attracted by the possibility of better earnings - not if the price is leaving China and living a hectic and hard life as his daughters do.

Mr Liao has four daughters and they all went to Europe looking to strike it rich. Two of them live in Italy, both in Naples, one lives in the Netherlands and one in Belgium. Even his sister lives abroad, she is a businesswoman in Rome. Like Mr Xia she imports Chinese goods to Europe. His daughters in Italy have lived there for ten years and now own a factory. He visited them only once for a few days. His idea of Italy is based on that short experience, on what he hears from his daughters and sister and from what is commonly discussed within the *qiaoxiang*.

Mr Liao's point of view on Italy

«Italy is rich. That is why we want to go there», Mr. Liao says candidly when asked about what he knows about Italy. Later on, he

[12] *Meihua kai wufu, zhuye qing san duo*. The five petals of a plum flower symbolize longevity, wealth, health, good virtue and a peaceful death.

corrects his statement, saying that Italy is not as rich as it used to be, but it still represents a good chance to earn some money for migrants.

In Mr Liao's view, Italy is more developed than China, but that is only because it started developing earlier. He thinks the pace of Italian development is too slow; actually he believes there is no more development, while China is developing very fast and it soon will surpass Italy «in ten years maximum». According to Mr. Liao, this is why many Chinese are now leaving Italy. China changes constantly so it can adapt to the world, while Italy is always the same and this is why it stays behind. «Today's China is completely different from that of ten years ago», observes Mr Liao, «while Italy did not change much».

Besides prosperity, what evokes Mr. Liao's praise is the fact that Italy is cleaner and less polluted than China, something his daughters always complain about when they visit him. He admits that the air is better in Italy and there is not as much dust and pollution as there is in China; at the same time he stresses that the reason for this difference in quality of air is again in the different stages of development in which the two countries are. Mr Liao is sure that Italy was not always this way and he is also positive that once China has reached full development, there will not be the need to pollute the air anymore and the climate will be better as well. The remarks expressed by Mr Liao about slow development in the West compared to China, and the topic of pollution as a transitory phenomenon aimed to catch up with the wealthy western countries, are part of a common discourse that has been influenced both by official positions and by public opinion on the pages of popular Chinese magazines, newspapers, tv shows and blogs.

Mr Liao thinks the most evident positive aspect of Italy, compared to other more developed western countries, is that it gives Chinese migrants a chance to gather some money. He adds that the price for that is hard work, something his daughters always complain about. He tells that even though they already reached a rather high economic status, they still work every day and eat out every meal to look after their business. Mr Liao thinks he could never live such a hectic life, but his daughters like it more than life back home. He mentions that it is a Wenzhouese thing to feel alive through earning ones living, chasing an always higher goal, never staying idle. Nonetheless he confesses he could never live in Italy, «but maybe it's only because I'm old». As already seen with Mr Xia, the judgment on Italy is seen only through the perspective of Chinese workers and the advantages it offers to them.

«I heard from my daughters that seafood is good in Italy, but Wenzhouese seafood is famous nationwide, how can you beat that?» Food, along with good air and the possibility for Chinese to get rich, is the other positive aspect of Italy, while the most evident negative aspects are criminality and immorality. Mr Liao knows that there is a lot of delinquency in Italy. His daughters have been robbed several times and their bags have been snatched on the street, while in China «when Mao was alive, we would not even lock our front door»[13]. Italy is unsafe in Mr. Liao's imagination, criminality is rampant and moral sense is corrupted. In his tale Mr Liao's insists on a point only briefly touched by Mr Xia when talking about his younger daughter: Italians are often morally depraved, they engage in sexual intercourse at an early age and often commit adultery. Rape is a common crime in Italy, according to Mr Liao, while life in Wenzhou is safe, slow, simple; it does not give the same chance of emancipation to youngsters and it is repetitive and predictable maybe, but for this family it is preferable by far to that in Europe.

The unflattering portrait of Italians

There is a common discourse about Italy that can be traced in the opinions of Chinese migrants to Italy, in the Italy-based Chinese ethnic press, in Sinoitalian literature and in the comments of *qiaojuan* and *guiqiao* in the areas of origin.

Italy is defined as a country rich in beautiful buildings and art, a country in general terms more developed than China (although not for long), in which the cities are clean, the weather is very pleasant and the air is not polluted. Italians are deemed friendly and warm, but also superficial, unreliable, immoral, not capable of any commitment, and irrationally dependent on good food and sex. Overall Italians are considered weak-willed, lazy, unable to sacrifice for future goals, but also lovers of 'good life'; this, in the eyes of Chinese migrants pushes them to be inclined towards cheating and prone to criminality. The perceived lack of respect for laws and authority gives Chinese migrants an image

[13] On 01/04/12 a Chinese migrant and his nine month old daughter were murdered in Rome during a robbery. The event had enormous media coverage since the Italian president went to visit the surviving mother at the hospital and over 10.000 people of Chinese origin from all across Italy gathered in memory of the two victims. It is expected that the idea of Italy as unsafe will be even more widespread than before in the country of origin after this sad event.

of insecurity. Italians do not have civic sense and even the police are not trustworthy. The excessive flexibility of rules and regulations is condemned as being a sign of poor resolution, but the weakness of legal controls and the tendency to tolerate illegality has also made Italy a favored country of migration in the past (Li 1999b).

Similarly, for Chinese from the areas within China from which most migrations to Italy originate, the qualities and shortcomings of Italy are almost exclusively defined in relation to their influence on the migration project. Fieldwork showed how the discourse on Wenzhoueseness is also relevant in the conceptualization of the host country as a mere temporary setting for migrant businesses:

> People in Wenzhou's qiaoxiang consider getting rich in Europe an opportunity reserved only for them; some even feel it is their common destination or birthright (Li 1999b, p. 190).

It is important to note that there is a certain difference in judgment depending on whether the subjects express their ideas while in Italy or while in their home town. Casual conversations with Chinese migrants visiting home during the fieldwork and the in-depth interviews report openly harsh judgments on Italy that are rarely found in data gathered in the host country.

For the most part, the oldest children of Chinese immigrants in Italy are only in their twenties, and thus the values and interpretation of the host country of their parents surely have an impact on their identity formation. Future directions of study on the subject of the formation of local hybrid cultures in European countries that are the target of Chinese migration will have to take into account, among other factors, the influence of first generation views and opinions of such countries and how they differ or match with those of the following generations.

CHAPTER 4

CHINESE-ITALIAN TEENAGERS AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION ACROSS COUNTRIES

Despite the fact that Chinese migration to Italy is a century long phenomenon, the majority of children of Chinese migrants in Italy are today still very young since the migration flow only started to become numerically relevant during the 1990s. Of the 277,570 Chinese migrants currently living in Italy, it is estimated that 72,863 are minors (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2013). Local laws do not allow children of foreigners that are born in Italy to receive Italian citizenship, so all children of Chinese migrants have Chinese citizenship and can only apply for Italian citizenship when they turn 18. A conspicuous number of studies address various aspects of life among the Chinese second generation or, more in general, of children of Chinese migrants in Italy, including also the so called generation 1.5, represented by children of migrants who were born in China but rejoined their parents in Italy and attended some years of mandatory school in Italy (among others see Ceccagno 2004b; Cologna 2002b; Cologna, Breveglieri 2003).

In the next pages I report the results of two studies that I carried out at two different times, here referred to as study A and study B. Study A is based on fieldwork that took place among a group of teenagers of Chinese origin in Rome in 2003. Study B is based on fieldwork that took place 8 years afterwards, in 2011, in Wenzhou among a different group of teenagers of Chinese origin who live in Italy. The two studies are distant in time and space but they both focus on identity negotiation. The results suggest that teenagers of Chinese origin today are more aware of their place in Italian society than members of the first generation of migrants are. They more openly criticize the stigma and prejudice they feel victim of, but at the same time develop a stronger feeling of belonging to the country. As already emerged in Study A, the students still feel a deep

Valentina Pedone, *A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy*,
ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print) ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online) © 2013 Firenze University Press

connection with the country of origin, but they do not idealize it as it was common a few years back. They also seem to have developed an independent set of values from that of their parents, which is also juxtaposed to that of their Italian peers, giving birth to an original synthesis.

Study A[1]

Subjects for this study were selected in an Italian public junior high school located near Piazza Vittorio an area of Rome with a high concentration of Chinese businesses (see Chapter 2). A suitable school was selected after consultation with local education professionals. At the time of the research, there was a third year class in the school that was attended by nine students of Chinese origin. Most of the fieldwork for Study A was carried out among those young students.

The ethno-anthropological data were collected through eight months of observation, two focus groups (one with people close to the subjects and one with the subjects themselves), fifteen semi-structured interviews with relevant informants (mostly specialists who work with immigrants and Chinese adults who live in Rome), ten semi-structured interviews with Chinese parents, thirteen semi-structured interviews with teachers who have Chinese students in their classes, and three in-depth interviews to discuss the conclusions of the research (two with the subjects and one with a second generation Chinese college student).

For the observations our research group decided to use the 'shadowing' technique, an observation technique used in Italy for the first time by Marianella Sclavi (1991; 2000). According to this technique, the researcher must follow a single subject, just as a shadow, in any key moment and domain of his/her daily life, taking notes about any relevant behavior. The benefits of the shadowing lay in the fact that it allows the researcher to observe how the subject behaves and reacts in different contexts and domains, unveiling information that otherwise might be neglected. On the other hand the main limitation of the technique is that it obviously cannot provide

[1] This part presents the results of a research project funded by the Italian Ministry of Welfare that was carried out between 2003 and 2004 with the coordination of Fondazione Labos and Cisp. Findings of Study A were already published on the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* in an article titled *As a rice plant in a wheat field: identity negotiation among children of Chinese immigrants* (Pedone 2011).

general findings, as it favors depth and detail over representativeness. In order to mitigate such downsides, the research group planned the aforementioned semi-structured and in-depth interviews along with the focus groups.

Among the nine Chinese students in the chosen class two girls were shadowed as main subjects. One, here called Barbara, was born in Italy and was 13 years old at the time of the research, while the other, here called Youyou, arrived in Italy at 7 years of age and was 15 years old at the time of the research. Only recently have a larger number of Chinese families been able to afford to raise their children on Italian soil; until late 1990s it was common to give birth to children in Italy, but then send them to live with family or friends to be raised and schooled in China, with the children rejoining the parents in Italy after school age. As the results of the research show, the process of adjustment to Italian society of Italian-born Chinese differs from that of those who arrived later. Following these two different subjects made it possible to have an insight on the life of both typologies of children of Chinese immigrants.

The findings have been ordered according to the three most relevant domains of the subjects' daily life, family, school, and society/peers, as they emerged in their relevance through the process of observation itself.

The family domain

As for the family domain, the fieldwork found a noticeable emotional distance between parents and children. In comparison with their Italian peers, the Chinese children under observation rarely interacted with their parents. The subjects hardly ever referred to their parents in their daily talk:

> While on the stairs I asked Youyou for her cell phone number. She asked me what I wanted it for and I told her I wanted to spend some time with her outside school to know her better. Then she told me that, once at home, I would have never recognized her because she never 'opens her mouth' in front of her parents (field notes).

Such emotional distance, also reported in other studies about Chinese families in Italy (Ceccagno 2004b; Cologna 2002a), can have a number of reasons. The first is the habit, extremely common for the

Chinese group, to send children to China for part of their educational curriculum. This trend is gradually slowing down but in the 1990s it was almost the rule that the children met their parents only after they spent a few years in the Chinese school system (Ceccagno 2004b). According to the interviews with the parents, by sending the children abroad they provide them with a basic knowledge of the Chinese language that is still necessary to be functional within Chinese ethnic business abroad and, of course, in the motherland. At the same time, especially for those families who are still at an early stage in their migratory plans, parents deem it wiser to delegate the education of their children to relatives at home who have more time and better living conditions than themselves:

> Even when living in Italy it is important that the children eat Chinese food. I heard of some kids who don't eat Chinese food anymore. It's a shame. School is also important. If the children haven't already attended school in China they should go there as often as possible (interview with parent).

