我是中国人: Identity and social integration of Chinese youth in the Marche region

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Abstract: This article analyzes the issues of identity and social integration of Chinese youth in the Marche region. The focus on these two themes arises from the recent increase in the number of Chinese students in schools in this region. This change points to a need to study an unexplored phenomenon. In this regard, the intention of this contribution is, on the one hand, to observe the dynamics related to social integration of these young people and to understand how they navigate their multiple identities, and, on the other hand, to provide guidance for future research as well as useful tools to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for them to live in. Following a review of the literature, this article analyzes research results regarding data collected from 198 young people and 21 teachers, and concludes with insights into the identity and social integration problems confronting Chinese youth in the region.

Keywords: Chinese youth, Marche region, social integration, identity, migration.

摘要： 本文主要分析居住在意大利马尔凯大区的年轻华裔的身份与社会融入问题。分析这两个主题的原因跟近几年来马尔凯大区各所学校里的中国学生人数的不断增长有关。此外，这一话题目前在研究领域仍有很多空白。因此，本文的目标一方面是观察年轻华裔在意大利社会融入的动态，并深入研究他们身份的变化，另一方面为未来针对当地社会融入这一主题提供了帮助。在参考了丰富的文献资料之后，本文对关于198位青年人和21位老师的不同背景进行了分析。最后，本文针对居住在马尔凯大区的年轻华裔们的身份与社会融入这一问题提出了两点建议。

关键词： 中国青年人，马尔凯大区，社会融入，身份，移民。

1. Introduction

The approximately 1,750 Chinese school-age youth in the Marche region have to face several issues, including problems of social integration and identity. These young people have been displaced from their home and brought to a different country, which is culturally and physically distant from theirs. In this new environment they have to deal with complex and challenging situations, both inside and outside of school. They have often started and strengthened their education in China, but now this trajectory has been interrupted and they find themselves on a different educational path that is in line with their preparation, where they are compelled to learn a new language, and, at the same time, pressured by their families to maintain their linguistic and cultural roots. We know little about how these Chinese youth confront the aforementioned problems of

identity formation and social integration in a small, albeit diverse territory, like the Marche region. In the last few years, we have witnessed an increase in foreign students, including Chinese, in schools all over the Marche region. They made up just over 25% of the total preschool to high school population during the 2015-16 school year, and approximately 24% during the 2018-19 school year[1]. Consequently, in order to face this growing phenomenon, it is essential to develop research in this specific area, which can address the social integration and identity issues in two directions: the building of an environment that is open and welcoming towards migrant youth, and the creation of avenues for dialogue with these young people to find ways to assist them through their process of social integration. Based on a review of the reference theoretical approach, illustrated in section 2 of this article, the author undertook fieldwork to collect firsthand accounts of how Chinese youth confront the processes of identity formation and integration in the Marche region, explaining methodology and analyzing results in section 3 and 4. In particular, the author developed the research around two questions: the first regarding how Chinese youth that live in between two worlds build and perceive their identity; the second related to their social integration process including factors that directly or indirectly depend on them (e.g. learning the Italian language and school environment).

2. Literature review

2.1 Why migrate?

People have ceaselessly migrated from one country to another in every historic period but the migration phenomenon we are witnessing today differs from the past because it is taking place in a highly globalized environment. In particular, migration processes underscore the structural reality of globalization. On the one hand, migration is considered a process of horizontal mobility, a geographical relocation, and the movement of people from one place to another. On the other hand, it reflects a system where the mobility appears to be a distinctive element of the global economy, which is based on increased international interdependence and on the circulation of raw materials, goods, capital and labor. Moreover, the globalization effect on migration processes emerges from several migration characteristics in the global and contemporary context, including: the continuous increase and diversification of countries of origin and countries of arrival, the speed of migrations, and the steady growth of foreign populations in recipient countries. Contemporary migration is facilitated by increased mobility, enabled thanks to multiple modern means of transport. Indeed, the development of technology and means of communication trigger processes that set in motion ever increasing flows of people (Santagati 2004: 21-24).

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[1]   Statistica Regione Marche 2020.

