# Fashioning the Future:

# Chinese Migrant Entrepreneurship in Italy

Yintan Fan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

Department of Sociology and Criminology

University of Essex

Date of submission for examination: April 2025

**Acknowledgement**

Before I started my PhD, I lectured at Wenzhou Medical University for almost three years. I often asked myself, “Do I really have a passion for academia? If so, do I need to pursue a PhD?” After much reflection, I decided to resign from my position and embark on a new journey as a PhD student at the University of Essex. In many ways, I feel like a time traveller arriving in my PhD studies from the future, bringing with me my savings, experience in the higher education system, and a clearer vision of the road ahead. Along this journey, I have been fortunate to receive a great deal of support, and I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude in this section.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Linsey McGoey. Her support began even before my PhD admission and has continued throughout my studies. She has been a guiding light, helping me navigate both academic challenges and personal frustrations when I lost direction. This dissertation would not be complete without her invaluable insights, mentorship, and encouragement. Thank you, Linsey!

I am also deeply grateful for the intellectual support I received from my department. I want to extend special thanks to my Board Chair, Professor Sean Nixon, who provided thought-provoking perspectives and closely monitored the quality of my writing. Similarly, I am indebted to Professor Lydia Morris and Dr. Boroka Bo, whose feedback during board meetings was both constructive and inspiring. A special thank you to Dr. Lukas Griessl, my senior peer, who generously shared his experiences with me. The research funding from the university and department also enabled me to conduct fieldwork, expanding my world and connecting it with others.

Beyond Essex, I would like to acknowledge the academic support I received from scholars abroad. I am grateful to Professor Tu Lan for participating in my interview and connecting me with additional interviewees for my fieldwork. I extend my thanks to

Ms Ilaria Mundula, who hosted my research stay in Prato, Italy, as well as to Dr Fabio Bracci, Dr Andrea Del Bono, and Giovanni Giamello for their enriching conversations and especially Fabio's recommended reading list. I also want to thank Professor Yuzhao Liu for inviting me to present my research at Shanghai University and encouraging me to participate in conferences where I received insightful feedback. My gratitude extends to all the scholars I encountered through conference presentations and summer schools — your comments and career advice made me feel welcomed into the academic community.

Finally, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my parents. As a self-funded student in the UK, their financial support, love, and care have been indispensable. I also want to thank my hometown, Wenzhou, where I developed an explorative spirit of curiosity and a deep empathy for the city and its people. And to the UK, in this land of inspiration, I have found good ideas for much of my research and chapter writing; thank you.

# Contents

**Abstract**

Ethnic entrepreneurship has long attracted the attention of policymakers and scholars due to their contributions to social development. Since the 1990s, Chinese migrants have transformed Prato, Italy, into a hub for textile, fast fashion, and wholesale industries, revitalising the local economy. Despite this significant impact, little is known about the entrepreneurial subjectivities, settlement motivations, community involvement, and social mobility of these Chinese migrants in Europe. This dissertation investigates the organisational resources that advance Chinese migrants' business interests in Prato's fast fashion industry, drawing from literatures on Economic Sociology, Ethnic Entrepreneurship, and Community Studies.

Based on a one-year ethnography (2022–2023), this research employs 52 semi-structured interviews primarily with Chinese migrant entrepreneurs and other relevant business partners, scholars, and organisation staff, complemented by observational and archival data. The study explores aspects of migrant entrepreneurship, such as entrepreneurial legitimacy, community scheduling and upward aspiration. I argue that Chinese migrant entrepreneurship in Prato results from temporal embeddedness, which calibrates migration patterns and fast fashion production. Chinese entrepreneurs leverage social capital to navigate uncertainty in both their business operations and community involvement. This thesis highlights the novelty of how social capital operates as an organisational resource and fluctuates to support business advancement along with uncertainty. By introducing the interplay between temporality and entrepreneurial practices, this research contributes to understanding the uncertainty of ethnic entrepreneurship and its role in transforming local economies.

**Tables and Figures**

## Chapter 1 Introduction

> "The sound of weaving never stops, and it is the oldest song in our city, and to Prato's children, it serves as a lullaby…While the Prato district and the entire Italian textile manufacturing industry have long been in a perhaps irreversible crisis due to the free global circulation of Chinese textiles, in Prato itself, in the warehouses left empty by the failed small enterprises, often built in the city , next to the owners' houses in homage to the ancient idea that "life was work" and "work was life", one of the largest Chinese communities in Europe has settled. It maintains and prospers by recruiting illegal labour and manufacturing clothes with fabrics imported from China because the fabrics produced by the people of Prato are too expensive, and it has every right to brand its rags 'Made in Italy'."
>
> - Edoardo Nesi (2011, pp. 92-93,105-106)[1]

"Made in Italy" contains complicated sentiments for people in Prato, which demonstrate their glorious pride in textile and fashion items, a pride that is now slowly being diluted by globalisation of production, especially Chinese entrepreneurs' involvement. Prato has been famous for its textile industry since the medieval age but has suffered global competition and economic recession in the last decades (Lan and Zhu, 2014). From the 1990s, Chinese migrants moved to this small industrial city and made Prato internationally well-known in fast fashion garments. Since then, they have been gradually involved in the production of "Made in Italy" garments for global export. In this case, this label refers to garments manufactured by Chinese-run companies in

[1] Edoardo Nesi, Italian writer, filmmaker and translator. His books include *Sentimental Economy* and *Story of my people*. In 2009, he was appointed councillor for culture and economic development of the Province of Prato.

Italy, where attaching the "Made in Italy" tag is a routine step before these low-end, fast fashion items are packaged and distributed to wholesalers worldwide.

In 2007, Al Jazeera media published a news story exploring the rise of "Made in Italy by Chinese" clothes production. As the broadcast described, "This is *pronto moda* (fast fashion), or cheaper off-the-rack items 'Made in Italy' labels with 'Made in China' prices". The programme quoted a local Italian entrepreneur who was deeply critical of the Chinese incomers, telling Al Jazeera, "Our working class has been fighting 50 years to get where we are now, and now we have a new class of slaves that are not entitled to all this progress". This unsatisfaction can also be seen in the writing of Edoardo Nesi, quoted at the outset of this introduction, who won a national major literary award in 2011 with his novel *Storia della Mia Gente* (*Story of My People)*. This book shows the other side of globalisation that people in Prato, Italy, felt a sense of loss when they witnessed the bankruptcy of family-run textile businesses and the influx of the Chinese population with their profitable fast fashion production. Local Pratese became the losers of globalisation despite their diligence and artisanship. This desperation made them blame those who advocated for this trend, such as scholars and politicians from the Global North and migrants and entrepreneurs from the Global South. In contrast, another key group in this wave of globalisation, Chinese migrants, seized the opportunities and became entrepreneurs – the new "masters" of the city – whom locals resented for economically overpowering their neighbours and families while also seeking job opportunities from them (Sala, 2024).

Over three decades, Prato has been one of the world's largest garment manufacturing centres and fast fashion wholesale trade hubs with Chinese involvement. Roughly a quarter of the city's population is Chinese, who mainly come from the city of Wenzhou and do business in fast fashion garment production. There is a significant

number of textile enterprises (2,119) and garment and cutting companies (4,847) as of the first quarter of 2023 (Camera di Commercio di Pistoia-Prato, 2023). Still, Chinese migrants in Prato face anger and often bigotry regardless of their economic contribution. For example, Italian journalist Silvia Pieraccini published a book named *L'assedio cinese* (*The Chinese Siege*) in 2008. She blamed the Chinese presence as a "*distrito paralelo*" (parallel district) where Chinese-run businesses are isolated and unintegrated into local cultures. She claims that migrants take advantage of local society without sufficient involvement in traditional Italian customs. The "siege" is caused by delinquent business practices such as tax evasion, labour exploitation and law violations among Chinese factories and firms.