Another reason for the observed emotional distance is lack of time together. As pointed out in Chapter 1 of this volume, for Chinese migrants the first years, and sometimes decades, of life in Italy are devoted to very tight work schedules that do not allow for much time to spend with the family.

The above-mentioned distance does not imply that the children are or feel abandoned. It is in fact the other way around, for the parents put a lot of effort into controlling the lives, acquaintances, and habits of their children:

> Barbara: My mom doesn't let me hang out with Zhao because her family is poor. Last month my mom went looking for Zhao on the street, just to tell her not to see me again! Now we chat on line, she gives a fake name, so that my mom doesn't know it's her! (interview).

Parents feel extremely protective against what they do not fully understand: Italian society and values. On the other hand they firmly control the interactions of their children with other members of the Chinese migrated group. As we will see, young children of Chinese tend to associate with Chinese peers. Nevertheless, it is often the case that families discourage interchanges between their children

and other Chinese families they do not already know from the motherland. When asked about the matter, Chinese parents stated that they deem the ethnic group environment more dangerous and less enriching than the Italian one.

Children, for the most part, often repeated they felt it was their duty to pay back the family for all the efforts they put forth on a daily basis. The entire family is called to work for the success of the migration project; the role of the children is to not interfere with parental choices. Even when these choices imply the complete deprivation of social exchanges with peers outside school, the children do not engage in open conflict nor complain; the most common reaction is that of a detached acceptance of parental control.

The school domain

During the observations in the classroom, a student of African origin once complained that 'the Chinese classmates always do the same things'. In the class under study there were several immigrant students but the Chinese were the only ones to be ethnically labeled by their own classmates. The homogeneity of this group was perceived as irritating, if not threatening, by their non-Chinese peers. The general behavior of the nine Chinese subjects in the class was remarkably passive and quiet. As a rule, they showed themselves to be unwilling to interact either with teachers or peers:

> The Chinese students, unlike their classmates, do not leave the class during the break. There are two groups of Chinese students: one consists only of girls. Youyou is there, laughing loudly and acting like a clown for her quiet audience. The other group sits on the desks at the back of the room: it consists only of boys, acting 'cool', chewing gum without speaking much. Barbara sits among them, she seems like she is posing with them, headphones on her ears, sporting her best 'grown-up' attitude (field notes).

Overall, passivity and the tendency to relate only to the in-group were the two characteristics observed in class that only pertained to the Chinese students. According to a recent study by Dalla Zuanna, Farina, Strozza (2009) based on a sample of 10,000 foreign minors in Italy, on average 70% of all minors see their Italian friends outside school «often or very often», while this was the case for only 31%

of minors of Chinese origin, by far the lowest percentage of all nationalities considered.

Many Chinese students in Italy attended some school in the motherland. The influence of the Chinese school system, which is more discipline-oriented than the Italian one, is very strong on these students. What is perceived as a passive behavior, for example in teacher-student exchanges, is in fact appropriate in the context of origin. This model of behavior is absorbed by children not only in the Chinese school system, but also within the family. It traces back to an ideal of social interaction that calls each member of a group to adhere to norms of appropriateness that are based on the group and not on the individual.

It is understood that if it is only the in-group who recognizes such a set of norms, the individuals will tend only to relate to those within the in-group. Consequently, Chinese children often prefer to avoid interactions with other students or teachers who fail to grasp their attempts to be adequate (Cologna 2002a). According to this interpretation, the tendency of the observed Chinese students to relate only to their Chinese peers stems from the need not to be deemed 'different' or 'inappropriate', something they manage to achieve only when dealing with other Chinese people.

To explain the lack of interaction with non-Chinese peers it is also necessary to take the language barrier into account. It is a fact that most Chinese students (those who attended part of the mandatory school in China) have some problems with the Italian language, more so than the majority of other immigrant children (Cologna, Breveglieri 2003). The language problem is so emotionally loaded that the children considered it to be their main obstacle to a life of integration. Fluency in Italian becomes a means to evaluate each other, sometimes in a very cruel way:

> Barbara: Giulia [a non-Chinese and non-Italian student] talks all the time even if she can't speak Italian. Not even the teacher understands her. Last time she was asked where she was from and she did not know it [laughs along with the other Chinese students]. She's so stupid! (focus group).

Although the language barrier is considered the first cause of isolation for Chinese students, both by themselves but also by a number of teachers, the comparison with other foreign children

with similar problems shows that very often the latter manage to find valuable strategies to surmount such a barrier.

We can isolate some factors that have a strong influence on the acquisition of Italian by children of Chinese immigrants. The nature of the Chinese migration project, as it is described in the first chapter of this volume, accounts for the low level of linguistic competence among the parents. The first generation still has very little contact with Italian society, and ethnic business does not make it a necessity. As a matter of fact, Italian was not spoken by any of the parents of the subjects, while there was no similar problem with the other foreign parents.

The tendency for Chinese students to only relate to the in-group, creating a closed network in which Chinese is the favored language of exchange, and the fact that Italian is not spoken at home, all contribute to slow the acquisition of a fluency in Italian within the peer domain.

The society/peer domain

During the eight months of observation, I took part in some of the rare get-togethers of the subjects outside school. In general terms, a group of seven to ten Chinese teenagers would all meet at a park or at somebody's house in the afternoon. Most commonly it was the older subjects, from the 13 to 18 age bracket, who promoted such meetings. Relatives and friends outside the class were invited, all of Chinese origin. In this context the subjects spontaneously complained about their life conditions, insisting on the fact that they perceive their life in Italy as 'very empty':

> Youyou: I hate being at my mother's store, because I'm always alone there (field notes).
>
> Chinese classmate: In my spare time I like sleeping, playing with my computer, and watching Chinese soap operas (composition).

In the company of their peers the children observed were not afraid to admit they felt lonely. Their confessions reflected the impressions recorded during the observations and match what has been extensively reported by Cologna (2002b; Cologna, Breveglieri 2003) and Ceccagno (2004b). The subjects appeared dramatically isolated - stuck between the pressure of their familiar duties and

those of a society that they are not interested in being part of. On the other hand children are constantly reminded by parents and society itself that they will never be anything other than Chinese, although Study B shows that today Chinese teenagers in Italy have raised their self awareness as a distinctive, bicultural group.

The emotional distress observed in the Chinese kids in Rome resulted in an idealization of China, even for those children who left the country when they were only 2-3 years old or were born in Italy. China was actually the only place where the family would let them be free and it also is the one place where their behavior was properly interpreted:

> Youyou: Try to go to China one day. A day there is better than a month here. Even an hour there is more fun than a month here. Even just one minute (focus group).

All the young Chinese contacted during the research were deeply attached to contemporary Chinese culture. During their leisure time they made continuous references to the Chinese world (by using Chinese chat lines, playing Chinese card games, listening to Chinese music, watching Chinese DVDs, eating Chinese snacks, reading Chinese magazines, playing Chinese videogames etc.). At the same time, little or no interest for things Italian was observed.

Even though the young Chinese in many aspects seemed to be victims of circumstance, they also appeared to have very clear goals for their future. When the students in the class under observation were asked what they wanted to be as adults, almost everyone revealed a personal dream, while the nine Chinese students all said they only cared about being wealthy, hopefully by working in trade:

> Teacher: What would you like to do when you grow up?
>
> Chinese student: I want to be rich (field notes).

That shows that the children's point of view on the future was exactly the same as their parents as it appeared from interviews with them:

> Researcher: What kind of job you'd like your son to do in the future?
>
> Chinese parent: It doesn't matter. He can decide as long as

> it is economically rewarding. It doesn't matter which job, what matters is the money he makes (interview)

A similar inter-generational overlap of values emerged regarding attitudes towards love and marriage, as we can read in the words of 13 year-old, Italian-born Barbara:

> Barbara: I don't think love is such an important thing. I don't care whether in my life I'm going to fall in love or not. But I will get married, that's for sure.
>
> Researcher: 'Really? Aren't the two things connected at all for you?'
>
> Barbara [laughing]: Oh no, this is a Chinese thing, that's why you don't understand. We just do get married, that's all. Love is a totally different matter. I know it sounds strange to you, but to me it's you Italians who are strange: you're obsessed with love, it's a real mania! (interview).

It seems that there was a perfect coincidence between the future life projects of the observed children and those of their parents.

> I hope she will marry a Chinese. This way they will have the same habits. Because Chinese and Italian habits are different. If they share the same habits, once they get married their future will be better (interview with parent).
>
> Usually Chinese don't like to get married with Italians. It's because of the language. It's a big problem for the mother-in-law, for instance. If the son-in-law doesn't speak Chinese communication is hard (interview with parents).

Nevertheless, young Chinese who have grown up in Italy perceived that there was some radical difference between themselves and children who were growing up in China:

> Youyou: I feel better when I'm with my friends from the School of Chinese. They all grew up in Italy. The way they dress, what they say, it's all more Italian then with the Chinese friends I have in the public school (interview).

Even though the values embraced by the young Chinese in Italy basically did not differ from those of their parents, the youngsters who spent enough time in Italy did not seem to identify themselves anymore with those who never left China.

Study B

In July 2011 I took part in a summer camp organized by Wenzhou University for teenagers of Chinese origin from all over the world. The name of the camp was 'Chinese root seeking trip' (*Zhongguo xungen zhi lu*) and provided three weeks of language courses, cultural activities and short field trips to 81 young Chinese who mostly were born in Wenzhouese families throughout Europe. While it is an established habit for second generation Chinese in the USA to attend such projects (see for example Louie 2004), it is absolutely new for a university in Southern Zhejiang to provide this kind of summer camp specifically targeting children of immigrants, since migration from these areas is still rather recent. It is common for older youth of Zhejiangese origin to attend summer language courses in different Chinese universities. However, the unique characteristic of this camp is that it is open to teenagers as young as 11 years old. The participants all live, eat, study, and play together on campus and are controlled at all times by a number of tutors provided by the university. The idea of the camp is very popular among parents of teenagers who send their children to their grandparents' homes in China to spend the summer. The participants are in fact given the chance to spend weekends with their relatives if they live in Wenzhou.

During the camp I lived in the dormitory where the participants were and attended all meals and all classes with them. I also went on two fieldtrips with the students. Besides daily and constant observation I had the chance to interview some of the participants and to submit a questionnaire to the 31 Italy based teenagers, who constitute the subjects for this study.

The main difference between the group observed for this study and the group observed for Study A lies in the fact that the first group was observed in Italian public school, and so the kids all came from families with different backgrounds and there was no specific social level that was overrepresented. In the summer camp, although the fees were very affordable, it is obvious that there was a certain selection, because less wealthy children could not participate in such a camp. Nonetheless the neighborhoods where the Italy-based children lived were all lower class neighborhoods, so it is also important to consider that it is not only especially rich families that send their children to camps like this. In fact it is the middle class of the Chinese migrant group that is the main target of such camps. In fact it is very common

for Chinese families in Italy, even those in economic distress, to invest substantial amounts of money in their children's education - sending them to private schools and colleges and to afternoon schools of Chinese.

Since the teenagers at the camp were constantly immersed in the same peer domain, I focused on one specific topic in this report rather than organizing the results according to domains. The focus of this study therefore is the feeling of belonging (or not belonging) to the two cultures in which the subjects grew up and live, and the conceptualization of an original distinct Sinoitalian culture that includes elements from both cultures.