Only relatively recently has the Chinese migration phenomenon, in the context of contemporary globalization trends, drawn the attention of sinologists and anthropologists. The new migration from China toward Europe, and especially toward Italy, began in the 1980s thanks to the opening up and reform policies that led to China's rise as a global economic, military and diplomatic actor. The increase in Chinese people in Italy is striking, rising from 402 Chinese adults in 1975 (Marsden 2014: 2) to 299,823 residents by January 2020[2], and with the growth in their numbers there has also been a change in their occupations. For a very long time, Italy has witnessed the absence of some categories of migrants who were already present in other European countries, where highly qualified workers were needed and students who had to complete their education were welcomed. This is due to the implementation of an immigration policy that has attracted, up until the 1990s, largely non-qualified workers to Italy, and has not recognized the credentials of highly educated migrants. A turning point was reached at the end of the century, when a larger number of Chinese migrants became involved in the import-export sector, after which, the Italian government started to summon the first groups of Chinese students, modifying in this way the composition of their settlement on Italian territory (Ceccagno and Rastrelli 2008: 67-70).

Analyzing the actual presence of the Chinese community in the Marche region, the number of Chinese citizens in the territory on January 1st, 2017 was estimated to be 9,690, and of these, 2,389 resided in Macerata province[3]. They were almost perfectly balanced in terms of gender: men represented 51.4% of the Chinese living in the Marche region, and women the remaining 48.6% (Sistema Informativo Statistico Regione Marche 2017: 9). Regarding Chinese school-age minors, in the school year 2015-16, they constituted 6.8% of the foreign students enrolled in Marche schools (preschool to high school), which enrolled 25,439 students in total (5,127 in preschool, 8,781 in primary school, 4,880 in middle school, and 6,651 in high school). Chinese students occupied the fourth position, after students coming from Albania, Morocco and Romania, totaling about 1,750 (Sistema Informativo Statistico Regione Marche 2017: 27-28). If we compare the presence of Chinese students in middle school during the school year 2015-16 in Macerata province, they were one of the major nationalities after Macedonian, Albanian and Romanian immigrants. Moreover, in the same school year, about 40% of the Chinese students attended public schools in Monte San Giusto and Corridonia. In absolute terms, among schools with the highest number of non-Italian citizens, in the school year 2015-16, was the Istituto Comprensivo "L. Lotto" in Monte San Giusto, which had 83 foreign students, including 20 Chinese students (Prefettura di Macerata 2017: 84-85).

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[2] Istat 2020a.
[3] Istat 2020b.

2.2 Which identity?

Questioning the identity building processes of Chinese youth means trying to understand the multiple identities they have to reconcile: a 'foreign' school-mate, an adolescent dealing with difficulties associated with their developmental age, and a child who has to demonstrate to his/her parents both the ability to remain Chinese and exert themselves in the effort needed to improve their life in an overseas culture. The notion of multiple identities can be considered a core concept in the literature regarding second generations.

In order to understand what second generation means, we can start by understanding how the use of the expression *second generation* has changed. Originally, it was used to refer to all the children who were born to first generation immigrants, regardless of their age or the historical moment in which they arrived in the receiving country; more recently, the expression has been used to define «those who were born in Italy or arrived there in early childhood; minors belonging to this category are considered juridically as foreigners until their majority, when they can apply for Italian citizenship» (Bolognesi 2008: 2).

Nevertheless, it is important to clarify the *second generation* concept, which literally defines those who were born in Italy to foreign parents. Children of the first generation cannot be considered without distinction members of the second generation. North-American sociological literature examined these concepts in depth, starting from the works by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), and Portes and Zhou (1993), which broadened the adoption of different categories to divide the population into three groups. If we adapt these categories to the Italian situation, the groups are defined as follows. The first is called *generation 1.75* and includes children who were born abroad and arrived in Italy during pre-school age; they have indefinite childhood memories and have been displaced in a stage of life where they are more capable of adapting to the new life; they grow in between two languages and two cultures handling them quite easily and obtaining educational outcomes similar to those of second generation children. *Generation 1.5* is composed of youth who began to attend school in their country of origin and then continued their schooling in Italy with many difficulties; they emigrated between 7 and 12 years old abandoning their mother language, together with their teachers and schoolmates, facing severe problems of adaptation in the receiving country. Lastly, *generation 1.25*, which consists of youth who arrived in Italy between 13 and 17 years old; they experience several difficulties because they left behind friendships and a consolidated educational path, and they, similarly to first generation members, have a greater struggle learning the Italian language and, consequently, in entering the receiving society (Ceravolo and Molina 2013: 6-7).

Whatever category they are included in, all these young people share the same feeling of a double belonging, one to the culture of origin and one to the receiving culture. More precisely, it is a question of a plurality of 'belongings', as second generation youth, besides handling several belongings to a nation, an ethnic group or a linguistic group, also build personal capabilities and manage-

ment strategies pertaining to the «multiplicity of self» that form their individual and varied identities. This construction process of forming and reconciling multiple identities «makes you feel foreign, Italian, student, adolescent, child, friend, all at the same time […]» (Leonini 2005: 4).