In December 2013, a fire incident occurred in a Chinese-run clothing factory, Teresa Moda, due to the failure of a substandard electrical system. Seven Chinese migrants (five male and two female workers) died when they were resting in the loft and surrounded by 250-kilogram flammable textile fabrics downstairs. The incident made international headlines, pushing Prato's Chinese community into the global limelight. A court trial in 2018 found factory owners Youlan Lin and Youlin Lin guilty, sentencing them to over eight years and six years in prison, respectively. Despite compensation agreements of €100,000 being reached in China between the two migrant entrepreneurs and every victim's family, they returned to China in 2015 without serving their sentences in Italy. The case also sparked broader cultural critiques across Italy regarding worker exploitation (Zona, 2023). This tragic case compounded concerns over inhumane working and dwelling conditions. At times, the media tended to sensationalize problems, pointing time and again to illegal modes of garment production (BBC, 2013; Povoledo, 2013). Further news coverage on improper business operations, human rights violations, and organisational crimes intensifies the negative

stereotypes of Chinese presence. Alongside the development of the Chinese presence in Prato, conservative and suspicious voices such as “Chinese people steal our jobs” (Afgeh, 2016), and “Prato is a byproduct of globalisation gone wrong” (Aloisi, 2013), have spread in the local community.

Controversy over the role and presence of Chinese migrants reached such levels that in 2019 the *New York Times* ran a feature article on the tension between migrants and natives in Prato. The article featured profiles of local Italian residents such as Nesi, quoted above, whose family once ran a successful textile business in Prato before he sold the factory in 2004 (Goodman and Bubola, 2019). Selling business among Pratese entrepreneurs became a trend under financial pressures in this period when their clients such as German garment manufacturers went bankrupted (Nesi, 2011). In articles in the *New York Times*, which offered a close examination of the links between Chinese migrants and a growing anti-globalisation backlash in the nation, the voices of men like Nesi tend to be featured the loudest. It is important for media to explore the sentiments of Italians whose families once dominated textiles production in Prato, and who told the media they feel misunderstood and abandoned by politicians, particularly on the political left, who they see as favouring Chinese business over the future of Italians.

But the subjectivities and livelihoods of another group also need far more observation, analysis, and empathy. That group is the migrant entrepreneurs themselves. It is these people – merchants, managers, community leaders, religious heads of temples and churches – who feature at the core of this dissertation. Most migrants in Prato are from Wenzhou, a city famous for entrepreneurship, private economy, and emigration. The advertisement lightboxes at the railway station and airport in Wenzhou show the words “Welcome to the capital of entrepreneurs” in both Chinese and English. Under globalisation and Chinese economic reform, both the city and its people reflect the

development of China's private economy. Yet, stories about these Chinese abroad are only heard if they become successful and come back home with honour.

As a Wenzhounese living in Europe for nearly ten years, my life experience and research interest have driven me to develop a unique, holistic understanding of business-related associations and the social capital among migrant entrepreneurs. Therefore, the research starts with my question: What organisational resources do Chinese migrants draw on to advance their business interests? The question can be deconstructed into "why" and "how" for further discussion.

The "why" questions try to answer the Chinese migrants' motivation for organisational resources based on their migration stories, the reasons behind the migrants' behaviours create a connection between the organisational resources and business interests. Meanwhile, the "how" questions are the outcomes of gains and losses during the migration experience and the way Chinese migrants have applied organisational resources. I wished to investigate the influences caused by their mobility choices and business decisions.

My core research questions were as follows:

*1)* **Ethnic Entrepreneurship**: *Why do Chinese migrants want to immigrate to Prato, Italy and how do they start to work and often become entrepreneurial in a new country?*

*2)* **Entrepreneurial Legitimacy**: *How do Chinese migrants reconstruct national branding in fast fashion production and identify organisational resources?*

3) **Entrepreneurial Traceability**: *How do Chinese migrants choose their communities and cultivate organisational resources?*

4) **Entrepreneurial Evolution**: *How do Chinese migrants justify organisational resources for their entrepreneurship and upward mobility?*

To answer these questions, my methodology focuses on semi-structured interviews, observations, and the grey literature on Chinese migrant entrepreneurship in Prato, Italy, from February 2022 to August 2023. During my fieldwork, 52 interviews (including follow-up ones) from 41 research participants constituted my main data source. They took place with a mixture of migrant interviewees (entrepreneurs, workers, and returnees) and non-migrant ones (including organisation staff, local Italian entrepreneurs, and scholars).

The structure of the thesis is as follows: In Chapter 2, I first introduce the phenomenon of Chinese migration to Prato, particularly by people from Wenzhou, which sends a higher proportion of Chinese migrants to Prato than any other region of China does. I explain why Wenzhou is seen as distinctive in China as an entrepreneurial hub, discussing the folklore and structural factors that created the contemporary mystique around Wenzhou today. I also, in the same chapter, describe my literature review and methodology in depth.

In Chapter 3, I then introduce the Prato region and its history as a textile hub in more detail. After exploring Italian municipality's evolving history as a centre of garment production, this chapter then turns to a close examination of the temporal embeddedness of Chinese migrant settlement and entrepreneurial practices in Prato. This chapter investigates the motivation of Chinese migrants who prefer to settle down in a midsized Italian city and the consequences of this new immigration wave in shaping the local industry and the city, following an analogy of plant growth (Seeding, Rooting, Sprouting and Flourishing) to reflect migrants' motivation, economic settlement, entrepreneurial attempt and business ecology formation.

Chapter 4 explains how Chinese migrants' fashion production influences national branding. The Chinese-run production was criticised as an abuse of the "Made in Italy" label, and Chinese migrants were blamed by international and local news for an unwillingness to socially integrate to a sufficient extent. The misunderstanding and tension between Chinese migrants and local Pratese centres on who represents Italianicity and "Made in Italy" label. This chapter explores how migrants seek to obtain entrepreneurial legitimacy and identify the first fluctuation possibility of social capital: accumulation, in which I analyse the socio-economic implications of this "Made in Italy" label from insider (Italian community) and outsider (migrant community) division and development, together with the factual social cohesion tendencies and the possibility of a wider and more stable collective identity against crises and challenges.

Chapter 5 examines how the Chinese community has evolved internally, moving beyond a singular identity to form distinct subgroups based on diverse backgrounds (multi-polarisation) through community involvement. Over the past three decades, migrants have not only contributed to the development of the fast fashion industry but also have established various ethnic communities and integrated into local society. I analyse Chinese migrants' trade-offs when it comes to their community choices. I refer to the "shopping" practice to understand migrants' community involvement and organisational scheduling, in which the "shopping items" refer to the community involvement options and the "shopping strategies" refer to effective social integration and business development under limited time. This scheduling process reflects the second fluctuation possibility of social capital: distribution.

Chapter 6 explores Chinese migrants' vertical social mobility to examine the entrepreneurial evolution path. On the one hand, Chinese migrants overdraw their social capital for upward mobility leverage and elite status formation; on the other hand, they

need to ensure this mobility outcome with endorsement and recognition from the community. I follow the elite formation framework and focus on migrants' agency of using moral power and justifying their entrepreneurship and upward mobility, which guides the third fluctuation possibility of social capital: multiplication. I take migrants' three-step social mobility from workers to entrepreneurs and possibly to migrant leaders with moral considerations, such as hardship endurance, innovation, and efficiency.