The first general remark about the behavior of this group, compared to the one in Study A, is that many of its members would constantly complain about China. Whereas the first group referred continuously to China as the land of perfection, this group would perpetually whine about China being «too hot, too dirty and too smelly». The overall attitude of the observed teenagers was one of keeping an emotional distance from the country and its population, behaving as they belonged to a different, superior, milieu.

They would use Italian, speaking loud to complain, and since the only people who could understand Italian were the other participants, it was to them that the message was directed; Chinese teachers and tutors were completely cut out of these comments. During class the participants were very confrontational, compared to the attitude of the group observed for Study A during their class in Italian public school. Nonetheless, a similar attitude was noticed during fieldwork for Study A when the some of the children who were very passive during class in the morning would act completely different in an afternoon Chinese school run by Chinese migrants.

Some of the observed kids were also aggressive with the teachers and mocked them in Chinese although, according to interviews with the Chinese instructors, this was more typical of teenagers coming from France. The Italy residents would mostly use Italian to complain aloud. The most typical complaints were about hygiene and smell (they would complain about everything smelling: the streets, the school, the canteen, while this was not always true), about the food not being good (while the university provided a very rich and high quality buffet with both Chinese and Western food) and professors being unreasonably strict.

The fact that the complaints were directed only to Italy-based peers suggests that they were a means to bond and create a common ground with only this group. Moreover, while the majority of the complaints had cultural connotations, they clearly addressed aspects of Chinese life the teenagers wanted to distance themselves from. Such complaints appeared especially meaningful as they would have been expected from Italian kids who have never had any Chinese experience before, but appeared very exagerated and out of place when uttered by kids who had lived in China and supposedly felt some affection for the country. There could have been various factors that triggered these kinds of remarks, such as the need for the single individuals to find a common ground upon which they could quickly create a group and avoid the stress of confronting each other, or the influence of the once common attitude of superiority found in Overseas Chinese when visiting home. When confronting this behavior with the results of the interviews and the questionnaire, it seems that the frequent complaints might also be the by-product of a process of identity negotiation that this generation of Chinese teenagers is going through. More about this will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The questionnaire

A questionnaire was submitted in Italian to the 31 Italy-based teenagers who participated in the summer camp. The questionnaire was handed to the subjects by the Chinese instructors, who could not understand the questions, this way the subjects could feel completely free to answer what they wanted without worrying about the instructors' judgment.

The gender ratio of the respondents was quite balanced, 14 females and 17 males. Their ages spanned from 11 to 19 y.o. (Tab. 3).

Tab. 3 - Age

Under 13 y.o.	4
13 y.o.	4
14 y.o.	8
15 y.o.	4
16 y.o.	9
Over 16 y.o.	2
Total	31

As shown in Table 4, the most represented areas in Italy were Rome and Milan, but different areas in the country were well represented, Naples being the farthest south.

Tab. 4 - Place of residence in Italy

Rome	8
Milan	7
Florence	6
Bologna	4
Veneto	3
Naples	1
Piedmont	1
Arezzo	1
Total	31

The great majority of the respondents were born in Italy (17). However, more than two thirds (21) of them spent at least one year in China (tab. 5). As already observed with the first group in Study A, it is still very common to send children back to China for long periods so that not only they learn some Chinese but they also do not interfere with their parents job, while enjoying full attention from their grandparents.

Tab. 5 - How much time have you spent in China?

Less than 6 months	One year	Two years	Three years	Four years	Five years	Six years	More than six years	Total
10	3	3	6	4	1	1	3	31

Despite the repeated complaints, most kids stated that they liked being in China enough (17). Nobody said they did not like it and six answered they liked it very much (Tab. 6). As already noted in study A, there were no cases of teenagers with feelings of rejection against

the country of origin, on the contrary, the overall attitude towards China is rather positive, although not as enthusiastic as what recorded in Study A.

Tab. 6 - Do you like being in China?

I like it very much	I like it enough	I like it so-so	I do not like it very much	I do not like it at all	Total
6	17	8	0	0	31

In order to investigate what the subjects deemed positive and negative about the two cultures of belonging, the questionnaire provided open questions on the model of «Write the three things you like the most/least about Italy/China». Since many answers were similar, the following tables report some of the more common answers.

Whan asked about their favourite things about China (Tab. 7), the majority of the respondents (17) mentioned food. A very similar answer was reported in the corrspondent question about Italy, where food is also the most mentioned item (Tab. 9). It appears that children of Chinese migrants in Italy have no evident preference for one of the two cuisines, which is something that distinguishes them both from their parents (mostly eating only Chinese food) and their Italian peers (mostly eating only Italian food). Another recurring answer was «Chinese cities». What the subjects seemed to appreciate in Chinese cities were their features of modernity; many praised the skyscrapers and the modern buildings, as opposed to the very different concept of city that is prevalent in Italy. Shopping was also mentioned by several subjects and it was a common topic in casual conversations during the summer camp. During the fieldwork for Study A some of the observed subjects also discussed extensively how shopping was better in China than in Italy in terms of variety of goods, beauty of display and better prices. Lower prices were also mentioned by four respondants to the questionnaire. Nine subjects stated that they especially liked the forms of enterteinment they could find in China - five subjects mentioned Karaoke, which is not common in Italy. Four subjects mentioned taxicabs, which are much cheaper in China than in Italy.

Tab. 7 - What do you like the most about China?

Food	Cities	Shopping	Entertainment	Monuments	Low prices	Landscape
17	13	9	9	8	4	2
Other answers included: «Karaoke», «Taxicabs», «Air conditioning», «Rikshaws», «Pubs», «Arcadias»						

When asked what they did not like about China, the subjects agreed on more than an aspect (Tab. 8). About half of the respondants quoted climate, lack of hygiene and pollution among the things they most disliked about China. These were also the main reasons for complaining among the observed subjects during the field trips. A rather large consensus was also found for other two answers, which each were proposed by about one third of the respondants. The first was that respondents what liked the least about China was «the way people drive», the second was that «people in China are rude». Other remarks that were espressed by multiple subjects were that «the food is unhealthy» and that they did not like «the teaching method». It is interesting how the subjects did not mention any aspect of Chinese people when praising China. Once again it seems evident that the teenagers observed for this study distance themselves from Chinese who live in the motherland and do not unconditionally identify themselves with them.

Tab. 8 - What do you like the least about China?

Climate	17
Lack of hygiene	14
Pollution.	14
The way people drive	11
People are rude.	10
Food is unhealthy.	4
The teaching method	3
Other answers included: «The way people dress», «There are too many rules», «Poverty», «Coffee», «Ice cream», «Too few pretty girls»	

The answers to similar questions about Italy elicited a wider variety of answers (Tab. 9, Tab. 10). As anticipated, food was still the favourite thing in Italy for the subjects. The landscape was not mentioned (while it was for China), but the sea was the second most frequent answer for the subjects. Many of the answers were the counterparts of what was not liked in China, such as «hygiene», «clean air», and «politeness». Interestingly two respondents answered «parent-children relationship». We will see how the relation between children and parents in Chinese and Italian families was deemed rather different by the respondents.

Tab. 9 - What do you like the most about Italy?

Food	16
The sea	5
How people dress.	4
Hygiene	3
Soccer	3
Clean air	2
Money	2
Parent-children relationship	2
Politeness	2
Other answers included: «Freedom to pick what school you want to attend», «Teaching method», «Spare time»	

The answers for the least-liked aspects of Italy elicited a strong open report of racism among Italians (Tab. 10). Along with racism, bullying can also be considered something the subjects feel victims of when in Italy. It is important to point out that in Study A the observed subjects never commented on racism or prejudice from Italians. Similarly, the topic of racism did not occur in interviews with first generation Chinese until 2007, when an incident between Italian police and Chinese migrants in Milan had a great impact on Chinese press (ethnic and continental), depicting Italians as openly racists and unfair with Chinese migrants (see Tarantino, Tosoni 2010; Cologna 2008). It might also be noted that racism does not come up in the image of Italy portraited in the literary works of first generation Sinoitalian writers (see Chapter 6), but it is an important theme in the short stories by second generation

writers. It seems that the public condemnation of racism is the new conquest of children of Chinese migrants in Italy. While a few years back, teenagers of Chinese origin would generally appear paralyzed by their discomfort, usually looking for an escape from the pressure suffered in daily life by fantasizing about life in China, today they sound more self aware and feel it is their right to openly confess being victims of prejudice without being ashamed of it.

Mafia and criminality were also considered important downsides of life in Italy: the answers portrayed an image of life in Italy perceived as unsafe, an aspect also reported on in interviews with first generation Chinese migrants in Italy (Fazzi, Martire, Pitrone 2012; Pedone 2013) This notion seems to be juxtaposed against an image of China as a very safe country.

Tab. 10 - What do you like the least about Italy?

Racism	16
Berlusconi	5
Mafia	4
Bullying	3
Criminality	3
Unhealthy	3
Working	2
Politics	2
Other answers included: «Trash», «Public transportation», «Corruption», «Waste», «Ignorance», «Superficiality»	

Another thing that is worth noticing is the number of answers connected to politics: five respondents answered Berlusconi (the Italian prime minister at the time) as the least liked aspect of Italy and two more gave the answer «politics». Although Silvio Berlusconi made some anti-Chinese statements during his career (for example in 2006, during a political rally in Naples, he stated that during the Mao-era, Chinese used to boil children to make manure for the fields), the adversion for politics and especially for Mr. Berlusconi is a very spread feeling among Italian teenagers and it could as well be considered as a value shared with Italian peers. The answer about the working ethics is particularly interesting because it is one of the aspects that seems to be

perceived as more different in the two cultures considered. More about this will be discussed in the following pages. Finally it should also be noted that three subjects answered that they liked everything about Italy (no similar answers came up for the corresponding question about China), which, again, shows an attitude towards Italian culture never encountered during the fieldwork for Study A.

As anticipated, all minors born in Italy to foreign parents in Italy retain the citizenship of their parents at least until they turn 18. Once they turn 18 they have one year to apply for Italian citizenship (art. 4, c.2, L. 91/92). China does not allow double citizenship, so picking citizenship can turn into an important life-changing choice for children of Chinese migrants. Regardless of what the law states, it is no surprise that about half of the subjects perceive themselves as exclusively Chinese (Tab. 11).

Tab. 11 - Do you consider yourself

Italian	Chinese	Italian of Chinese descent	Total
3	15	13	31

As a matter of fact, the interviews show that they are considered excusively Chinese both by their own parents and by Italian peers:

> My parents think that I am Chinese and that's why I must study Chinese (13 y.o. girl).
>
> My folks say that if you want to be a good Chinese you need to know the language. But I forget anything that I study. I hate Chinese and I hate sudying it (13 y.o. girl).
>
> Italians are quite racist, they treat me like a foreigner. Kids at school think that I am Chinese «Why did you come here?» (14 y.o. girl).

Considering the attitudes of the family and peer domain, the fact that 13 subjects answered that they deemed themeselves «Italian of Chinese descent» is even more meaningful and is another sign of a raising awareness of their status as a distinct group with distinct cultural traits.

A similar interpretation can be given to the answers reported in Tab. 12. When asked to define the degree of distance between Chinese and Italian cultures, one third stated they are completly opposite cultures, but the rest of the respondents found that the two cultures «are quite diffferent in some aspects» (16) or «have some aspects that are similar and some aspects that are different» (5).

Tab. 12 - Do you think Italian and Chinese cultures…

Are completely opposite	Are quite different in some aspects	Have some aspects that are similar and some aspects that are different	Are quite similar after all	Total
10	16	5	0	31

In order to better define how the subjects synthesize the two cultures and construct theirown mixed culture, a list of aspects of life was provided along with the request of a judgment about how they prefer each aspect was handled, according to Chinese culture or Italian culture. A third option, stating that the two cultures did not differ much in handling the proposed aspect of life was also provided (Tab.13).