Among the various identities that Chinese youth build and handle, there is the strong element related to their culture of origin. The difficulty of defining Chinese culture itself compounds the complexity of the identity question. Indeed, it is not an easy task to determine the 'Chinese-ness' of migrants living in the Italian territory. The Chinese-ness is not a fixed category, and it acts openly and indefinitely through meanings that are continuously re-negotiated and re-defined inside the different ramifications of the Chinese diaspora. Being Chinese outside China does not have the same meaning as being Chinese inside China; this feeling changes from one place to another, and molds itself to local habits in the various parts of the world where Chinese people have settled down and built their ways of living. There are, indeed, several Chinese identities, not just one (Ang 1998: 225).

The anthropology of Chinese culture cannot be limited to Chinese geographical boundaries, and for this reason, it is important to observe Chinese culture inside and outside China, and relate cultural practices in different regions and multiple national contexts. From studies conducted over the years, two elements are particularly meaningful for the identity building of Chinese people living abroad: culture and language. Even if the Chinese all over the world do not form a nation, they share a linguistic and cultural background that make them feel a solid group. We witness a sort of de-territorialization of Chinese identity through the so-called «ethnic civilization», or an ethnicity defined by a common civilization that includes Chinese history, literacy and philosophy among other aspects (Tan 2012: 200).

In practice, how do Chinese youth outside China, and particularly in Italy, express their Chinese-ness? Studies conducted in Italy in relation to second generation identity building show a situation where Chinese youth seem to take as a reference the members of second and third generations of countries with a longer migration history, such as the United States, United Kingdom or France. The youth interviewed «do not feel subjected to the receiving country, instead they use it, selecting values and customs that they want to acquire, and maintaining a Chinese identity that they feel proudly attached to» (Pedone 2004: 41). They spend their free time playing poker or *majiang* or listening to Chinese music, and at the same time, they perceive their own Chinese-ness as eating only Chinese food and wearing exclusively Chinese clothes. The identification with the 'Overseas China' makes these young people feel a connection with a youth culture, which is displaced both from the areas of origin and the context of their arrival in Italy. However, they are capable of selecting Western values, habits and ways of living, replacing them inside a precise and proud attachment to an identity which is reshaped but unavoidably Chinese. In this regard, we can talk about globalization of youth cultures and 'multilocality', referring to the ways of simultaneous presence that have been adopted by these youth in order to move

from one context to another following their identification and identity building needs (Benadusi 2012: 136).

2.3 What is social integration?

In order to understand the expansive conceptual world of social integration and its multiple shades, it is useful to start with a definition:

> […] coordination of directions for action among all members of a society, which is achieved in various sectors of the social structure and with different degrees of intensity. Social integration constitutes the condition that makes possible maintaining social order, that is the existence of the society itself as a harmonized co-existence of individuals[4].

Given this, it is important to mention a concept connected to social integration: multiculturalism. Meant as the compresence, in a specific physical or relational space, of different groups and identities, multiculturalism has increasingly been seen as a distinguishing feature of contemporary society, especially in relation to the migration phenomena. The contact between various cultural worlds is not an abstract and detached meeting between cultures, but a concrete meeting between people, made possible thanks to intercultural dialogue. (Santagati 2004: 51). This dialogue is started by strong intercultural education, whose purpose is to promote sincere interaction between different cultures in support of mutual recognition, and remove those prejudices and stereotypes that consider diversity as abnormal. Promoting intercultural education means creating the necessary circumstances for building «a society aimed at educating the future generations to leave the established frames of mind, lifestyle and thinking models of the belonging culture, in order to learn to open up to diversity and to move close to the other without prejudices and narrow-mindedness» (Sani 2011: 93).

The key place to build intercultural education is school, which is a privileged space for educating new generations to open to plurality and consider diversity as a resource. However, it is precisely in this educational environment that migrant youth face various critical moments in their social integration process. The first is the educational placement, which is the first stage of mutual knowing and crucial for proper educational planning. In this regard, two main problems emerge: the first is related to the welcoming period, because migrant youth do not have the necessary tools to interpret the surrounding signs and, therefore, may feel a sense of disorientation that affects both them and the class group; the second takes place amidst migration flows with areas of high mobility, where irregularities in terms of entering and attending school may occur.