In the last chapter, I review the sub-questions and return to answer the main research question, echoing the embodiments and influences of uncertainty in the literature review on Chinese migrant entrepreneurship, community involvement, and social capital fluctuation. I also summarise research implications in theory, methodology, and practice, together with future research possibilities.

## Chapter 2 Situating Wenzhounese Entrepreneurialism in Prato, Literature Review and Methodology

> "Capitalist societies have always relied on their capacity to anticipate, imagine, and speculate on the future in order to navigate its uncertainty and volatility…Contemporary capitalism sees the risk-taking, entrepreneurial agent of the post-Bretton Woods era being refashioned as a politically disoriented, speculative subject who accepts rather than averts the future's radical uncertainty."
>
> - Aris Komporozos-Athanasiou (2022, pp. 1, 4)

> "There is an old saying in Wenzhou: the city is 7/10 mountains, 1/10 water, and 2/10 farmland. Due to its cultural and geographical remoteness and its lack of natural resources, locals have always been driven to find business opportunities far beyond the sea or deeper inland, contributing to their independent, self-reliant and business-oriented character." (Kou, 2020)
>
> - News Report from *People's Daily Online*

This chapter contains three parts. First, I briefly summarise the recent history of Chinese migration in Prato – before returning in Chapter 3 to a longer historical discussion of Prato's evolution as a European fashion hub. Next, I discuss the critical literature on economic sociology, community, and migration studies, making it clear how they are connected to and have implications for my research. In the last part, I introduce my methodology with research design, sampling, and research methods and ethical considerations. With all three sections, I aim to clarify how this dissertation develops the idea of social capital fluctuation in the following empirical chapters.

## 2.1 Diasporic Wenzhounese merchants and their fashion dreams

Prato is the smallest and youngest province in Tuscany, where ancient buildings are mixed with industrial sites. Prato, the name of this industrial city, means literally "meadow" in Italian, with the neighbouring city Florence, whose name originates from "flower". Before Prato became an independent province in 1992,[2] the larger city of Florence had administrative power over Prato for centuries, ranging from the industrial development restriction made by the dominant Medici family to concessions for Florence airport construction and constant bureaucratic trade services such as customs and fax via Florence (Giovannoni, 2019; Fels and Hamilton, 2013; Gras and Craveri, 1967).

Such structural relations between the two urban communities extend the ecological metaphors developed by the Chicago School (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). Due to its subordinate position in both economy and politics over centuries, the Pratese were not allowed to operate high-end wool manufacture due to the influence of the Florentine wool guild *arte della lana*. Instead, they took a different path to develop low-end and recycled wool, sending the products to commercial centres (Florence) or trade harbours (Livorno) for fortune (Fels and Hamilton, 2013). Compared with the traditional well-infrastructure *central economy* in the North and the less-industrialised *marginal economy* in the South, Bagnasco (1977) coined *Third Italy*, referring to the *peripheral economy* in Central-Northeastern Italy (including Prato, Tuscany), embedded in craftsmanship-based market niche clustering, such as clothing and furniture. For scholars' interests, Prato is famous for the "industrial district" or "Third Italy" under regional studies, featured in domestic migration for its textile production (Becattini,

[2] Prato was a city (*comune*) under the administration of Florence province (*provincia*); in 1992 Prato became the capital of the eponymous province.

2001; Signorini, 1994; Dei Ottati, 2009a). But in recent decades, international migration has sharply increased, and Prato now hosts a considerable number of foreign workers.

According to the Office of Statistics in the Prato municipal government, the total population in the Prato municipality as of 2024 is 196,578, of which 49,978 (25.4%) are foreign residents. Among the migrant population, Chinese migrants make up more than half of foreign nationals, at 32,524 (Comune di Prato, 2024). This is likely an undercount, as there are also undocumented Chinese workers (Krause and Li, 2022). This high proportion sometimes surprises visitors to this region; for instance, in the summer of 2023, I spent time with an Italian acquaintance from Turin who told me that he expected a region the size and population density of Prato to have fewer migrants in comparison to Rome and Milan. But the reality is that Prato has the highest concentration of Chinese residents in Europe (Ceccagno and Salvati, 2020), outnumbering Chinese migrants in larger cities.

Most of the Chinese migrants in Prato are from Wenzhou, a southeastern city. It is a geographically isolated region in China that received less support from the central government in the early days of its growth, over the mid-20th century.[3] Accordingly, such isolation with limited official influence promotes business prosperity and grassroots entrepreneurship. Notably, Wenzhou was the first city in China to issue a private business license following the 1978 economic reform, clustering niche small commodity productions in certain city districts. Even before the economic reform, the vigour and resilience of the private economy have drawn scholars' attention, as the similarly small- and middle-sized family enterprise production in niche light industries

[3] Wenzhou is geographically near Taiwan Island, which was potential frontlines of battlefield during the post Chinese civil-war period. During early to mid-20th century, poor geo-political conditions restrained Wenzhou's (industrial) infrastructure development with the limited government investment.

(such as leather shoes, garments, and lighters) with the networked national market is researched as the “Wenzhou Model” (温州模式), or “small commodities, big market” (Fei, 2004; Liu, 1992a; Parris, 1993). These niche market demands, ignored by state-owned enterprises, became the possible post-Fordism innovation drives for cities like Wenzhou (Walcott, 2007). Since the 2010s, Wenzhou has gradually gained official attention and awarded national titles in garment and footwear, and the Wenzhou municipal government promoted the slogans from “Wear in Wenzhou” (穿在温州) to recent recognition “Chinese Capital of Fashion Industry” (中国时尚产业之都) in 2024 to highlight the effort to transition from quantity to quality competition.

On the other hand, Wenzhou has suffered from this economic development due to industrial upgrading, talent and investment attractions, and urban transformation (Lin and Li, 2019). Although the local authorities noticed the signals and intervened in improvement, there is still a trend of local enterprises and talents relocating domestically. The private economic vitality was, in the beginning, the promotor of urban development to face restricted official support, such as self-governance through chambers of commerce and civil society exploration (Fewsmith, 2005). The long-term unbalanced power dynamics between strong private capital and weak governance led to difficulties in industrial transition, and private capital poured into speculative activities in domestic real estate and other areas (Wang, 2024). In 2023, Wenzhou had the third largest GDP in Zhejiang province with a population of over nine million. Apart from the industrial ambition, local authorities aim to expand the advantages of the Wenzhounese diasporic tradition and convert migrant returnees’ villages into diasporic investment zones.

In October 2002, Prato and Wenzhou officially became sister cities, while civil activities, in particular migrant entrepreneurship, moved out the first step earlier. For

the Wenzhounese migrants who choose to restart a life in Prato, they became the link between two communities, practising entrepreneurship in both the best and the worst times. Since the 1990s, Wenzhounese and other Chinese migrants have been moving to Prato from China and other European countries. In 2024, the most common eleven surnames in Prato are Chinese ones, with the largest 2743 "Chen" population, while the typical Pratese surname "Gori" is ranked in twelfth place (Fiorentino, 2024).[4]

Wenzhounese merchants are networked both domestically and internationally for business opportunities, among which there are almost 690,000 overseas Wenzhounese in 130 countries with business and migrant associations (Wenzhou Municipal Government, 2023). They are almost everywhere in China, from earlier travelling salespeople for hometown-made leather shoes and other commodities to settled "Wenzhou Trade City" (温州商贸城) as local wholesale centres. Many Wenzhounese merchants also managed to participate in production and merge their business networks beyond bazaar economy. Scholars have taken *Zhejiangcun* (Zhejiang village/ 浙江村) in Beijing to study the Wenzhounese domestic diaspora, focusing on the localised garment production and trade, community and social network clustering, and self-organisation and governance (Wang, 2000; Xiang, 2004). Since the first Chinese allopatric Chamber of Commerce by Wenzhounese merchants in Kunming was established in 1995, the Wenzhou Chambers of Commerce have spread nationally and internationally, and the chambers have become an icon of the "home" and non-official embassy of diasporic Wenzhounese (Chen, 2021). As the pioneering challengers of the previous socialistic planned economy, the Wenzhou Model, with its initial underground