There are some preferences for almost each of the proposed themes, although only few are very evident. Subjects appear to prefer the Italian relation between parents and children, but they prefer the Chinese relation between teachers and students and how friendship is dealt with in Chinese culture. What did not appear very distant in the two cultures for the respondants is love and marriage. This seems to be a very different view from what observed in study A, more research is to be done on the subject.

Tab. 13 - Which of the following items do you prefer in Italian culture and in Chinese culture?

	Chinese	Italian	They are very similar	Total
Parent-children relationship	10	14	6	30
Teacher-student relationship	12	9	9	30
Work ethic	15	13	1	29

Love	7	9	14	30
Friendship	15	7	8	30
Spare time and vacation	4	21	4	29
Money	10	11	9	30
Marriage	11	9	10	30

The answers about work ethic and spare time and vacation are especially cogent. Interviews already highlighted how the subjects criticized the lack of discipline and dedication to work perceived in Italian culture:

> (about Italians) I don't like the type of commitment that is put into working, the behavior of some workers who never do their job properly. The lack of commitment (16 y.o. boy)

Remarks about a lack of commitment and laziness in Italians compared to Chinese are also very common in interviews with first generation Chinese (Fazzi, Martire, Pitrone 2012; Bracci, Pedone, Valzania 2013). In the questionnaire only one subject felt there is not a difference in Chinese and Italian work ethics, the rest of the respondents divided themselves almost exactly in half, each preferring a different concept of work. The other value that is considered radically different in the two cultures is that of spare time and vacation. On this aspect the respondents agree vigorously (21 subjects) that they prefer how spare time and vacation are conceived in Italian culture. This, so far, seems to be the Italian value that is mostly relevant for the subjects interviewed, and it will most likely play a role in the decisions that the children of Chinese migrants take about their future lives.

> I am Chinese, but when I'll have to pick citizenship I might choose the Italian one. It seems to me that life in Italy is a bit more confortable (13 y.o. girl).

Plural identities

The two studies presented here were distant in time and space. The first one is based on observations of a group of teenagers of Chinese origin in a public Italian school. The group included children of migrants born in Italy as well as children who reunited with their

parents in Italy after being schooled in China. The socio-economic level was also very heterogeneous; as the study was conducted at a public school, it gathered kids from all social levels. The second study is based on observations of a very selective group: a cohort of 31 kids living in Italy, who did not know each other before moving in together to live side by side for three weeks at a university in China. Since they were participants in a root-seeking summer camp these subjects did not include teenagers who arrived to Italy recently nor did it include more disadvantaged teenagers who could not afford the fees of the camp and/or the trip to China. Although the characteristics of the second group of subjects make it less representative of the general situation of children of Chinese migrants in Italy, who come from more heterogeneous backgrounds, the opinions and values of this group can be especially interesting because they give an insight on what the future of the Chinese presence could be once (and if) it is allowed to take root in Italian society.

Another factor to be considered in comparing the findings of the two studies is what has changed in discourse about multiculturalism in Italy during the last decade. While in early 2000s terms as 'second generation' or 'ius soli' were completely unknown to the general public, today they are common knowledge; Italy has a minister of African origin and Italian President Giorgio Napolitano in the past years has made several declarations about the rights of children of migrants in Italy. Another change in Italian society is also the importance that associations of 'new Italians' (as the children of immigrants are often called in public discourse) have today. Through the diffusion of such groups on the internet and with the help of social networks, many teenagers who felt very isolated a few years back, have found a way to exchange ideas and build a new awareness of their status as an independent cultural group. Nonetheless it would be simplistic to assume that such self-confidence is shared by all children of Chinese migrants. Especially for the more disadvantaged families (such as those belonging to the lower segments of Chinese presence in Italy, see Chapter 1), problems of isolation/self-isolation, school dropping, drug abuse and even criminality are unfortunately still common.

Regardless of the length of permanence in Italy, all of the observed subjects in Study A considered themselves exclusively Chinese. Those who could not speak Italian were, to a certain extent, forced in a Chinese dimension and made daily efforts to ideally shorten the

distance with their home country. Those who grew up in Italy did not openly suffer for living far from China. They basically embraced the values shared by their families but re-read them in an anti-traditional perspective, yet apparently uninfluenced by Italian circumstances.

Teenagers observed for Study B appeared to be more aware of the advantages that their cultural heritage could provide them. During the interviews most of them said they would consider going to China for work in the future, but they would still say they would pick Italian citizenship if possible. Their plans to work in China and learn Chinese were not too different from those of many Italian teenagers today and were based on the considerations that Italy is going through an economic crisis, and that China would provide them with better chances of success:

> I hope my Chinese will improve a lot, because I really would like to work in China. Italy is not going well now, it is hard to find a job there. But China is in full development, there are many opportunities, the market is big. I think I want to study college in the UK, because I think Italian universities are not very good, then I'm going to go study for my MA and my PhD in China (14 y.o. girl).

This new generation is still struggling to find a spot in Italian society, but it appears as if today it is more aware of its potential. Teenagers of Chinese origin today denounce more openly that they feel victims of prejudice, they write about it in short stories (see Chapter 6) and discuss about it on the web; they embrace some Chinese cultural values that they feel are far from the Italian counterpart (such as work ethic), but they also pursue some Italian cultural values that they do not share with their parents (such as seeking a high 'quality of life' in terms of spare time and holidays).

Such a development towards a proud definition of a plural identity is, by all means, a very positive outcome for this generation of children of Chinese migrants. However, whether this model of development becomes more widespread will also depend on how quickly Italian society will open up to these youths and whether the least-advantaged children will be given a chance to take part in this process of self actualization.

CHAPTER 5

LANGUAGE USE ACROSS GENERATIONS

The majority of Chinese migrants in Italy alternate between the three languages that constitute their repertoire – Italian, Putonghua (Standard Mandarin Chinese) and one of the Chinese dialects – in their daily speech. The selection of one language over the others available in their repertoire appears not to be casual, but to follow a number of rules. Language choice, as Romaine (1984, p. 37) points out, is in fact governed by rules: «People are constrained by the expressive resources available in the language(s) to which they have access and by the conventions which apply to their use». In the following paragraphs I provide a description of language choice for first generation Chinese migrants in Italy and their children. While the description of language use among first generation Chinese migrants is mostly based on observations carried out in Rome[1] and on the available literature, the description of language use among young bilinguals of Chinese origin is based on the results of a questionnaire about the topic.

Language use among first generation Chinese migrants

The tendency of Chinese migrants in Italy to engage in family run enterprises, along with their tight rhythm of production/work that allows little diversity in social contacts, favors the formation of very close social networks. A speaker's network, in the sociolinguistic sense, is the sum of the linguistic relationships that one person has, that is, the people that one speaks with on a daily basis or with high frequency (Milroy 1980). A network

[1] From 2002 to 2011, I collaborated as a cultural mediator and interpreter with the non-profit social welfare organization CIDIS and for the local health authority in Rome. During this time I met and talked with hundreds of Chinese migrants.

Valentina Pedone, *A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy*,
ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print) ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online) © 2013 Firenze University Press

is called multiplex when people within it are tied together by means of more than one relationship, for example not just through work but also through family life. Due to the common fusion of family and work environment in the Chinese migration project, the Chinese presence in Italy is characterized by a tendency to create close-knit multiplex networks. Since, as a general rule, first generation Chinese migrants only operate within these kinds of networks, usually not including Italian speakers, they show a lower competence in Italian compared to other migrated groups that do not follow the same migration path (Chini 2004).

As shown in previous studies on language use among first generation Chinese in Italy (Ceccagno 2003a; Banfi 2003; Banfi 2004) and from fieldwork among their children (Pedone 2004; 2006b), Chinese dialects are spoken virtually throughout all the members of the community, in addition to the standard language, Putonghua. Due to the common origin of the migrated individuals, most of the dialectal varieties spoken in Italy belong to the Wu group (individuals from Zhejiang), while only relatively few people speak the Min dialects (individuals from Fujian). Because of the low level of mutual intelligibility that characterizes southern dialects, the several dialectal varieties mentioned are considered in this work as functionally distinct within the repertoire, all united under the general label 'dialect'.

Besides Italian and a Chinese dialect, the third language option available within the ethnic group is Putonghua, which is spoken at different levels of fluency according to the educational level achieved in the home country and age (older people usually having less competence). Putonghua, besides being a precious tool to favor communication among sub-groups that speak mutually unintelligible dialects, is also expected to be used in formal occasions and constitutes a status symbol of higher culture.

As already pointed out in Chapter 1, the Chinese migration project to Italy has been based for years on the sacrifice of the migrant's free time. Especially in the first years of migration, the migrant works as much as possible, in order to move forward in the migration project, pay back the migration debt and finally become a *laoban*. Although the future of Chinese presence in Italy will most likely have multifaceted outcomes, to date the life of the majority of first generation Chinese in Italy is still mainly divided between

family and work, with the latter determining most decisions about the former. The language spoken within the family is undoubtedly the dialect; even where Putonghua and Italian are available to some of the family members, the use of the dialect surpasses by far the occurrence of any other language. As already pointed out, Italian is rarely an option for Chinese adults in Italy, although it is quite often spoken among their children who were born or schooled in Italy. Some parents make an effort to intentionally speak Putonghua at home in order to teach this language to their children, but it is rare for both parents to speak it, or that they do it at all time. In the areas of origin, dialects are the most common choice for the family domain, so it also tends to be the most natural choice in the new context.

As far as the language in the work domain is concerned, four of the most common employment types in the Chinese community can also be considered as sub-domains for the description of language choice for Chinese migrants in Italy: workshops, restaurants, stores, and services for the community.

In small workshops it is common that the employers come from the same area (Ceccagno 2003a). This peculiarity justifies the almost exclusive use of the dialect and the lack of need for using Putonghua. Furthermore, since there is virtually no interaction with Italian speakers, the use of the Italian language is not considered an option within this sub-domain. With the new migration flows from Fujian and Dongbei, some of the larger workshops present a wider linguistic diversity, but for the majority of the small workshops scattered throughout the country, homogeneity in place of origin for the workers is still the most common scenario.

The situation changes when we examine the restaurants and stores as sub-domains. Despite that family enterprises are still the most common models in these occupations, the use of Italian is needed in dealing with the customers. Restaurants usually requires four to five people to function. If all the workers belong to the same family or to the same area of origin, dialect is most likely the other language used in the workplace. If the laoban and the workers come from different areas, the common language is Putonghua. The majority of Chinese stores usually only feature one shopkeeper (often the owner), henceforth the only language that is necessary on a daily basis is Italian and only occasionally

Putonghua to communicate with the suppliers. The term 'services for the community' applies to all of those activities recently developed within the ethnic group and addressed to the ethnic group itself. These services include insurance companies, real estate companies, accounting agencies and so on, all run by Chinese to provide their services to other Chinese. The language most used in this environment is Putonghua, which is the language of choice for interactions with customers. At the same time, necessities caused by the bureaucratic and management aspects typical of this kind of business make the occasional use of Italian crucial for the success of the venture.

One aspect of the work domain that is worth mentioning is that of competence in Italian of Chinese business owners. Since in general terms the new owners are people who worked in the ethnic economy, first to pay back the migration debt, then to save money to open a new enterprise, they often do not speak Italian. Those owners who frequently interact with Italian customers (coffee bar owners, small store owners, small restaurant owners, etc.) sometimes rely on their children, when available, at the beginning of their activities, and then acquire some specific competence in the language while at work. Those owners who only need to deal with other Chinese, such as manufacturing subcontractors or importers, do not need to learn Italian and they can reach a high level of economic inclusion in the country without speaking the language.

When describing the language of leisure, the last domain considered, one must take into account how limited the recreational environments for Chinese migrants still are today. Most adults spend their free time with family, occasionally going to restaurants or, for men, playing cards and drinking with people from the same area of origin. The favored option in this domain is their native dialect.