Once the critical school placement has been achieved, migrant youth may still feel disoriented in a new environment with new people, where a lack of reference points can jeopardize their adaptation to culture models belonging to the

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[4]   Melchiorre 1996, 459 definition selected by Colombo 2004: 13.

receiving society. They undertake tasks often based on conflicting expectations arising from school and home. On the one hand, they may experience insecurity about how to behave in the formal educational context of relating with teachers and in the informal context of interacting with schoolmates. On the other hand, in the domestic context, they often find themselves confronted by social rules and practices belonging to their culture of origin, which are often inconsistent with the educational order, yet serve as tools of their own ethnic belonging in public environments. Migrant youth, therefore, use these tools both in public and private spaces, leading to collisions between school and family worlds (Colombo 2004: 116-117).

Family is the locale of primary socialization and informal relations, and it often contradicts socialization processes occurring in the formal educational environment of school. A division can arise between the two socialization spaces where limited interaction can inhibit mutual understanding. Various problems can lie at the base of this tension. Firstly, it is often extremely difficult for parents to adapt to their children's growth in a context that is no longer under their total control and that is at least partly at odds with their traditions. Secondly, they seem not to be interested in their children's school or relational problems. They often consider the educational systems of their countries as their points of reference and, consequently, they do not fully understand the prevailing rules and dynamics of the new educational system where they now live. Finally, they do not take part in parents' activities or meetings with teachers because of linguistic barriers (Colombo 2004: 124-126).

This last issue of linguistic challenges constitutes another problem for migrant youth during the social integration phase. These young people are at a systematic disadvantage because the primary language of the receiving country is the main tool for communication, learning, and evaluation of educational outcomes. To their detriment, their communication skills are rarely valorized by teachers, because in schools with a national curricular tradition there is often no space for multilingualism. Given this, it is necessary, on the one hand, to «[…] rethink linguistic learning strategies, giving more space to integration between L1 (mother tongue) and L2 (learned language), and to skills evaluation methods, avoiding ethnocentric models and vicious circles of depreciation of foreign students» (Colombo 2004: 50). On the other hand, it is equally important to try to understand «if public schools should promote the identification of migrants' children with their culture of origin, or let families have freedom of choice to organize these activities, privately or through the support of communities and ethnic associations located throughout the territory» (Colombo 2004: 52).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to contribute to existing knowledge by filling a gap in the scientific literature regarding the processes of identity formation and social integration of Chinese youth in the Marche region. Using a survey methodology, and drawing on theoretical ideas that were adapted and applied

to the real life experiences of Chinese migrant youth, several insights emerged with practical implications regarding the understanding of how these young people deal with identity and social integration issues.

The study aimed to address two main research questions:

1. In relation to identity building, how do Chinese youth, displaced from their homeland and relocated to the Marche region, perceive themselves and feel about being suspended between two worlds?

2. How is their process of social integration impacted by: a) Factors that directly depend on the Chinese youth themselves (e.g., learning the Italian language, relationships with peers and their culture of origin) and, b) Factors that indirectly depend on the Chinese youth themselves (e.g., school environment, peers' and teachers' attitudes toward them)?

The intention of the author was to approach the research questions from two directions using two different methods. First, a brief questionnaire was distributed, which included two drawings to which every Chinese student attending the Marche Region Chinese Language Academy[5] in Civitanova Marche and Porto Sant'Elpidio, was asked to respond. Second, a more extensive questionnaire was given to Chinese students, non-Chinese students and teachers in the middle school Istituto Comprensivo "L. Lotto" in Monte San Giusto. These two approaches were adopted in the hope of more accurately capturing the different perspectives and dynamics associated with identity formation and social integration. Written questionnaires were used owing to the age of the participants who ranged from 12 to 17 years old. It was assumed that pre-adolescents and adolescents would not be inclined to talk freely and truthfully about the topic with an interviewer but would instead be more comfortable completing a written questionnaire. The drawings were used as a way to allow the youth to express themselves as freely and creatively as they wished.

The fieldwork started in November 2017 in the two schools of the Marche Region Chinese Language Academy in Civitanova Marche and Porto Sant'Elpidio when students received a short questionnaire and a simple initial drawing intended to elicit their conception of their home and family life. Later, following a careful analysis of the drawings, an important observation regarding these young people's self-expression was noticed, and so, in February 2018, a second drawing, focused on their self-perception and self-representation, was created and distributed to study participants.