[4] According to the report, the reason why Chinese surnames are so common, despite being only a quarter of the overall population, is because the new-born babies are mostly Chinese, and because Chinese with the same surnames often come from the same villages in China. In contrast, Italian surnames contain more patronymic variations (e.g. Domenico with variations of Domenici, Menici etc.).

business, started before the economic reform, helped peasants get out of poverty, and expanded through the Wenzhounese diaspora worldwide (Liu, 1992b; Shen, 2023). These non-elite migrants, who are overseas Chinese, have brought more social and cultural traditions from China (Wang and Beja, 1999). Wenzhou has a unique dialect (Marjerison and Yang, 2022),[5] the largest Christian population in China (Volodzko, 2015; Cao, 2010),[6] and a distinctive pragmatism-oriented Confucian philosophy (Yang, 2012b). [7] In addition to the commercial atmosphere, the diasporic distribution constitutes the "big market" part of the "Wenzhou Model", networking information, resources, and opportunities for entrepreneurship cultivation and development.

Researchers have carried out studies of the Wenzhounese global diaspora in cities such as New York (Zhu, 2007; Bao, 2004), Paris (Wang and Beja, 1999; Ma Mung, 2015), Milan (Cologna, 2005; Balducci et al., 2006) and Madrid (Antolín, 2007; Li, 2017). To understand their immigration and entrepreneurship, scholars listed various explanations, ranging from exporting of Wenzhou Model (Tomba, 2014), to social aspiration for modernity (Rodrigues, 2018; Li, 1999a), to religious and cultural value guidance (Cao, 2008; Yang, 2012b) and to strong-connected networks and associations (Wang, 2000; Zhang and Zhang, 2016).

Although much of the Chinese in Prato come from Wenzhou, some also come from other regions, such as Fujian province. A common goal for most migrant entrepreneurs is to fill gap demands in the local society and to maximise their ethnic advantages. Chinese migrants have long-term residence to operate their businesses mainly in catering, manufacturing, garment, retail, or other niche industries. Unlike service

[5] The dialect Wenzhounese is considered the most difficult language to understand among Chinese.
[6] Wenzhou is named after "China's Jerusalem" due to the Christian population.
[7] Yongjia School or Yongjia Doctrine (永嘉学派) is a branch of Confucianism, referring to advocating an equal emphasis on commerce and agriculture, justice and profit. In contrast, the main branch belittles business and suppresses profit.

sectors, the garment industry is in the manufacturing area which needs a wide range of labourers, including labour-intensive and machine-based skills. Its categorisation can be as broad as part of the textile industry or as specific as the fashion industry, depending on the added value of the produced items.

As Wenzhou itself is domestically well-known for its textiles industry, such as garment and leather shoe production, migrants are likely to transfer their skills and production model where the market demand or industrial infrastructure matches. Despite being a traditional labour-intensive industry and gradually replaced by high-value industrial transformation in many countries, the textile and garment industry has played an important role throughout history and prepared the foundation of primitive capital accumulation for further development. This industry has demonstrated multiple meanings in different contexts: in the UK, it is the origin of the Industrial Revolution and the creation of globalised production with raw materials, labour, technology, and markets (Beckert, 2015); for China, it is the symbol of its re-entry into the global value chain and witnessing China's manufacturing power and patriotic sentiments (Zhao, 2010; Global Times, 2023);[8] as for Italy, it makes use of the textile industry to develop further innovation, fashion and deep cultural recognition (Greta and Lewandowski, 2010; Savi, 2023).

Along with the trend of industrial transfer in the textile and garment industry moving to developing countries due to cost, labour and environmental issues, developed countries still managed to maintain the fashion industry with its aesthetic power and highly-added values (Kim et al., 2006; Hoppe, 2023). With the trend of global reconfiguration of manufacturing, the Chinese took over the labour-intensive

[8] There was an unofficial narrative in Chinese, "exchanging Boeing aircraft with 100 million pairs of jeans" (1 亿条牛仔裤换波音飞机), implying China is in the disadvantaged position of global trade price scissors on the one hand and the strong manufacturing power in textile production on the other.

garment and durable goods components, outsourcing production from the developed countries and, at the same time, creating one of the largest markets in the world (Li, 2013a). Meanwhile, there is another trend where immigrants from the Global South fulfil the labour shortage of garment production in the Global North cities and continue local production (Rath, 2003). In particular, Chinese migrant-run garment factories once thrived in fashion centres such as New York during the 1970s and 1980s (Wong, 1987), Paris from the 1980s until the 1990s crisis (Chuang and Trémon, 2013), and Milan in a similar period as Paris (De Luca, 2004), but which gradually faded away with urban development and outsourcing of global production. Meanwhile, peripheral cities in the Global North, such as Prato, which had an industrial heritage but lost to the global competition, became the new centre of garment manufacturing with migrant involvement, thereby challenging the dominance of fashion definition from the metropolitan fashion hubs.

In their ethnic enclaves, Chinese migrants use their way to re-conduct fashion and carry fast fashion forward. The fashion industry is*, per se,* producing uncertainty in the specific time against stability, connecting the upstream textile supplier to downstream end customers globally and shaping identity expression (Sellerberg and Aspers, 2015; Aspers and Godart, 2013). Fashion production is closely connected with temporality in regard to industrial, antilinear and uchronic aspects (Evans and Vaccari, 2020), offering explorations of both the latest lifestyle and the possible transition of the textile industry. Being fashionable means being up-to-date, speedy, and agile from design to production to delivery, so that the fashion items are fresh enough within the "expired date". In particular, fashion production, together with consumption, creates linked global spaces based on lifestyle and industrial phases in different "time zones". When migrants from the Global South, where labour-intensive garment manufacturing is distributed through

the Global Value Chain, participate in the delayed industrial transition in the Global North and continue, even enlarging the production, it challenges the current stratified fashion system and shuffles new diversity. As outsiders in the new society with limited resources, migrants figure out their strategies to define their fashion.

Fast fashion is, therefore, a feasible option to maximise the advantages of low capital and labour since the global production network and outsourcing for cheap costs make it happen (Linden, 2016). Along with the wave of outbound production, such as Zara and H&M, in developing countries, another inbound trend of migrant labour into previous production locations fills the industrial vacuum. Despite the critiques on fast fashion, it is still a relatively accessible area for migrants; they can take speed and flexibility to practice fashion power against the authoritative high-end fashion dominance and practice their ethnic entrepreneurship, especially when they build the community and apply collective behaviours to achieve their dream.

### 2.2 Literature Review: Exploration from Uncertainty

The following section explores three main literatures – social capital, organisation and community, and ethnic entrepreneurship – that are core to my research. Firstly, I draw on and contribute to the large body of literature on social capital as a theoretical framework, including the definition discussion of social capital, connections with *Guanxi* in the Chinese context, and uncertainties related to social capital. The second part analyses the literature about community studies in terms of their embeddedness and organisational resources from the community. Lastly, ethnic entrepreneurship is associated with sociological discourse and entails the motive and influence of ethnic entrepreneurship, and investigation with an organisational lens of communities to deepen the understanding of entrepreneurial subjectivity and institutional construction.