The following table summarizes the language options available in the most common domains for first generation Chinese migrants in Italy (Tab. 14).

Tab. 14 – Language choice among first generation Chinese migrants in Italy

Domains		Languages			
		Chinese dialect	Putonghua	Italian	Annotations
Family		++	+	-	
Work	Manufacture Workers	++	+	-	
	Restaurants	+	+	++	Dialect is spoken only if co-workers come from the same region
	Stores	-	+	++	
	Services	-	++	+	
Leisure		++	+	-	

Language use among children of Chinese migrants[2]

Since children of Chinese migrants in Italy have a wider repertoire than their parents, since they are usually able to speak Italian and they develop more diverse social networks, the analysis of their language use was based not only on observations, but also on the results of a questionnaire that helped clarify what was observed in greater detail. A 55-question questionnaire was submitted to 78 students of Chinese origin attending an afternoon school of Putonghua in Rome. The institute, funded by the Chinese Evangelic Church, is entirely managed by Chinese migrants and it is only attended by children with Chinese heritage. It enrols over a hundred students and offers two kinds of courses - novice and advanced - with several classes each. Classes meet three times a week, after the public Italian school day ends. Even though there are several informal schools of this kind in Rome, the institute surveyed is by far the best organized and most highly respected within the ethnic group.

The results presented here deal mainly with linguistic repertoire, linguistic dominance and codeswitching. The repertoire, as defined in Gumperz (1977), is the sum of language varieties available to a speaker, the norms that rule their use and the relationships between them. The dominant language in the repertoire is identified by its

[2] Results of this survey were formerly published by the Association of Chinese Sociolinguistics (Pedone 2005) and the Centre de Researches Linguistiques sur l'Asie Orientale (Pedone 2006a).

relationship to the others, thus it follows that different items in the repertoire can become dominant if we consider how they relate with the others from multiple perspectives. This is also what we find in the results of the survey: the dominant language variety in the subjects' repertoire changes according to the point of view we adopt when considering their language use. Codeswitching (i.e. the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same speech event) could also be treated as an option in the speakers' repertoire, since it can be very common in bilingual speech. Nonetheless, observations and the answers to the questionnaire show that although codeswitching between Chinese and Italian is an available linguistic choice for young Chinese in Italy, it is not as widespread as in other speech communities.

The subjects

The questionnaire, submitted both in Italian and Chinese in October 2004, was structured on the basis of preliminary observations of language use among children of Chinese migrants. Observations provided an educated idea of what constituted the repertoire of the youngsters, what kind of social situations represented their domains, and who took part in their social network. Data discussed in these paragraphs come only from close-ended, multiple-choice questions.

Even though the total number of respondents was 86, only 78 questionnaires were analyzed, because I excluded subjects younger than 9 years old. Age limit was fixed from 9 to 17 years old following the study of Chini (2004) on language use among migrants in Italy; this way it was possible to narrow the number of subjects to those who were more likely to share similar life experiences typical of their age, while still keeping a representative sample. Most of the subjects were born between 1990 and 1992 (41%) and were between 12 and 14 years old at the time. The younger subjects were less represented (33.3%), who were born between 1993 and 1995 and were 9 to 11 years old at the time. In the end, the least represented group (25.6%), which still forms about one fourth of the total number, was made up of the oldest subjects, born between 1988 and 1989, aged 15 to 17 years old (Tab. 15). Overall, the sample proved to be rather balanced in covering the entire range of age analyzed. As for gender, males slightly outnumbered females in the sample (53.8%).

Tab. 15 – Age of questionnaire respondents

Birth year	n.	%
1987-89	20	25.6
1990-92	32	41.0
1993-95	26	33.3
Total	78	100.0

Almost half of the subjects were born in Italy (46.2%), while, of the subjects who arrived to Italy at a later stage, the most part (64.3%) arrived from 4 to 7 years before the submission of the questionnaire (Tab. 16).

Tab. 16 – Years in Italy (only for the subjects who were not born in Italy)

	n.	%
from 0 to 3 years	9	21.4
from 4 to 7 years	27	64.3
from 8 to 11 years	6	14.3
Total	42	100.0

The reason for the high percentage of subjects that arrived from 4 to 7 years before the survey took place is probably that a peak rate of migration was recorded around 1998[3] when some radical changes in Italian migration laws occurred[4]. This hypothesis is confirmed by data related to the number of students of Chinese origin in the Italian public school as shown in Tab. 17.

[3] i.e. 6 years before that date.

[4] The Law 40/1998 gave the right to work autonomously back to migrants in Italy (Ceccagno 1997).

Tab. 17 – Number of students of Chinese origin

Birth year	n.
1997-1998	4187
1998-1999	6148

Source: Italian Ministry of Public Instruction

Finally, concerning the place of origin of the families, the whole sample comes from the Zhejiang province, with a major percentage of subjects (48.7%) originally from the Wenzhou area.

Language repertoire and dominance

When analyzing the answers related to the repertoires, we observe a rather composite situation. In fact, the languages involved play different roles within the repertoire, according to the perspective we adopt in observing them.

When confronted with the direct question 'what is your L1?', the largest portion of the respondents (62.8%) chose the answer corresponding to their home dialect (Tab. 18).

Tab. 18 – L1 as self-reported by questionnaire respondents

	n.	%
Italian	8	10.3
Putonghua	20	25.6
dialect	49	62.8
other	1	1.3
Total	78	100.0

It is clear that the answer is strongly influenced by the definition provided in the question, which was necessary due to the young age of the subjects. The definition attached to the term L1, in fact, read 'i.e. the first language you spoke when you were little'. This

is probably the same reason why the answer 'Italian' was chosen by only 10.3% of the respondents. As already pointed out, the proficiency in Italian for first generation Chinese immigrants is particularly low (even when compared with other ethnic groups) and there is no doubt that this has an impact on the options chosen as L1 by the subjects, according to the definition they were given.

While the diachronic perspective shows that Chinese (in its standard and dialectal varieties) is the first language acquired by the subjects, the situation is reversed when they are asked which language they feel they speak better. Being forced to ground the question on self-evaluation, it appeared more useful to investigate the linguistic competence of the three codes in comparison, rather than look for absolute values that would have been hard to interpret. Therefore, the subjects were first asked which language they felt they spoke more fluently between Italian and Chinese, then they were asked the same question for Putonghua and their dialect (Tabs. 19 and 20).

Tab. 19 – Language of highest fluency 1 (*self-evaluation*)

	n.	%
Italian	41	52.6
Chinese	15	19.2
balanced fluency	22	28.2
Total	78	100.0

As indicated in Table 19, over half of the respondents think they speak Italian better than Chinese, even though it is not the language they learned in the home, and more than a fourth of them answered that they speak both Italian and Chinese with the same fluency. While the results clearly suggest that Italian is strongly perceived as the best spoken language in the repertoire, we must keep in mind some of the implications of the personal linguistic histories of the subjects when interpreting these answers, as these histories might have exacerbated the results. In the first place we have to remember that most of the subjects had not had the chance to study Putonghua in the Chinese school system,

so their knowledge of the language is not comparable to that of their peers in China. Since their contact with relatives in China is continuous and extensive, they are forced to face the comparison with the native-like fluency in Putonghua on quite a regular basis. Moreover, the partial or complete lack of acquisition of the Chinese writing system for all those subjects who grew up in Italy is likely to contribute to their perception of a low proficiency in the language.

On the other hand, when considering the comparison between Italian and the Chinese dialectal varieties, even if the latter are fluently spoken in the home environment, they can hardly compete in the respondents' consciousness with the two standard languages - Italian and Putonghua - proposed in the question. Even though throughout the entire questionnaire the dialect was referred to as a 'language', it is possible that the common idea of a dialect as not being a prestigious linguistic variety could have played a role in the self-evaluation of the subject's speech. In other words, they might have been discouraged from choosing something they considered a dialect to represent the variety that qualitatively is best mastered in their speech.

When we analyze in detail the perceived competence in the two Chinese varieties, dialect and Putonghua, we find an almost complete symmetry among the answers offered (Tab. 20). Namely, no specific trend seems to emerge in the comparison of competence in Putonghua and dialect.

Tab. 20 – Language of highest fluency 2 (*self-evaluation*)

	n	%
Putonghua	27	34.6
dialect	24	30.8
balanced fluency	26	33.3
no answer	1	1.3
Total	78	100.0

After defining the dominant language, the dialect, from the diachronic point of view and comparing it to the (perceived) linguistic competence in Italian, we can now move on to define the dominant language with regard to frequency of usage. In other words, we identify the language that is used the most by the subjects on a daily basis (Tab. 21).

Tab. 21 – Frequency of usage

	n.	%
speak more Italian than Chinese	37	47.4
speak as much Chinese as Italian	19	24.4
speak more Chinese than Italian	15	19.2
almost never speak Italian	5	6.4
no answer	2	2.6
Total	78	100.0

Here as well, the information was asked in relation with the other variables and not in absolute terms; in this way it was possible to avoid quantified answers such as 'I speak … hours of Italian every day', which would have been hard to assess by the respondents and of little help for the analysis of the relationship among the various languages in the repertoire. The results show a clear correspondence between the percentages representing the relative fluency of the languages (Tab. 19) and their frequency of usage (Tab. 21), indicating that Italian appears to be the most frequently used language in daily interaction. To ensure that such a finding was not only motivated by daily communication with teachers and Italian classmates, but that it extended outside the school domain, the subjects were asked whether Italian was also used with interlocutors of Chinese origin (Tab. 22).

Tab. 22 – How often do you use Italian to speak with Chinese people?

	n.	%
everyday	30	38.5
often	19	24.4
sometimes	19	24.4
rarely	7	9.0
no answer	3	3.8
Total	78	100.0

More than 60% of the respondents stated that they use Italian every day (38.5%) or often (24.4%) to communicate with people of Chinese origin, preferring it to the other two Chinese varieties available in their repertoires.

The distribution of the variables when answering whether Putonghua or a dialect is most frequently used (Tab. 23) differs deeply from what emerged from the correspondent question dealing with fluency (Tab. 20). In this case, we actually find a strong dominance of dialect (42.3%) over Putonghua (19.2%).

Tab. 23 – Frequency of usage

	n.	%
speak more dialect than Putonghua	33	42.3
speak as much dialect as Putonghua	18	23.1
speak more Putonghua than dialect	15	19.2
almost never speak dialect	10	12.8
no answer	2	2.6
Total	78	100.0

Such a result can be better interpreted through the analysis of language use in the different domains and through network analysis. In fact, dialect appears to be the favored language in the family domain (where quite often it is actually the only option), while the limited peer interactions of this segment of the Chinese community (see Chapter 4), along with the extensive use of Italian in communicating with friends, all contribute to decrease the amount of Putonghua used in daily speech.

In sum, from the perspective of the frequency of use, Italian is once more the dominant language, but here, contrary to the results for the competence perception in Tables 19 and 20, the dialect is also well represented.

The last of the questions in the repertoire area, namely 'Which is the language you speak most with your Chinese friends?' shows, finally, how the least dominant language in the repertoire – Putonghua - is used (Tab. 24).

Tab. 24 – Language choice with friends

	n.	%
Italian	39	50
Putonghua	18	23.1
dialect and Putonghua	14	17.9
dialect	4	5.1
no answer	3	3.8
Total	78	100.0

As could be predicted on the basis of the previous answers, Italian is still the most dominant language in the exchanges with Chinese peers. What attracts attention, however, is that the use of dialect only is very limited here (5.1%). If we consider that the problem of mutual unintelligibility between dialects is heavier in the friendship network, which, unlike the family network, is formed by individuals of different origins, we can partially justify the use of Putonghua as a *koinè*. This is also what happens in

mainland China, where the Putonghua promotion campaign is achieving greatest success in the most linguistically heterogeneous areas. The concentration of several mutually unintelligible dialects in relatively small areas, especially in the areas of Southern dialects, is one of the factors that contributes to speed up the diffusion of Putonghua as a *lingua franca* (Chen 1999). At the same time, it is also possible to recognize a symbolic use of Putonghua, which is favored only in peer communication. Within this social domain, such a language choice actually begins to represent a code in contraposition to the family one, from which the adolescents might want to detach for several reasons. Meanwhile, this code is still ethnically marked and becomes a vehicle of amplification of *in-group* belonging.