Over the same period of time, the author worked/volunteered as a cultural mediator in the middle school Istituto Comprensivo "L. Lotto" in Monte San Gi-

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[5]   In Chinese 马尔凯国际中文学校. This academy opened in 2012 and is now divided into two schools, one in Civitanova Marche and another one in Porto Sant'Elpidio. When it first opened, it enrolled 7 students, and currently enrolls around 120. The academy mainly offers Chinese courses, referring to Chinese school curricular programs and adopting only Chinese textbooks. Students are divided into multiple classes depending on their age (from 6 to 18 years old), and lessons are organized on Saturdays and Sundays, for a total of six hours.

usto, a school that has enrolled one of the highest number of foreign students in Macerata province. In January 2018, questionnaires were distributed to students and teachers in this school. The final number of study participants included 198 students and 21 teachers. Following data collection, analysis of the drawings and questionnaires was undertaken using tools including specific psychology books to interpret the data. Specifically, books written by Cannoni (2003), Carlino Bandinelli and Manes (2004), Crocetti (2008), Federici (2005), Oliverio Ferraris (1978) were adopted. The last phase was the discussion of the research results.

In conclusion, the number of participants, which consists of 198 students and 21 teachers, is limited but the author believes that this research and its results can be valid and useful for studying the same issues related to Chinese youth in other areas of the Marche region or in other Italian regions.

4. Results discussion

The analysis of the research results starts from the illustrative statement below, made by one of the teachers involved. One key issue emerges from it and shows what needs to be examined in depth in future research: the influence of the family in the social integration process of Chinese youth.

Is the parent-teacher relation problematic? Why?

Yes, parents do not take part in parent-teacher talks because of clear linguistic difficulties, work obligations and because they already know that their children's results are mediocre because they work so they cannot study.
(Participant 21)

As several teachers have noticed, these parents rarely seem to participate in their children's school life and may not fully appreciate the importance of social integration. These are parents who speak little or no Italian. Lacking linguistic competence in the local language is a huge obstacle to adapting to a new environment. These young people experience this difficulty every day, as they are completely immersed in a situation where knowing Italian is essential to obtaining equal educational preparation and achievement, and eventually, a good job. It is not surprising that almost all the teachers who were interviewed insisted on the importance of language and enhancing Italian instruction. Indeed, to the question «According to you, what are the biggest problems that Chinese students have to face to obtain good educational outcomes?» 16 teachers out of 21 stated that the most problematic issue for them is learning Italian. Two of the teachers said:

The fact that they need time to adequately master the language in order to study properly is not taken into account at all, therefore Chinese students are often abandoned without having the necessary tools to be able to follow the school program, even if didactic material prepared specifically for them is provided.
(Participant 4)

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I think that the biggest obstacle is the language, which is very different from Italian. Then, they do not have anyone at home that can help them with their homework. They are left alone and those who do not have the will to persevere could become demoralized because of the difficulties, so they do not do their homework, and this contributes to enlarging the gap with the rest of the class. It often seems that they do not make any progress, even for several years.
(Participant 20)

It is also not surprising that all Chinese youth involved in the research and attending the Istituto Comprensivo L. Lotto affirmed that learning Italian is fundamental to their future employment and education if their life is going to be in Italy. In particular, 10 participants considered learning Italian important, and 7 very important. Observing the reasons for the importance of learning Italian, the outcome of the analysis is as follows: 5 affirmed that it is important because they want to live in Italy, 2 said that it is essential for communicating and making friends, 2 stated that it is important because you can speak properly and understand things, 4 affirmed that it is important because in the future they want to find a job and live in Italy, one participant said «If Italian was not important, why did I come here?», another one stated «Because I have difficulty in reading Italian», one pupil affirmed «Because learning has its advantages». The following answer is particularly significant as it epitomizes the condition that all Chinese youth face in relation to learning Italian: «Because I am not Italian. This is exactly why it is important». It seems that Chinese students appreciate that to demonstrate their competency relative to other students, they have to attain fluency in the Italian language. In this regard, the question «Is your Italian proficiency adequate for communicating, studying, both or neither?» aimed at examining their perception of their own Italian competency. Only one of them affirmed that it was adequate both for communication and study; 3 participants said their competency was not adequate for either; 4 stated it was good enough for studying; 9 affirmed their proficiency was acceptable for communication purposes.