### 2.2.1 Social Capital Theory

Social capital is important for understanding how migrants interact with others and how communities function. It demonstrates the mechanism(s) behind interpersonal relations and acquires scarce resources that are possible or more accessible. As the research object and scenario are becoming diverse, the term has developed a vast range of definitions from different scholars and perspectives. Son (2020, p. 3) concludes: "Nobody is entitled to claim a monopoly over social capital", and my analysis started with both the collective and individual levels of the term's definition.

#### 2.2.1.1 Collective Social Capital: between Putnam and Bourdieu

According to Putnam (1996, p. 56), social capital is "the features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives". He emphasises the importance of pursuing the common good or shared objectives in collective lives and the profits from the objectives.

Hence, social capital is a key step throughout the individuals' effort to make a better and trustable society, those who are absent from social participation will give a severe strike to the social capital accumulation (Putnam, 2000). The more individuals are engaged and endeavour in the community, the more reciprocity and shared value they will get from the community. Therefore, it will be a better and more civic community. Individuals seem free to express their agency, but this agency is merely a component or public good of the whole community. However, social capital is only available and possible to accumulate within a given environment, either an organisation, community, or society, under the precondition that the environment is functioning or meant to be "civic"; in other words, social capital has to be abandoned and reconstructed to formulate new shared values and mutual trust in formal relationships if the current environment is not civic or the individuals step out of the boundary.

Bourdieu (1986, pp. 248-249) defines social capital as "membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit in the various sense of the word". In a society with certain structures and classes, different capitals are created, distributed, and inherited by social members. Individuals need to collect different forms of capital to internalise proper habitus so that they can find the proper interaction ways under certain circumstances. At this point, social capital, as per Bourdieu's understanding, is an entrance pass to the non-family groups, such as elites or higher classes. Similar to Putnam's civic community, this kind of advantage is only valid in a given environment, which Bourdieu named "field" as a "structured space of social positions which are also a structure of power relations" (Topper, 2001, p. 39). Criticism has been raised toward the Bourdieuian concept of social capital since those who are included in the group can acquire capital to become "elite" and maintain the advantages, while those excluded may have no choice but to be under oppression (Asquith, 2019; Field, 2016). That implies the possibility that outsiders who do not belong to the field are challenged to use social capital embedded in the structure.

For Putnam, social capital is a collective trust and shared norm, whereas, for Bourdieu, social capital is distributed power from the ruling class. Both start from an institutional perspective to express the agency of a related group, either a civic community or distinctive class, as well as the relations between institution and individual by highlighting the importance of the whole social structure. Both applied social capital to set boundaries on existing social structures. Individuals' efforts to create or acquire social capital are to become members and fulfil the expectations as a result of being solidarized or embedded in a certain society. Overall, collective social

capital demonstrates the institutional influences and the structural environment on individuals.

#### 2.2.1.2 Individual Social Capital: from Network to *Guanxi*

Nan Lin (2001) conceptualises social capital in a personal-network-based framework and defines social capital as "resources embedded in one's social network" (19) or "resources embedded in a social structure that is accessed and/or mobilised in purposive actions" (29). Lin terms "network" to stress the individual's intentional creation and a sum of the personal relations in a graphic way, which implies human agency can actively socialise oneself to shape identity. That echoes the assumption that social capital is based on "investment in the social relations with expected returns", strengthening the outcome from social relations and structure (Pescosolido and Smith, 2021, p. 490). For instance, entrepreneurs acquire and make use of embedded resources such as information or personal reputation, to reduce transaction costs, exercise power, raise organisational reputation and formulate identity and acknowledgement in the social ties.

Furthermore, specific social and cultural meaning strengthens the attractiveness of relationships; individuals benefit from it and develop their relationships to make sure their network remains valuable (Asquith, 2019). In the Chinese context, *Guanxi* (关系) means relation or connection, especially with implicit hierarchies, and *guanxi* is equal to social capital in an ego-centric network. Nonetheless, the difference is that *guanxi* highlights the importance of relations and personal interests, while social capital has extended rational considerations and obligations in the network (Zhai, 2009). According to the analysis from Bian (2001, p. 277), "the capacity to mobilise social resources from *guanxi* networks lies in ego's reputation for fulfilling moral and ethical obligations to one's family and pseudo-family". Individuals can create, exchange, or

abandon social capital for a certain identity; as a result, social capital can generate more than one identity, and these identities play different roles under different situations with different sources of social capital. In this context, individuals have the right and willingness to possess social capital, bypass an organisation or community, or even create their own organisation. They can define themselves with their ownership of social capital instead of being merely defined by certain institutional power.

From an individual perspective, networks are not trying to construct a core and siphoning individuals into them; rather, networks are becoming a product during the procession of social capital formation. A Chinese perspective defines the closeness levels of the ego-centred relationship as *Chaxugeju* (a differential mode of association/ 差序格局), or "concentric ripple model" (Fei, 1992[1947]), as the individual is located in the centre of own ripple. A closer distance to the centre indicates the closer relationship and stronger social influence produced by the centre, from family and close friends to an acquaintance, lastly to strangers with corresponding attitudes and reactions, and the intersection part of ripples is where social capital comes from (Ruan, 2017; Fei, 1992[1947]). Individual social capital, therefore, is an identity to construct one's relative position in society.

#### 2.2.1.3 Uncertainties of Social Capital

Apart from the fixed dichotomy of social capital in macro structure and micro action, scholars have explored the meso-level with "structural holes", " bonding and bridging social capital", and "strong and weak ties" to describe the objective dynamics of network and connection features (Burt, 1995; Putnam, 2000; Granovetter, 1973). And yet, whether social capital is flexible and fluid through the meso level to both collective and individual capital and how the involved members subjectively influence the social capital formation by communities and organisations remains untouched by academic

research. Social capital can derive from both institutional influence and the shaping of individuals that fosters migrants' business interests. In this way, associations and related communities potentially become the transition between individuals and institutions to realise such social capital fluctuations; as Poder (2011) points out, the social capital definition is vague and has limited validity within certain frameworks. Referring to the notion from Swidler (1986) "culture as tool kit" to reflect cultural influences on actions, I interpret social capital as a tool kit in different contexts to apply its definition and hedge the conceptual uncertainty.

Furthermore, social capital and its function contain risks and uncertainties regarding creation and maintenance, internal power dynamics, and over-embeddedness (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Since a high density of norms inside the network promotes trust, talented entrepreneurs can make use of social capital to realise their business achievements. In contrast, a network has to balance its size and density to enlarge the resource circle without harming current trust and equal chance caused by potential plutocracy (Granovetter, 2005; Littler, 2017). However, excessive trust will cause price bubbles in the trade market and ruin the whole economy. This "ethnic homogeneity" and overreliance on the ethnic group also bring about conformity, free-riding and rebellion against mainstream society (Portes, 2014; Portes, 1998). For instance, such a high dependence on the ethnic community blocks external opportunities and creates forced interlocks with potential exploitations in the migration context. In addition, the moral hazard and broader separation among intra-communities and whole society at a price of public welfare and social cohesion are also from social capital abuse (Brass et al., 1998; Poder, 2011; Ayios et al., 2014). Even though social capital remains functional and promotes partial solidarity, overall social development remains risky.

Lastly, scholars tend to ignore the uncertainty caused by social capital's dysfunctionality. Moret (2016) notices the "symbolic exchange rate" in social capital transnational mobility, while Poder (2011) and Fischer (2005, p. 3) question the alienability of social capital, asking, "Where can I find some 'social capital'?" or "can I move some of my social capital off-shore?" Especially where the embedded social relations are false or do not exist at all, if an outsider tries to defraud others for community entrance and social capital attainment, the validity of social capital faces a challenge.