Codeswitching

Compared to other speech communities (Poplack 1980, among others) codeswitching is not a favored option in the repertoire of young Chinese bilinguals in Italy. Similar results were reported in the work of Li Wei (1994) in his study about Chinese-English codeswitching among British speakers of Chinese origin. In a total of 23 hours of spontaneous recordings, Li Wei found only 50 minutes of codeswitching.

The answers about codeswitching collected through the questionnaire confirmed the impressions gathered during observations. Observations revealed a tendency to mix languages in very long chunks, mostly during conversations at turn taking (Pedone 2008), or, in contrast, to only insert single words from a language in a longer discourse uttered in the other. Very few instances of mixed sentences at the syntax level were observed. The answers to the questionnaire draw attention to the insertion of single items from one language into the other, a phenomenon that is often regarded as temporary borrowing and not real codeswitching.

To the direct question 'do you mix Chinese and Italian?', the answers show that, although respondents engage in codeswitching to some extent, still it happens less than expected from bilingual speakers. The answers point to a sporadic use of codeswitching, with a 65.4% of respondents stating that they only 'sometimes' (35.9%) or 'rarely' (29.5%) mix languages (Tab. 25).

Tab. 25 – Do you mix Chinese and Italian?

	n.	%
always	11	14.1
often	14	17.9
sometimes	28	35.9
rarely	23	29.5
No answer	2	2.6
Total	78	100.0

The other question on the topic, 'Why do you use an Italian word while you speak Chinese?', that is the direct question on motivation for switching from a language to the other, confirms that the occasional switches move mostly from mechanical reasons (Tab. 26).

Tab. 26 – When you use an Italian word while you speak Chinese is because:

	n.	%
I don't know the translation	42	53.8
I use it every day	14	17.9
I like the way it sounds	4	5.1
I don't know	13	16.7
No answer	5	6.4
Total	78	100.0

The first remark is that relatively few respondents chose the neutral answer 'I don't know' (16.7%). Bilingual speakers are usually unaware of the switching when it occurs extensively. It would have been plausible to expect a higher number of neutral answers. On the contrary, the answers clearly show that more than half of the subjects switch from one language to the other only to fulfill a linguistic gap,

as it is suggested in the answer 'I don't know the translation' (53.8%). The answer that suggest emotional attachment and identification, here 'I like the way it sounds' (5.1%), and the one that suggest an interiorization in personal lexicon, here 'I use it every day' (17.9%), did not receive similar approval. It seems that the motivation for codeswitching in children of Chinese migrants is only the imperfect command of one of the two languages, although a temporary one, since there are no signs of the use of this option in the repertoire as a variety that is distinctive of the second generation. Codeswitching is, in many bilingual groups, a common choice for speakers who want to emphasize their multiculturality, something that children of Chinese migrants in Italy are just beginning to reflect upon today (see Chapter 4).

Language and identity

While language use among young Chinese bilinguals in Italy appears to be rather composite, it also appears to be governed by a set of norms. The daily speech of these individuals is sensitive to a number of conditions that make it possible to detect patterns of use. Although the subjects of the survey discussed here use a remarkably diverse repertoire, most of the answers to the questionnaire reveal defined trends that account for their linguistic behavior.

As for their repertoire, the results show that there is an alternation in the roles played by the linguistic varieties spoken – Italian, Putonghua and dialect - , suggesting a dynamic definition of what constitutes their *we-code* and *they-code*. The subjects in the analysis, in fact, recognize dialect as their L1, meaning here the first language they acquired. Nevertheless, they feel that today they are more competent in Italian, which is also the variety that occurs most frequently in their daily speech, followed by dialect and, to a much lower extent, by Putonghua. The latter, instead, proves to be mainly the language of in-group friendship, as opposed to either dialect or Italian.

Italian is the language of school and education, but it also covers an important role in peer interaction (with both Italian and Chinese speaking friends). Dialect, on the other hand, seems relegated to the family domain. Putonghua, finally, is confirmed to serve communication with peers (after Italian), but also to be used with Chinese adults who do not live in the home.

Considering the vitality of Chinese dialects (still the first language acquired and the second most used in daily speech) and the determination to use Putonghua with peers along with Italian, we are left with the hope that the repertoire of children of Chinese migrants to Italy will evolve in a direction that preserves such a linguistic diversity, instead of surrendering to an integration model that neglects the maintenance of the varieties of origin.

CHAPTER 6

SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ABOUT THE RISE OF A SINOITALIAN LITERATURE

Overseas Chinese literature in the world

Literature of the Chinese diaspora has been a lively and multifaceted reality for well over a century. Its features may differ according to the country in which it develops. The characteristics of the so-called Overseas Chinese Literature can also differ when its writers are established authors, such as Lin Yutang (1895-1976) or Eileen Chang (1920-1995), than from when they are not – such as the anonymous coolies held on Angel Island at the beginning of the 20th century waiting to be accepted or refused by American authorities (Him, Lim, Yung 1991). Another factor that has a strong impact on the features of this kind of literature is whether the context is hostile to its authors, such as the USA during the Chinese Exclusion Act (1885-1943), or favorable, like British Malaya in the early 1940s (Wang 2005). It is even harder to univocally define literature of the Chinese diaspora when we take into account the language variable. Most Chinese scholars, for instance, divide clearly between Overseas Chinese literature in Chinese (*haiwai huawen wenxue*), recently called Sinophone literature[1], and Overseas Chinese literature written in other languages (*haiwai huaren wenxue*), the latter being assimilated into foreign literature. Many Western scholars, on the other hand, stress the importance of considering diasporic literature as the one written in the languages of the host countries, emphasizing the importance that these authors have in the society in which they live and are active rather than in the one of origin (Cheung, Yogi 1988; Yin 2000). Other divisions could be made that consider the depth

[1] For more on the rise of the field of Sinophone studies see Shi, Tsai, Bernards (2013).

Valentina Pedone, *A Journey to the West. Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy*,
ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print) ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online) © 2013 Firenze University Press

and quality of the relationship between the authors and the country of origin, taking into account, for example, the huge differences that can be overlooked when we include in the same label both authors who arrived in the host country at an adult age and those who were born in the country but have some sort of Chinese cultural heritage. For these writers some specific labels are also in use in different fields, such as 'migrant writers' on one side and 'second generation writers' on the other.

Some Overseas Chinese authors have had a huge commercial success, as epitomized by the many novels published by the Sinoamerican writer Amy Tan, whose *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) has been turned into a blockbuster movie produced by Oliver Stone. Besides the many established Sinoamerican writers, many other diasporic authors have reached a noticeable commercial success such as Timothy Mo (1950-), Ma Jian (1953-) and Jung Chang (1952-) in the UK, Lulu Wang (1960-) and Gong Yuhong (1968-) in the Netherlands, Gao Xingjian (1940-), François Cheng (1929-) and Dai Sijie (1954-) in France, Ee Tiang Hong (1933–1990) and Fang Beifang (1919-2007) in Malaysia, and Wong Yoon Wah (1941-) and Wong Meng Voon (1937-) in Singapore, just to mention a few. Some authors of Chinese origin have focused more attention on the cultural debate surrounding the country where they live, producing works that reached social or even political importance, such as the famous feminist novel by Sinoamerican Maxine Hong Kingston (1940-), *The Woman Warrior* (1975), or the many works of the writers of Chinese origin in post-Suharto Indonesia.

A brief overview on migration writers in Italy

Before dealing with if and how the literature of the Chinese diaspora has developed in Italy, it is necessary to take a look at the state of the Italian so called 'migration literature' in more general terms. In this way we can contextualize the works written by people of Chinese origin in Italy within a wider national frame. There is a vital debate in Italy, which has been going on for years, about the so-called migrant literature, i.e. the literary production in Italian of writers of other nationalities. Among the most active observers, Armando Gnisci reconstructed the history of such literature and, besides having published many articles and volumes on this topic, he also created a database of all migrant writers in Italy (Banca Dati Basili). Scholars and observers consider the beginning of the 1990s

as the starting point of migrant literature in Italy. In those years the majority of such authors wrote their works with the help of Italian writers, who would assist the migrants especially from a linguistic point of view (the most famous being Pap Khouma, Mohamed Bouchane, Mohsen Melliti, Saidou Moussa Ba, and Fernanda Farias De Albuquerque). The attention of the publishing world lasted only a few years, during which some of these autobiographical works managed to get published by established publishing houses. Soon migrant literature in Italy entered its second stage, where the authors became independent from any linguistic help, the choice of topics became wider, but the works no longer easily found their way into the mainstream publishing houses. Once the hype of migrant writers faded, the fate of this literary current began to depend on the newborn underground publishing houses, some of which specialized in migrant literature. The next stage of this kind of literature was characterized by the growing presence of second generation writers, included by most scholars within the category of migrant writers although they have a very different background. Among the most appreciated second generation writers there are Igiaba Scego, Gabriella Ghermandi, Cristina Ubax Ali Farah. Today there are quite a few migrant writers who have gained a certain degree of fame and success, both at the critical and commercial level. A symbol of such status was the awarding in 2006 of the prestigious literary prize Premio Flaiano to Amara Lakhous, a writer of Algerian origin, and the subsequent movie rendition of his best seller – the novel *Scontro di Civiltà per un Ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio) in 2010.

Part of these writers that are commonly grouped under the general label of migrant writers have their origins in the former Italian colonies in Africa, and as such, their works have also been of interest in the field of post-colonial studies. Moreover, since there is a massive presence of women among these writers (30% of migrant writers in Italy are women, while only 10% of all Italian writers are women) this kind of literature has also been object of study from a gender perspective. Finally, because of the original and often innovative use of Italian, a second language for most of these authors, the works of migrant writers have also been interesting for linguists.

Within such a diverse and vital field, authors of Chinese background have a very marginal place. This is partly because, as is natural, the first

migrant writers emerged from the oldest migration flows to Italy – the ones originating from Maghreb and the Horn of Africa, where the Italian colonies used to be. As described next, Sinoitalian authors only began publishing well after the 'birth' of Italian migrant literature in the early Nineties. A younger phenomenon, it is also more limited, at least in its Italian language forms, by the fact that the Chinese group has a lower competence in Italian than other migrated groups (Chini 2004). But if we adopt a different definition for the works of writers of Chinese origin, as in the definition of Sinoitalian literature that is proposed in the next paragraph, then it is not at all difficult to detect the cultural contribution to Italy that emerged from Chinese migration.

Sinoitalian literature, a tentative definition

When starting to reflect on the possibility of a Sinoitalian literature, one must first decide upon a criterion according to which the available works can be included under such a label. My choice follows that of Yin (2000), who embraces within the label of Sinoamerican literature both literature written in Chinese and in English, and that written by both first and second (or succeeding) generation writers. I find this approach especially useful for the representation of the Italian situation: in Italy the Chinese presence is a reality that traces back to a century ago, but, for reasons connected both to the way the Chinese migrants settled down and to the political, social and cultural reaction of Italy to this kind of migration, it remained rather socially isolated from the host context. Henceforth it would be rather inaccurate to exclude all the material published in Chinese by authors of Chinese origin in Italy, their first (and often only) language still being Chinese. On the other hand it would be just as inaccurate to force second generation authors simply within the label of Italian contemporary literature. Today Italian-born Chinese are still perceived (and unfortunately also legally treated) as foreigners. Many of them are pushed by this common attitude to take refuge inside the ethnic *in-group* or to look for new identity expressions abroad (see Chapter 4). I argue that both first and second generation Chinese in Italy share a rather similar cultural experience and this is also confirmed by the fact that the theme of dialectic confrontation (be it controversial or harmonious) between the two cultures to which they belong is overwhelmingly present in virtually every work I found in my

research. In other words, there are no works that transcend this question, which shows that both generations are interested in and are questioning themselves about the possibility of a Sinoitalian sensibility.