Based on the data I collected, peer relationships developed outside school time were meager and this could be attributable to (and reinforced by) limited social integration. Nearly all the Chinese students who participated in the study indicated that they built relationships almost exclusively with other young Chinese people. Only a few of them reported having Italian or foreign friends, and spending time with them outside of school. Regarding making friends with Italian youth, most Chinese participants stated that it is a little difficult to make friends with them (9 out of 17), 5 of them said it is difficult, and only 3 said it is not difficult. Exploring the reasons in relation to this issue, it turned out that according to 11 of them it is difficult because they do not understand Italian, 5 affirmed that they do not have the same interests and 1 participant said that they cannot meet outside school. Despite these answers and the feeling of inappropriateness they can perceive, most of them still express their willingness to socialize with Italians. To the question «Would you like to have more Italian friends?» 12 out of 17 participants answered positively. 5 of them explained that

making friends with Italians would help them improve their Italian proficiency, and 3 of them affirmed that they would like to make new friends.

In some cases, though, a profound loneliness emerged, confirmed by the interpretation of some of their drawings, as in the case of Drawing 1, where the house, with just a single road leading to it, represents for the participant their sole shelter and chance of protection, and, at the same time, denotes a sense of closure towards socializing with people who are not family members.

Drawing 1

This situation, where Chinese youth relate very little with Italian or foreign peers, may in part be due to the Chinese students' disposition because, for the most part, and, mostly for reasons related to language and common interests, they tend to associate with their own fellow citizens. In this regard, 12 participants out of 17 stated they had few Italian friends and spent their free time going to their Chinese friends' homes. When these young people go out with friends, the places where Chinese and Italian students spend time are not the same, and this does nothing to help bridge the distance between the two groups. Indeed, it turned out that young Italians mainly go to the city center or bars and parks, whereas the young Chinese go to shopping malls. Practical help in this regard could come from foreign youngsters, who exhibit a greater inclination to get to know and interact with the Chinese youth, and who are certainly more conscious than young Italians of the challenges associated with social integration and adaptation to a completely different culture. They can be their friends as well as important reference points, since they can offer help as they face the same type of issues. In this regard, to the question «How would you help a Chinese classmate to integrate?» 7 out of 23 answered that they would socialize with him/her and make him/her feel comfortable, 10 students affirmed that they would help them with Italian and talk with them, and 1 participant said «I do not know how but I would help him/her in any way I can». Almost every for-

eign participant, and in particular 19 out of 23, also said that having classmates coming from different parts of the world is an enrichment. The following answers are the most meaningful:

It is an enrichment: they teach me things about their countries and I teach them things about mine! So that everyone knows one thing more than before.
(Participant from Senegal, 12 years old)

It is an enrichment because I can make friends and understand their traditions.
(Italian-Albanian participant, 12 years old)

It is an enrichment because we have more friends to help integrate.
(Participant from Albania, 12 years old)

It is an enrichment because we can learn new languages and new ways of living.
(Participant from Pakistan, 12 years old)

Having classmates coming from different parts of the world is an enrichment because in this way you have more friends, you know more about their languages and countries.
(Participant from Morocco, 12 years old)

It is an enrichment because you can know new things about different nationalities.
(Italian-Argentinian participant, 13 years old)

Despite the problems highlighted by this research there is at least one positive factor that can support social integration, and which is shared by all Chinese youth; that is, maintaining their mother tongue with family members and fellow citizens. In order to achieve successful social integration, it is essential to sustain a strong bond with your own roots. In this regard, almost all participants (12 out of 17) stated they speak solely Chinese at home and watch exclusively Chinese TV during their free time. And lastly, to the question «Why is studying Chinese important?» 2 out of 17 participants affirmed that it is important because when they go back to China they will be able to speak Chinese, 2 said that learning Chinese is essential for reading novels, speaking fluently and communicating with their families, 8 participants answered «Because I am Chinese»[6]. The rest of them gave various answers: «Because I like Chinese», «To learn things», «Because it is my mother tongue», «Being able to speak Chinese is very respectful», «To communicate».

With respect to the characteristics of the youth who were directly involved in this research, there was substantial variation in the sample, which turned out to be essential as their different migration backgrounds affected their diverse processes of social integration and identity formation. The present research revealed the exact classification of these young people, which follows quite faithfully the categorization elaborated by Rumbaut, Portes and Zhou that has been illustrated earlier in

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[6] In Chinese 因为我是中国人.

this paper. There are youth who were born and have grown up in Italy, and they can build their own Italian identity, while still being conscious of their cultural uniqueness. There are youth who were born in China and who possessed limited language competency, and they are able to build a Chinese identity, introjected during the childhood period. There are also youth who were born in China and who received their elementary education there and they can build a Chinese identity, being fully aware of it. Finally, there are youth who were born in Italy but returned to China to receive their elementary education, who currently attend Italian school, and who could have difficulty in building a coherent identity between their Chinese and Italian selves. Regarding their acculturation process, which can go from problematic to non-problematic with various repercussions expressed during the adolescent phase, situations can range from an unbalanced acculturation and a tendency toward assimilation or an unbalanced acculturation and a negotiation of their own identity, to cultural assimilation and an awareness of their own identity.