### 2.2.2 Community and Organisational Resources

Community studies have built deep connections with social capital regardless of whether they see community as a means or an end. According to Nisbet (1967, p. 47), the community encompasses "all forms of relationship which are characterised by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time", which emphasises individual engagement and collective devotion.

#### 2.2.2.1 Community and its Embeddedness

The study of communities has experienced both marginalisation and rejuvenation (Crow, 2014). However, community studies always play a role in recording particular histories and witnessing social changes, influenced by Tönnies and Durkheim among others. For Tönnies, community is *Gemeinschaft* of togetherness for the common good, while for Durkheim, community is the outcome of mechanical and organic solidarity (Tönnies and Loomis, 2002; Durkheim et al., 2013); both of them observed that the European countryside was experiencing the decline of the peasantry under semi-feudal conditions (Day, 2006), and such dichotomy had its justification and limitations in their temporal-spatial embeddedness.

Along with the trends of modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation, scholars reacted differently to community development: Zorbaugh (1929) worries about the vanishing of community due to high centralisation and mobility in urban growth, while Frankenberg (1966) prefers the smooth social transition and took community as a continuum in this process. In contrast, Giddens (1990) acknowledges that communities in pre-modern society have not yet suffered much from time-space distanciation, while Etzioni (1995) advocates recovering the community for public welfare and collective solidarity promotion; such communitarianism echoes Putnam's civic community, but Etzioni romanticises the altruistic part of individual involvement and overlooks the individual and collective balance.

Moving to the next phase, the transition from pre-modern to post-modern society, social changes accelerate, and the decline of community becomes inevitable, as "modernity is intrinsically disorderly because it obliges individuals to experiment, to hope, to gamble, and to be ambitious. Its social life lacks the predictability and the certainties that characterise societies governed by tradition" (Savage and Warde, 1993, p. 150). Hence, explorations such as "singularization" (Reckwitz and Pakis, 2020), "liquidation" (Bauman, 2000), and "tribalism" (Maffesoli, 1996) intend to find new meanings for the existence of community in the post-modern context since "community has continued to serve as a benchmark against which the strengths and weaknesses of newly emerging social patterns can be measured" (Day, 2006, p. 22).

It leads to co-occurrences: the dis-embeddedness of community that individuals challenging the traditionalised time-space boundaries and radical decentralisation minimising risks on the one hand (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Wittel, 2001); on the other hand, the re-embeddedness of community creation in the specific dimensions beyond the previous rural-urban or local-global measurement (Harima, 2022), such as political

elites based on wealth and education (Reeves and Friedman, 2024) and Chinese baristas running Italian cafés (Deng, 2024). It is a process of re-coupling of newly emerged temporal-spatial embeddedness. Anderson (2016) raises "imagined community" to refer to individuals' chase for fictional empathy and community recognition, as an active embedding of community construction. Furthermore, community boundaries can overlap and transcend (Xiang, 2004). Globalisation allows for mixed contexts of embeddedness, making previously independent communities interact with each other as if they are travelling in different time zones. Meanwhile, the reorganisation of the community implies that social capital creation is embedded in the new and changing social relations.

Portes (1998, p. 5) distinguishes social capital from resources accessed through social capital, highlighting social capital as the "ability to obtain them (resources) by virtue of membership in different social structures". In this sense, social capital becomes both the community *per se* that facilitates individuals' acquisition of resources and the concrete expression or product in community involvement (Day, 2006; Bowles and Gintis, 2002). The duality of social capital is embodied in both infrastructure and resources, bounding the organisational power dynamics between micro actors and macro structures.

#### 2.2.2.2 Organisational Resources from The Community

Organisations overlap with communities since they both refer to a presentation of collectivism and functional complementarity: organisation reflects the objective structure of a community on a meso level, and community contains organisation as part of its ecology with highlights on subjective solidarity and territory (Freeman and Audia, 2006; Galaskiewicz, 1979; Laumann et al., 1978). Compared with organisation, community creates a space where involved members can express their autonomy and

network. Members of the community, in return, can join collective actions to create interaction networks for information exchange (Schelling, 1980), form communities with internal structural features and functions (Granovetter, 1973) and shape social ecology through community coalitions (Wandersman et al., 1996). Individuals get a sense of belonging by collecting certain social capital, and their goals are to make linkages with the groups.

An egocentric view of social capital is seen in the social structure as a network since the network is decentralised, and each individual has the agency freely to choose connection with others or not based on personal feelings and relationships. Hence, the emergence of organisational resources is for the individual's demands in their community instead of pandering. Community involvement brings about identity formation among individuals by attaining and creating a membership, which echoes collective and individual social capital access.

Coleman uses social capital to investigate "personal interactions in closed communities" in the transition between the macrostructure and micro-actions and to promote network building (Son, 2020, p. 9; Coleman, 1988). Echoing this idea, the community becomes the transition zone between individual and collective dimensions, and organisational resources emerge from this process along with the reduction of uncertainty (Galaskiewicz, 1979). Organisational resources vary in different community contexts but, in general, refer to accumulated assets owned or shared in collective groups, including knowledge and information, materials and financial resources, human capital, and social capital under ethnic entrepreneurship (Glinka et al., 2023; Hsu, 2007). The organisational resources as common goods are circulating in the community and enriching the community ecology.

As mentioned above, social capital is one of organisational resources because social capital is prominent in the existence of communities with interpersonal agencies, and social capital contains fluid and diverse variations, both collectively and individually. Social capital can also be used for exchanging and acquiring other organisational resources under communities. Concerning how community members use organisational resources advance community development, I identified three possibilities in which these resources contribute to what I understand as functional uncertainty.

Firstly, organisational resources function as cohesive elements within the community, by fostering a recognised identity, simplified and routinised interactions, and trustful and moral norms. These resources help mediate conflicts (Martinez-Damia et al., 2024), punish free riders (Bowles and Gintis, 2002), and mobilise social participation (Calhoun-Brown, 1996). Hence, the community maintains its stability and maximises its capacity to support existing members and attract newcomers to enlarge the community.

Secondly, organisational resources diversify and evolve more heterogeneously along with intra-community development when newcomers join the community, or the community expands its boundary. A growing community improves the infrastructure of information channels (Arrow, 1974), the cluster of local innovation and knowledge (Tsai, 2018), and the bridged transnational networks through shared ethnic capital (Glinka et al., 2023; Lin and Zhou, 2005). Organisational resources contribute to the vitality and diversity of communities and offer individuals various options for community involvement.

Thirdly, organisational resources accelerate expected rewards and expand community prosperity in inter-community interactions under certain moral codes. It provides not only organisational endorsement and social legitimacy (Nahapiet and

Ghoshal, 1998; Lyons et al., 2012) but also leverages resources through collective actions (Heilbrunn, 2005; Kim, 2018). In some cases, organisational outflanking happens (Mann, 2012) when the community penetrates its power over every aspect of another community and bonds the interdependence to boost its social capital. Social capital makes community and relevant outcomes more influential and gains larger advantages over possible competition.

Bowles and Gintis (2002) point out that community addresses the possible market and state failure on a meso level, especially in economic actions, as a result of strong reciprocity and interdependence. However, it romanticises the mutual dedication based on a unified and good value and creates potential exclusion to outsiders. Overemphasising the role of community can reinforce boundaries between insiders and outsiders. For instance, some insiders may create exclusive, rent-seeking spaces by withholding access to resources within the community, fostering a sense of mystique and exploiting outsiders. This lack of transparency leads to uncertainty. When outsiders perceive uncertainty as an inherent feature of these inaccessible community resources and distance themselves further, the community perpetuates this mystique, exacerbate uncertainty to its advantages. This dynamic may cause a community trap, which hinders long-term social transformation and broader solidarity.