Although heterogeneous, it seems there is a common feeling among many Sinoitalian authors who, in a certain sense, share only the experience of residing in Italy and coming from a Chinese cultural universe. Thus it is important to start recognizing the features of this common sensibility, allowing it at least the license to exist. It is because of such shared essences that I find it more appropriate to exclude from the bulk of Sinoitalian authors those who produce travel literature. Travel literature does not meet the requirement shared by other works, whose authors, unlike simple travelers, are an integral part of Italian social and economical life on a stable basis, with all the advantages and problems deriving from such a status.

The following brief overview does not have among its aims that of expressing any aesthetical judgment about the works of literature discussed here. This is not to imply that they have no literary value, but simply that I leave the task to a different occasion. On the other hand, the one principal aim of this chapter is to make other scholars aware of an already rather developed cultural and literary phenomenon – Overseas Chinese literature in Italy.

Authors included in the following paragraph represent the totality of writers of Chinese origin that to my knowledge have published literature while living in Italy to date. As for genres, in this preliminary presentation I only include authors of novels, short stories and poems, but in Italy there are cases of authors of *suibi* and *bijt*[2], comics, song lyrics, drama scripts and short movies. I consider these products to be a substantial part of Sinoitalian culture but I simply do not cover them in this chapter.

A *'Who's who' of Sinoitalian literature*

The first and most well known

Within Sinoitalian literature, the name that is most familiar to the Italian public is that of Bamboo Hirst (1940-), who was born to a Chinese mother and an Italian father. Although she is

[2] Traditional Chinese informal essays and notes.

quite unique, being neither a proper second generation writer nor a migrant writer, she still is included in this brief overview because all her works are very ethnically characterized and she is commonly referred to as a Sinoitalian writer. Since the end of the 1980s she has written seven novels in Italian (Hirst 1987; 1989; 1991; 1994; 1999; 2005; 2008), some published by bigger publishing houses and have enjoyed a certain level of fame at the beginning of the 1990s. Her works are almost exclusively about the encounter between 'Western' and 'Eastern' culture and sometimes they turn to the abused stereotype of the Western man, masculine and uninhibited, who finds a new innocence when meeting with the Oriental woman, pure and mysterious. The memory of Suzie Wong sometimes wears out this author's production, which seems to give life back to some old fashioned Western fantasies, infusing them with an aura of authenticity because of her cultural origin. Some aspects of her work remind us of what Yin (2000) calls the literature of the «loyal minority», aimed at the acceptance by the dominant group, through the endorsement of its stereotyped ideas. As just one example of the stereotyped image of Chinese women see the following excerpt, from her novel Blue China (Hirst 2005:67):

> Green Bay understood from many particulars that the Italian had many important reasons to often be away from her. She never asked questions and he never told her about his secret mission. That night she greeted him as usual, with no questions and a happy look on her face. It did not matter what had happened or was about to happen, that night was for them. And from how he took her hand and squeezed it, the young Chinese knew how much he desired to share and celebrate with her a specific occasion about which she would not ask anything.

Although Hirst wrote a significant number of novels, most of them dealt with the same autobiographical subjects. Two of her novels, *Inchiostro di Cina* (Ink of China) and *Vado a Shanghai per Comprarmi un Cappello* (I'm Going to Shanghai to Buy a Hat), tell the story of her childhood in China, while two other novels, *Passaggio a Shangai* (A Passage to Shanghai) and *Blu Cina* (Blue China), revisit the story of her parents in China. Two more novels, *Il Mondo Oltre il Fiume dei Peschi in Fiore* (The World Beyond the River of Blossoming Peaches) and *Cartoline da Pechino* (Postcards from Beijing) are reports of her trip to China in search for her

roots. The seventh novel, *Figlie della Cina* (Daughters of China), is about discrimination against women in classical and modern China, on the heels of Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* (1991), from which she partially copied the title[3].

Nonetheless, her frequent presence on the TV screen and the fair sales of her novels have given Bamboo Hirst the undisputed credit for first creating a mental 'space' in the mind of Italian readers for a bicultural writer and public character. She is responsible for somehow stimulating a first reflection about the possibility of a Sinoitalian identity, and opening the way, even if only with her fame, for the following authors of Chinese origins in Italy. Bamboo Hirst has also published a cookbook of Chinese cuisine in Italian.

Authors who published in Italian

The story of Hu Lanbo (1959-) is rather different. A journalist and intellectual activist within the Chinese community in Italy for many years, Hu Lanbo self-published her first autobiographical novel *La Strada per Roma* (The Road to Rome) in 2009, in which she tells the story of her life between China, France and Italy. In 2012 a revised version of the novel was published by an Italian publishing house with the title *Petali d'Orchidea* (Orchid's Petals). This author, unlike Bamboo Hirst, has always been close to the world of Chinese migrants; she runs the bilingual magazine *Shijie Zhongguo* (World China), on which many writings by Chinese migrants are published both in Chinese and Italian. Besides the novel mentioned above, she has also authored two short stories, titled *Tramonto* (Sunset) (2008a) and *Notte Nera* (Black Night) (2008b). She is currently working on a new reportage novel based on lives of Chinese women in Rome.

The first novel published in Italian by author Zhai Ran (1957-) is *Il Segno dal Cielo* (The Sign from the Sky) (2002). It is a novel that takes place in China and has nothing to do with Italy or any transcultural encounter. She also published some Chinese folk tales in Italian (2003). She previously published a novel in Chinese, *Yuan jia Ouzhou* (Married in Europe) (1999), in which she explores the advantages and the downsides of marriage between Chinese women and Italian men. Recently she is involved in the writing of a set of short stories in Chinese about daily relationships between Italians

[3] The full title of Jung Chang's work is Wild Swans: Three daughters of China.

and Chinese migrants. Besides her literary works, Zhai Ran is also a co-author, along with several Italian scholars, of a manual to teach business Chinese and a volume about some Chinese linguistics topics.

Another author to publish in Italian is Gao Liang (1962-). In 1997 she published a novel in Italian titled *Il Cavaliere delle Nuvole* (The Knight of the Clouds). Published by a mid-sized Italian publishing house, the novel features an introduction by Alberto Bevilacqua, a well-known Italian writer. The novel is about a Chinese woman who lives in Italy and is married to an Italian man (just like the author), and who goes back to China for a short trip after many years of absence. There she meets with all of her old friends and ex-lovers who have changed a lot since she left China. Despite the premises, the novel almost makes no references to Italy or to cultural confrontation in general. It touches on the topic of moral degradation caused by the excessive materialism that infested China after Mao's death, making it more similar to a late example of the Chinese so-called 'literature of the reform', than to the work of the majority of the other Sinoitalian writers, who focus on the experience of living across two cultures.

Until recently, Yang Xiaping's (1964-) writings have resembled what Yin (2000) defines as literature of the «goodwill ambassadors», i.e. literary products aimed at explaining to a non-Chinese audience the positive aspects of their own original culture in an attempt to counterbalance the image damage inflicted by foreign media and stereotypes of the Chinese population living in Italy. In one of her early works (Yang 2003, p. 6), she says:

> If fruit salad is a way to get acquainted with mixed fruits and many vitamins important for our health, then fairy tales, legends, and folk stories can be an educational means to get to know different cultures, to travel in time, from past to present, and from present to future; and also to travel from one continent to the other, even when they have a very different climate and different time zones.

Yang Xiaping, as with Zhai Ran (and as we will see for Mao Wen), mostly presents in her work adaptations of Chinese folk stories in the Italian language, but completely uncontaminated by the Italian context (Yang 2003; 2008). However, in her last piece of work, *Come Due Farfalle in Volo Sulla Grande Muraglia* (Like Two Butterflies Flying on the Great Wall) (2011), she writes about a love story between two youngsters of Chinese origin in Italy, one Italian born and the

other arrived in Italy at an adult age. She has also edited a collection of traditional Chinese poems in Italian and a few other materials for multicultural classes in Italian schools.

Mao Wen (1953-) has published two short novels in Italian, *La Storia della Grande Campana* (The Story of the Big Bell) (1999) and *Wu Gou Yue* (2001), inspired by some tragic events of his life in Italy. More recently he also published a short story against racism, *A Long* (2011), in a collection of short stories written by migrant writers. He has also published a volume of Chinese folk stories along with an Italian illustrator and wrote a collection of poems that has not been published yet. His main artistic activity is that of scriptwriter and director of short films, which he writes, produces and acts in. In the scientific-didactic field he is co-author, along with other Italian scholars, of a manual of Chinese linguistics.

Cultural differences within a couple are the main theme of the short novel by Ji Yue (1972-), *L'aquilone Bianco* (The White Kite) (2004), published in Italian with Chinese translation, illustrated and followed by a short guide to the Chinese presence in Italy.

Authors who published in Chinese

Chen Xi (1980-) is an illustrator who uses comics to tell very poetic stories drawn from her own dreams. She is also responsible for a well known blog in which she published funny episodes of her life in Italy (some of these comics have also been published in Hu Lanbo's magazine *Shijie Zhongguo*). When she was still living in Italy (she recently moved to the UK), she published a novel in Chinese under the pseudonym Long Santiao titled, *Luoma Tiankong Xia* (Under the Roman Sky) (2009), partially inspired by her life in Italy with her husband from southern Italy. The novel is illustrated by the author herself.

A peculiar case of a Sinoitalian writer is that of Deng Yuehua (1950-), a Fujianese poet and writer, who is also a worker in a factory in Northern Italy. Most of his abundant literary production has, to date, only been published in Chinese. These works include the autobiographical novel *Wo zai Ouzhou de rizi li* (My Days in Europe) (2005), *Wanli Xunfu* (Thousand Miles Away, Looking for my Dear) (2007), a novel about a woman who leaves China to be with her husband in Italy, and *Dou Xiang You ge Jia* (Everybody Wants a Family) (2008), a novel in which he tells the story of a young Chinese man

that after many years in Italy gets a divorce from his wife who stayed in China and later on finds a new love and family in his adoptive country. Extremely prolific, he has written many unpublished novels and collections of tales. Some of his work has also been published on websites and in the ethnic press. He is also the author of a number of poems, some of which have been published by the Chinese ethnic press in Italy. In addition, he has written many ballads, which he often inserts into his novels and are imagined to be sung along with music.

Slightly different still is the case of Jin Jian (also known as Jin Zicai), whose only short story translated into Italian, *Voglio Tornare a Casa* (I Want to go Home) (2006), was published after it was selected in a literary contest. However, before that, the author had already published several pieces in the Chinese ethnic press in Italy.

The second generation

Due to specific factors affecting the Chinese presence in Italy, it is especially hard to define a shared background for youth of Chinese origin. For Chinese migrated families it is a very common habit to send Italian-born children to China to attend primary schools and sometimes for even longer periods. On the other hand it is just as common that children born in China rejoin their parents, who move to Italy right after giving birth, during their school years (Pedone 2011, and see also Chapter 4). As a result, it is not always the case that those belonging to the second generation or to the so-called 1.5 generation share a common cultural background. In general terms, most studies on second generation Chinese in Italy include within the definition all individuals who attended Italian public school, regardless of the place of birth or nationality[4], thereby focusing on the importance of formal education in the process of identity construction as the most crucial factor defining their status (Ceccagno 2004; Chiodi, Benadusi 2006; Pedone 2011, and see also Chapter 4). I hereby follow the same definition.