Concerning the participants' self-representation and correlated drawings, it is evident that there is a common feeling of disorientation and incomplete awareness of their own identity. Notably, none of the drawings contains elements that represent their Chinese-ness. These youth experience their personal schism and continuously ask themselves if they are Chinese or Italian. They represent themselves with uncertain strokes, or as a caricature, or with elements taken from the manga or cartoons worlds, because they seem to find it difficult to represent themselves, or understand themselves and their identity. Drawing 2 is a clear example of the perceived disorientation.

Drawing 2

A similar perception can be found looking at the drawing shown here:

想象自己站在镜子前面，你可以看到什么？
画一画
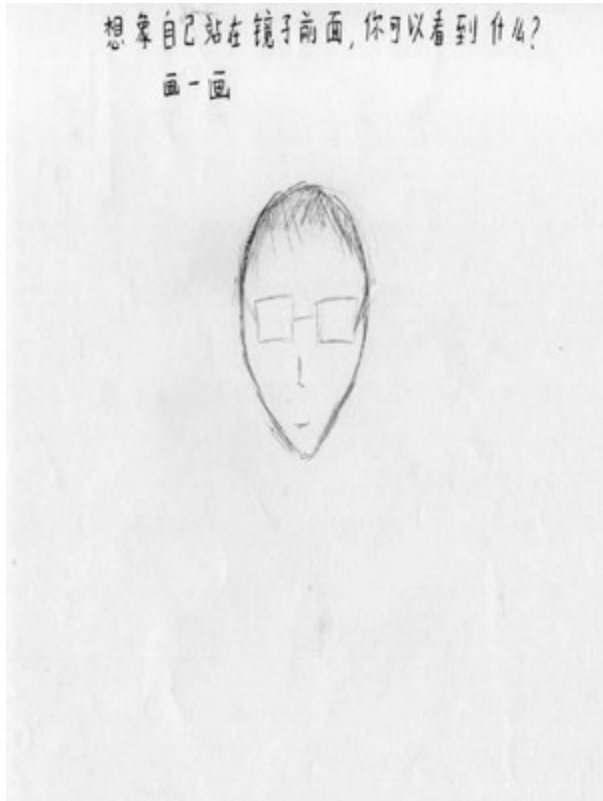
Drawing 3

This is a drawing that can be defined as 'incomplete' as it shows only a part of a human figure. It is typical of individuals that have a partial, complex vision of themselves, finding it difficult to depict themselves in a concrete way. Drawing 3 represents a face that has become totally estranged from reality, with lines that barely relate to a human face. The lines themselves, which are irregular and uncertain, are signs of fear of social relations and distance from family. Moreover, sunglasses have been placed as a defensive screen by this pupil, revealing a wish to be excluded from the world that surrounds him and a possible negation of the reality in which he lives.

However, it is necessary to interpret these findings with caution as one must consider the participants' age as they are mainly adolescents, and the identity theme is extremely complex and sensitive at this stage of life. Indeed, the question «Who am I?» is one of the crucial questions typical of adolescence.

In relation to the concept of home/family and its representation by the youth, we can observe the same feeling of disorientation. What emerges from

most of their drawings is a sense of loneliness and non-communication, exemplified by the absence of human figures or representations of people without a face. In particular, drawing 4 shows a girl who drew herself as a figure without hands standing in the furthest position from her parents. This represents both a feeling of detachment from them and emotional deficiency together with a sense of social inadequateness and the inability to establish bonds.
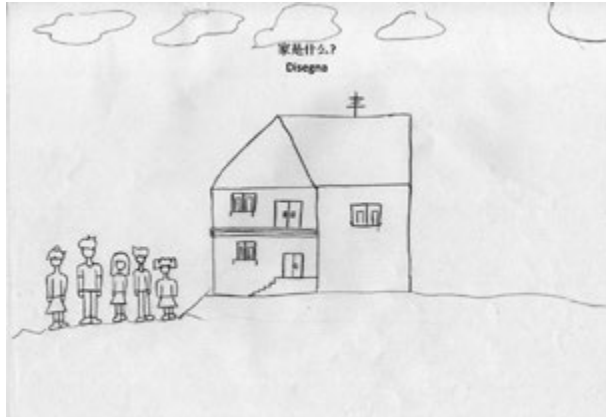
Drawing 4