### 2.2.3 Ethnic Entrepreneurship

Ethnic entrepreneurship, or (im)migrant entrepreneurship, refers to "the process whereby immigrants identify, create and exploit economic opportunities to start new ventures in their destination nations" (Dheer, 2018, p. 558). As well as exploring Chinese migrant entrepreneurship, similar studies have taken place with a wide range of communities, including Igbos and their apprentice system (Igwe et al., 2020), Gurkhas and military heritage (Adhikari et al., 2023), and Korean and church

communities (Choi, 2010). Particularly relevant to my study is the question of why different communities chose to become entrepreneurs in new environments.

#### 2.2.3.1 Becoming Influential Ethnic Entrepreneurs

Scholars have analysed motivations such as institutional constraints (*disadvantage theory*) and ethnic agency (*culture theory*): some confirmed the certain scale of ethnic population and limited working opportunities due to legal status, language, or skill barriers have forced immigrants to work for themselves and become entrepreneurial, whereas other scholars defend migrants' talent and good quality nurtured by their cultural background since entrepreneurship seems an inborn mindset (Volery, 2007; Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Zhou, 2004; Dheer, 2018). However, both theoretical frameworks have three gaps which lead to contextual uncertainty.

Firstly, the frameworks failed to acknowledge the potential institutional benefits when immigration and entrepreneurial choices are attracted and encouraged by local economic and social contexts. Studying the Chinese diaspora in Prato, Ceccagno (2017) concludes that instead of choosing a marginal industry, Chinese migrants started business in contracting workshops and garment companies under the mainstream Italian fashion production system with industrial dividends.

Krause (2018) further points out that Chinese migrants' chase for autonomy and independence beyond money became the entrepreneurial motive, which, secondly, refutes ethnic agency when the newcomers are not entrepreneurially endowed but just ordinary people, who replicate the previous members' experience to run a business.

Lastly, the organisational antecedents, such as the roles of an ethnic community (Johanson et al., 2009) and local industrial clustering (Becattini, 2001), play a role in settling migrants at different stages and achieving entrepreneurial evolution. Beckert (2016) argues that systematic entrepreneurial drives thrive only when social status

becomes the outcome of achievement instead of the barrier to ascription. Therefore, migrants are distant from the guest society traditions by nature, but ethnic entrepreneurship makes aspiration possible and even feasible.

Zhou (2004) classifies ethnic entrepreneurship into two embodiments: *middleman minorities*, where ethnic entrepreneurs connect migrants to the host society and profit from both sides and *enclave entrepreneurs*, which are ethnic enclaves whose businesses are mainly based on ethnic communities. However, variations challenge this classification and expand the typology above: due to technological progress and transnationalism, global innovators and traders are emerging ethnic entrepreneurs (Zhang et al., 2021), younger generation of migrants follows different entrepreneurial paths from their parents (Beckers and Blumberg, 2013) and the era of precarious economy incubates self-employment and "entrepreneurs of himself" (Vieira, 2023; Foucault, 2008). Regardless of personal willingness or new opportunity emergence, the subjectivity of ethnic entrepreneurs becomes more flexible and diverse under uncertainty. Furthermore, their subjectivities empower the influence to create opportunities and cope with uncertainty in terms of new identities, new options for communities, and the degree of autonomy involved in these communities.

For the influences of ethnic entrepreneurship, Zhou (2004) also summarises economic promotions such as minimising ethnic employment marginalisation, relieving native labour for employment competition, maximising entrepreneurship cultivation, ensuring earning benefits through self-employment and shaping overall economic opportunities, which Light (1972) raises "*elective affinity*" that migrant entrepreneurs maximise the advantages of ethnic communities to hire co-ethnic peers. On the one hand, the built ethnic networks and associations in return, promote business within the community and formulate a stronger ethnic subjectivity (Dyer and Ross,

2007); on the other hand, it also inevitably brings about unequal competition and even ethnic exploitation as a darker side (Liu and Olivos, 2019). These consequences would not be significant without a sizeable population in the migrant community because the quantity of community members has an impact on the visibility, availability, and validity of social capital.

Apart from the quantity, the prosperity of entrepreneurship, innovation and economy depends on the quality of the ethnic community, such as overall social cohesion degree, peer influence and demographic features (Samila and Sorenson, 2017; Ruef et al., 2003; Botelho et al., 2024). Therefore, ethnic entrepreneurship involves more collective participation and community formation. Among these ethnic and economic behaviours, the role of social capital is essential and functions as a "club good" available within the ethnic community, while entrepreneurs proactively make use of social capital to build their businesses and make social mobility and solidarity possible (Portes, 1998; Galbraith et al., 2007; Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019). An ethnic community becomes the social gathering in a certain territory, which facilities value introjection, reciprocity transactions, bounded solidarity and enforceable trust through member interactions (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Both the community and embodied social capital gain the scale and influence via accumulation over time.

One significant character in this accumulation process is the entrepreneurs, as the Weberian approach inspires entrepreneurial role via religious ethic (status creation) and challenges institutional authority in the bureaucratic hierarchy (organisational founding) (Ruef and Lounsbury, 2007; Carroll and Khessina, 2005; Lounsbury, 2001). This leads to a controversial research orientation on Chinese migrant entrepreneurship in Prato: Chinese scholars tend to focus on migrant subjectivity influenced by home society and ethnic community while forgetting to associate the embodied "commonality" with

previous Italian domestic migrants and current migrants from other ethnicities (Zhou and Zhu, 2014; Zhang et al., 2016), whereas Western scholars (mainly Italians) catch the migrant entrepreneurial practices and integration difficulties connected with local context (Becucci, 2017; Ceccagno, 2015; Baldassar et al., 2015a), but fail to attribute to the "uniqueness" of Chinese migrants from Wenzhou or relate to Wenzhounese domestic and global diaspora. It is essentially a disconnection of holistic time-spatial contexts from both sending and receiving communities since it is not easy to collect complete empirical cases and associate temporal-spatial evidence together.

#### 2.2.3.2 Communities Related to Ethnic Entrepreneurs

Incorporating ethnic entrepreneurship within the community framework involves two dimensions: Ethnic and Entrepreneurship. "Ethnic" denotes the locals and migrants, or insiders and outsiders, in identity formation and social cohesion since migrants are drifting outside the guest society, which, on the one hand, encourages them to challenge the existing rules and habits for business innovation and, on the other hand, their informal entrepreneurial practices are more aggressive with less regulation (Afonso and Devitt, 2016). "Entrepreneurship" highlights social division, entrepreneurial mobility, and pioneering and innovative practices on social advancement. Entrepreneurship also demonstrates organisational resource acquisition and allocation. For instance, chambers of commerce and business associations are examples that reflect the community's role with organisational resources. Unlike trade unions, which aim for employee rights and social justice, chambers of commerce are arranged for business elites, craftsmen, merchants, and manufacturers to solve problems with organisational power. Pilgrim and Meier (1995, p. 7) define chambers of commerce as "membership organisations representing the business community and comprised of enterprises and industry and services". They are non-profit and self-regulated organisations with spatial boundaries

(ibid), while other scholars argue that chambers are industrial regulatory bodies authorised by the government or solely intermediaries as a result of the interaction ways with the government and the market (Wu, 2006; Feng, 2010). Such community bodies are investigated and convinced to promote economic development (Doner and Schneider, 2000), vocational education and employability (Curtis and McKenzie, 2002; Kasipar et al., 2009), poverty eradication (Zainol et al., 2014), global trade and long-term development (Brown, 1997) in different countries.