The first author belonging to the second generation of Chinese heritage to write a novel in Italy is Marco Wong (1963-), who published *Nettare Rosso* (Red Nectar), an illustrated erotic novel, in 2011. The characters featured in the novel are mostly Italian, but

[4] Italian born children, according to Italian law, share the nationality of their parents and are not automatically entitled Italian nationality.

there are also some Asian characters (for the most part fancied by the Italian characters in a rather stereotypical manner). One of the main characters is an Italian born Chinese girl, Silvia, completely different from the dragon lady cliché imagined by her Italian peers:

> At the beginning I was deceived by Silvia's looks. Maybe I was looking for the graceful ways of that Thai waitress, but she is a very strong girl and her frail look hides a determination of steel. To have the chance to chitchat with her I started going early to her restaurant, when there were only a few customers, or at the end, when it was about to close.
> «How come you Chinese are so closed?»
> «How come you let your prejudice lead your judgment? Do I look closed to you?»
> «A little bit, at least against me. Actually I'd say you've always been quite rude to me»
> «You bet. You have no idea how many Italian guys want to shag a *cinesina*[5], like we were trading cards or something. And I have the feeling that you are not different» (Wong 2011, p. 110).

The novel is also about to be published in a comic book version, while Marco Wong is currently working on his new novel titled *Amare Diverso* (Different Love), that tells the story of a group of people with different cultural backgrounds who cross each others' paths. He also recently published an erotic short story for an online publishing house, *Appuntamento Olimpico* (Olympic Date) (2012), an autobiographical short story, *Il tuo Destino in uno Sguardo* (Your Destiny in a Glimpse) (2008), and a manual to learn how to read a Chinese newspaper.

Two other young authors belonging to the second generation, Sun Wenlong and Zhu Qifeng, have only published one and two short stories, respectively (Sun 2010) (Zhu 2007; 2008). However, they are culturally very active through the website associna.com (managed by second generation Chinese in Italy), on which many short stories of young authors of Chinese origin appeared.

Occasional writers

There are many authors who only published one short story

[5] *Cinesina* is an ethnic slur directed to Chinese women. Literally it only means 'little Chinese girl', but its usage is criticized by second generation Chinese in Italy in blogs and forums for it conveys the idea of Chinese women as petit, feeble and childish.

within a collection and nothing else, such as the writers included in a number of volumes that came out after specific literary contests addressed to migrant writers. This is the case, for example, of Ying Chen (2008), Zhang Xianzheng (2008), Huang Wenwen (2009) and Zhou Meimei (2011). These are extremely brief stories, written by girls and women who arrived in Italy at an adult age, and their tone is quite melancholic. The short stories included in the recent volume that followed the literary contest held in Prato by Monash University have a different tone. The writers of Chinese origin included in this collection are all second generation teenagers (Badeng 2012; Hu 2012; Huang 2012; Li 2012; Liao 2012; Liu Luigi 2012; Liu Luisa 2012; Liu Mo 2012; Wei 2012; Yuan 2012) and have a better command of the Italian language. Some of these short stories have a rather sophisticated structure: they share a passionate attitude and sometimes rage against racial prejudice, but they also manifest a deep affection for the country in which their writers live.

Other authors have been included in collections of works by migrant writers (outside of any literary contest), such as the autobiographical stories of Xia (1998), Weng (2008) and Xu (2010).

Some further considerations

Sinoitalian literature shares some common traits with the literature authored by people of Chinese origin living abroad in other countries. The most visible one is the need to take the word, to be there, to express oneself. Italian society has ignored the foreign presence for a long time; while in the recent past Italian media distorted and amplified some of its aspects, trying to exploit it for various purposes (Aime 2005). What many immigrants or children of immigrants perceive is the lack of media representation, the perpetual lack of a mental spot in the collective imagination. Italian schools are already attended by a great number of children of immigrants, but, besides their relatives, who are the adult role models for these kids? Almost all information and education in Italy is monocultural and this makes the expression through literature one crucial way to say 'Look at me, I am here too'.

We also observe how some authors of Chinese origin feel a strong urge for self-representation. The discourse about the Chinese presence in Italy that has been spread by media, and unfortunately also by *vox populi*, is made of sad stereotypes. The many clichés that

cage the Chinese in Italy are among the steadiest, paralyzed also by the fact that people of Chinese origin in Italy, and not only the first generation, often find themselves a place within the ethnic economic system where no competence of the Italian language is required. Although such an environment allows them to quickly reach economic emancipation (see Chapter 1), it also slows down any cultural exchange with the host society. As a consequence, urban legends about Chinese migrants spread undisturbed or, at the best, the Chinese in Italy are simply considered to be quiet workers, who live in complete apathy of what surrounds them. In this scenario, Sinoitalian literature casts a new voice, made of self-representation against the stereotypes. With its very existence it erases one of the many stereotypes about the Chinese in Italy, granting a space to reflections, judgments, sufferance, joys and satisfactions of a group of migrants that is falsely considered to be incapable of having room for anything outside working.

In some of these works a certain didactic scope is detectable. Many authors want to 'explain', or 'make others understand'. In some cases, the imagined readers are other migrants to whom the authors try to explain what the real difficulties encountered in the migration process are, and what is to be expected by such experience. As in Jin (2006, p. 19):

> I want to go home. These are the first words I said when I arrived to Italy 8 years ago, when I realized that this place was a thousand miles away from the paradise I dreamed of: magnificent buildings, gold and luxury. I wanted to go home. […] Waste paper/green card, oh waste paper/money. The 21st century belongs to China and the blood that spills from the motherland must flow in the motherland […].

In other cases, the writers imagine that they describe Italian people to the Chinese citizens back home, in doing this they often linger on cultural differences, or sometimes they re-interpret their own cultural background according to the new values encountered abroad. As in Weng (2008, p. 25):

> Today my people appear mysterious and impenetrable from the outside, although they participate actively in the Italian economic growth. A deeper integration of Chinese within the Italian society would by all means guarantee further progress and more stability to

> the society itself […] I wanted to share my story with this purpose, to encourage the many young migrants, like me a few years back, who dream to change their life and at the same time can only see an uncertain future before their eyes.

In most cases though the target readers are Italians, to whom many authors feel the duty to explain their country of origin, their culture of origin, their migratory experience. In this case it might happen that the author gives a watered down, tamed image of China, or it can also happen that he/she ends up exploiting Chinese folklore, telling the story of a traditional China, far from daily and present reality (Yang 2003; 2008; Zhai 2003). It is possible to trace, however, the need to be the spokespersons for a country that is perceived as heavily misconceived. In some cases it appears as if the author feels inadequate to represent a country that he/she loves and would like to be accepted in a more appropriate manner.

The topic that reoccurs in these materials most often is surely the autobiographical one. The tale of one's own life experience takes different shapes, it can dwell on the over passed difficulties, open windows on painful events of the past, but it can also just as often tell the funny, light and amusing aspects of the transcultural encounter. As it happens for example in the following excerpt, where a not yet speaking Italian Ji Yue is fooled by her Italian husband Gianni (Ji Yue 2004, pp. 62-4):

> Gianni played another cruel joke on me when we were in San Remo walking by the seashore. There are many older people there who walk very well kept little dogs: prissy poodles or other garnished little dogs. To me it was a real sight, because in China there are very few dogs and people don't usually keep them on a leash.
> Gianni told me old ladies would love it if I complimented their dogs by saying: «*Si mangia?*» So I would just innocently get close and ask: «*Si mangia?*». The old ladies would run away in fear, because people in Europe think that dog is a habitual food for us Chinese.

In second generation writers there is a deeper awareness of one's own position in Italian society. Theirs is a literature that challenges and claims, and at moments it is an angry literature. The theme of identity is extremely present in these writings; frequently the eternal questions by Italian society to take side and decide if one is more Chinese or more Italian is openly refused. These second generation

writers, also because of their young age, are able to make fun of this limited and outdated interpretation model; they feel '100% Chinese' and '100% Italian'. They report about their sufferings with irony and delicacy, being perfectly able to defend themselves and claiming that they do not want to adhere to a monocultural scheme that would bring them, in any case, to the refusal of a substantial part of their identity. The following are just a few examples of the tone of awareness that we find in the works of the second generation writers:

> Some more bullshit, bro', you tell me if you think they are more funny or just plain ignorant, these, my Italian friends: they asked me if it's true that Chinese never die, in other words if we hide our dead grandpas in the fridges! Anyway, they do hate us a little bit, although I could never understand how much and why (Sun 2010, p. 48).

> Many clients ask me how the Chinese can survive since they do not have many customers. They ask that hinting more or less explicitly at the help of Chinese mafia. To these questions I now have a standard, tested answer, which is also the truth that I am aware of: «It's all family run! Damn, look at my brother he started working when he was 15. Would you send your 15 year old kid off to work? To slave his ass off ten hours a day for 1000 lousy Euros a month?» . They usually leave, shrugging their shoulders and keeping the answer for themselves (Zhu 2008, p. 40).

> […] aren't you Italian? Right, I am not, I am a Chinese citizen. I am only *de facto* Italian, I'm an Italian with an Italian green card. I remember everything, every second, every moment in which they made me feel I was 'nobody'. I am bitter, sad for all I had to give up in these years, although I don't feel resentment, nor a grudge against Italy, despite what I still suffer every day. It is a perpetual fight, against myself, against institutions and against prejudice and I will soon win, I am sure (Xu 2010, p. 150).

> […] once I was getting on a very crowded bus, with passengers who were exiting from both the entrance and the exit doors. When I got on, as the very last person to board the bus, a lady who was getting off through the entrance door told me: «Haven't you Chinese learned how to get on a bus yet?». If she hadn't used that extremely irritating «Chinese» I would have probably apologized, although I wouldn't have known what I was apologizing for. «And haven't you learned that one should theoretically enter in a bus from the entrance and get out from the exit?». This is what I respectfully answered. She left, speechless and irritated by my satisfied sneer (We 2012, p. 32).

Conclusions

Sinoitalian literature has started moving with its first real strides and after more than two decades, during which different authors belonging to different social and cultural levels have independently produced works dealing with the bicultural Sinoitalian experience. Today, a greater interest in this kind of literary work is seen in different contexts and it is more and more evident that some shared efforts are being made to sustain this cultural and literary phenomenon.

In Italy the academic interest towards *migrant writers* is growing; literary contests addressed to migrants and second generation writers are more common every year[6], many publishing houses started specializing in these authors[7] and a few online journals focus only on this specific kind of literature[8]. The writers themselves seem more aware, as it is suggested by the proud and sneering tone of second generation youngsters and by the desire to tell stories more attached to everyday life shown by some of the authors that debuted with folk stories or didactic materials (for instance Mao Wen, Zhai Ran and Yang Xiaping). More and more authors publish their second or third works in Italian (Marco Wong, Hu Lanbo), or look for someone who can translate their work from Chinese to Italian (Jin Jian, Deng Yuehua). These are all signs of vitality, that seem to anticipate a literary season which could offer a few nice surprises if the Italian public, and those who guide their taste and expenses, will be open to these works, as has happened in other European countries with a similar history of Chinese migration.

[6] Among others: Eks&Tra, Marenostrum, Linguamadre.

[7] Some examples being: Edizioni dell'arco, Sinnos, Compagnia delle lettere, Ali&No, Gruppo Babele, Fara, Mangrovie edizioni, Besa editrice, Cosmo Iannone editore, e/o edizioni, Edizioni il punto di incontro.

[8] The most famous being *El Ghibli*, *Kúmá* and *Sagarana*.

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ISBN 978-88-6655-461-5 (print) ISBN 978-88-6655-462-2 (online) © 2013 Firenze University Press

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