The sense of disorientation is noticeable in other drawings too. In particular, we can find it in drawings where the representation of the house (with walls, a roof, doors and windows, as depicted in Drawing 4) is a result of an image constructed in the receiving country, which can reflect emulation of drawing styles of Italian youth or be their very own Chinese creation of communication strategies. It is also evident in the drawings that they in some way relate the concept of home/family to China, through for example, the representation of a panda with the word «panda» next to it (See Drawing 5). It was also apparent in the figuration of a child with his grandfather and animals on a farm in China (Drawing 6), where there emerges a strong emotional bond with the native land, also confirmed by the fact that there is no ground line in the picture and the figures appear to be suspended in space, an element that relates to the dimension of memory and the past. The same feeling can also be observed in another drawing, Drawing 7, showing a tall building with a sketch of what resembles a Chinese pagoda, which has been deleted; what is left is the building itself. The walls of the building are particularly well marked, meaning that the individual is afraid of losing his identity, therefore he reinforces his Self in an artificial way by using heavy exaggerated lines.
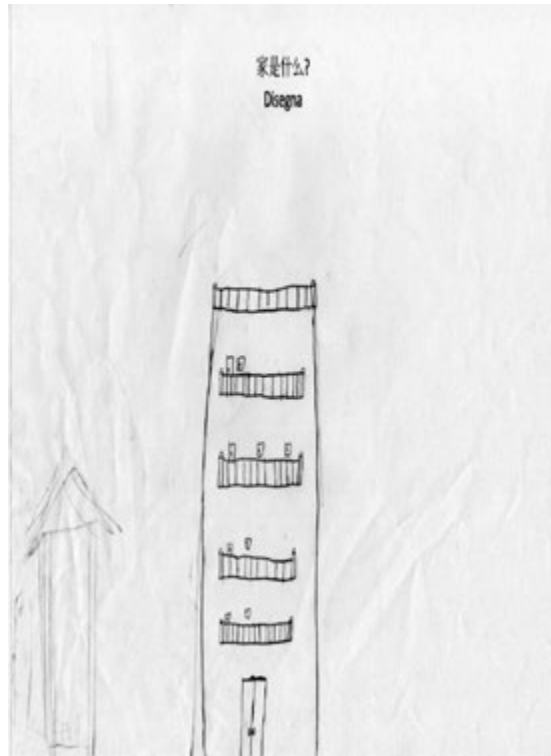
All these drawings reveal a bond with a China that lives in the memories of these young Chinese students who reside in Italy, who feel, however, still connected to their land and who perceive themselves as part Chinese, part Italian.
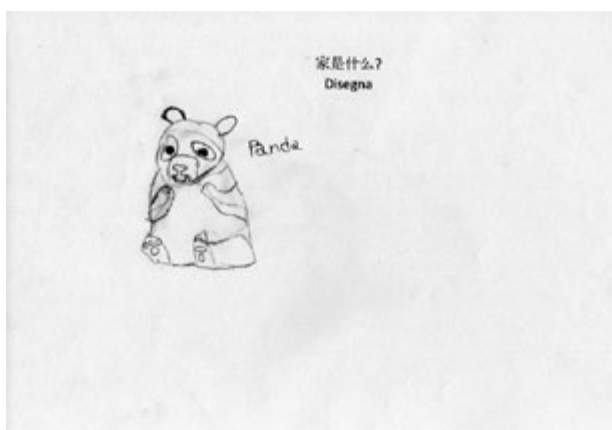
Drawing 5

Drawing 6

Drawing 7

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the issues of identity and social integration of Chinese youth in the Marche region, including not only their perspective, but also the points of view of Italian and foreign youth and teachers. The method used was intended to involve a heterogeneous group of people that would yield a more complete vision of the question. This research attempts to begin to redress gaps in the understudied phenomenon of Chinese immigrant youth in Italy. Migration to the Marche region is relatively new and research on the specific question of «identity and social integration of Chinese youth» remains sparse. The demographic trend toward increased migration of Chinese to the Marche region deserves greater attention. Their successful integration will require a more systematic grasp of the connection between Chinese youth, their families, and the schools. A more thorough understanding of the mechanisms of, and challenges to, identity formation and social integration is necessary before more effective and practical strategies for supporting these young people can be pursued.

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