When it comes to overseas Chinese migrants, a growing body of literature has specifically examined their lives, subjectivities, and entrepreneurial aims. The literature on Chinese migrants in Prato was produced mainly during the 2010s and features three main sources: Italian scholars such as Antonella Ceccagno and Gabi Dei Ottati, who are based on the local perspective seeing migrants as research objects on social integration and industry development (Ceccagno, 2003c; Ceccagno, 2012; Ceccagno, 2017; Dei Ottati, 2009b; Dei Ottati, 2014); Chinse scholars such as Tu Lan and Yili Zhang with migrants' agency, specifically Wenzhounese, on entrepreneurship and commercial transnationalism (Lan, 2014; Lan, 2015; Zhang and Zhang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2016); and other researchers mainly from Australia with collaborated book editions on cross-national comparisons and global migrant studies such as Loretta Baldassar et al. (2015a) and Graeme Johanson et al. (2009).

This prior research, however, has limits. It typically focuses on 1) either the Chinese migrants' or Italian society's perspective rather than a holistic combination; 2) fragmented migration integration or entrepreneurial challenges analysis; 3) changes until the 2010s instead of following the changes along pandemics and geopolitical issues. Furthermore, it neglects the questions of migrants' embeddedness in the specific temporal-spatial context and their agency to shape this embeddedness at a meso level.

As Wang and Beja (1999) describe, migrants from Wenzhou, similarly to other Chinese migrants, landed in foreign countries to make a living in niche industries such as catering, leather processing, and apparel since most Wenzhounese migrants lack the necessary survival resources as individuals. Therefore, they need to find groups to support each other, and communities based on hometown, clan, industry, religion, and charity are the most common forms. Among these communities, migrant organisations such as Hometown Associations (同乡会) and Chambers of Commerce (商会) are established to help newcomers adapt to the business environment and overcome difficulties (Zhuang, 2020; Cao, 2012a). Overseas Wenzhounese communities assist migrants in defending their rights and strengthening their relationships, and in reality, different kinds of migrant communities perform overlapped and similar functions. Cao (2012b) explains that the Wenzhounese migrants' integration difficulties are mainly due to a sense of belonging as a "guest" and a silent attitude against unfair treatment, who are regarded silent and close group, only aiming at wealth accumulation instead of enjoying life or engaging in local social issues.

Thus, as I have described, although some research on the immersion and lived experiences of Chinese merchants in Prato society and fashion industry does exist, there is insufficient detail in this prior body of work on how different workers and their employers conceptualised the value of their own labour, as well as which communities and organisations were seen by migrants to uplifting themselves as an individual and as a community in an often hostile environment marked by strong native Italian mistrust of the Chinese migrants.

This tension – between the lives and needs of the migrants and the attitudes of native citizens – sets the stage for my own data collection. My research was, thus, shaped by a set of open-ended related questions: 1) in what specific ways these Chinese migrants

are involved in both local or transnational communities and institutions; 2) whether they can realise upward mobility through these organisational resources; and 3) whether their increased assimilation in Italian networks would usher in the eventual waning of ethnic ties and forms of social capital, or whether a type of entrepreneurial enclaving of community would endure.

### 2.3 Research Design and Methodology

The methodology chapter introduces the research design, sampling method, data collection and analysis, and ethical issues.

#### 2.3.1 Research Design

This project adopted a qualitative approach to answer my research questions and get insights from my research subjects. Qualitative methods emphasise the meaning behind social facts and create a narrative way to interpret Chinese migration in Italy. In this research, I narrowed the research subjects to Chinese migrants in Italy, mainly migrants from Wenzhou (China), working and venturing into Prato's apparel/ fast fashion industry (Italy). Apart from my research subjects, answers from a broader range of different groups in relevant locations as supplements cross-check the answers from migrants, facilitate the entire migration stories and see whether similar clues behind these stories can result from domestic migrants' habits in China or the integration of local influence in Italy, which Mason (2011) defines as "facet methodology" to interpret research subjects from a variety of ways of seeing.

Before this study, research on Chinese migrant entrepreneurship in Italy had been conducted in various approaches, many of which are based on case studies (Biggeri et al., 2022; Guercini et al., 2017; Santini et al., 2011; Lan, 2015). Case study is a suitable approach to take research subjects as a case unit and collect data for further analysis, providing evidence to reflect the real-life context and in-depth understanding (Yin,

2017; Noor, 2008). In my study, Chinese presence in Prato are the main case, and Chinese in other relevant fieldwork sites are cases for reference. Yin (2017) also stresses the importance of "replication logic" to ensure that selected cases can fulfil either literal or theoretical replication with predictable or reasonable explanations. In addition, I want to understand my research subjects through comparison with relevant groups. Therefore, Chinese migrants in other European cities with business connections, as well as migrant returnees who were before abroad and are now back in Wenzhou, are considered as comparative research cases to triangulate the research data, restore the daily life and commercial ecology, and understand the life paths of my research subjects based on connections and comparisons among these cases (Stavros and Westberg, 2009; Yin, 2017).

For the data collection section, due to the features of the apparel/ fast fashion industry, demands and supplies maintain a seasonal basis (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010; Govier, 2022). Therefore, Prato's production process must follow the fashion seasons and experience the high and low seasons. After my pilot study in Prato in September 2022, I got the idea that high seasons are roughly from February to June for the summer sales and middle September to November for Christmas/winter sales, during which the factories and clothing companies are busy working, and migrants are usually not available for interview contacts. The rest of the year is in low seasons, and they are more likely to have free time and accept my interview invitations. Therefore, my strategy is to visit the fieldwork site in low and high seasons and interview migrants mainly during low seasons. In contrast, I interviewed non-migrant participants during peak seasons to gain their perceptions and interaction experiences of Chinese migrants and observe the production, sales, and other business activities under permission. The field site visit with interval frequencies, based on the production seasons, helps me to

maximise my research efficiency, control the budget and reduce both cumbersome Schengen visa application process and repetitive data collection. In so doing, short-time ethnography is effective and feasible to fit my research fieldwork (Pink and Morgan, 2013).

In my one-year ethnography, the primary method during my fieldwork was semi-structured interviews, which enables flexibility of question setting to adapt to different respondents and discover further unexpected information. To reach my interviewees, I combined two sampling strategies: purposive sampling is used to identify my interview participants (Noor, 2008) and snowball sampling is applied to better access and expand my research data. Along with Chinese migrants as the primary research participants, other groups related to migrants and other relevant research sites are also included on the interviewee list to enrich the migrants' stories from the "bystander's perspective" and the influence caused by my research participants on them. Furthermore, other methods, such as observation and grey literature, are supplemented to interpret migrants' life stories, entrepreneurial experiences, and personal thoughts about migrant business associations. In short, qualitative methods are used to triangulate research data, cross-check the interview contents, and conduct insights.

### 2.3.2 Sample Selection

This study has been conducted mainly in Prato as the central research location. Meanwhile, as the research subjects' sending society, I also conducted interviews in Wenzhou. Prato is the leading research case as a result of its textile and fast fashion production networks, together with well-established migrant civil engagement, such as chambers of commerce and township associations (Lan, 2015; Ceccagno, 2003c), compared with Wenzhou, where some migrants lived in Europe (including Prato) and come back now for new careers or retirement, Prato is an actual sample location to

relate with possible transnationalism of capital, business network and migrant entrepreneurs' experience (Fels and Hamilton, 2013). The two cities have industrial traditions in common: they have light industry traditions with business networks of small- and middle-sized family-owned enterprises, attracting migrants to keep the scale of labour-intensive industries, being famous for "Third Italy" and "Wenzhou Model", respectively (Baldassar et al., 2015b; Wei et al., 2007). My fieldwork in Prato is conducted on Via Pistoiese/ *Macrolotto 0* (Chinatown, migrant commercial zone and stitching workshops) and *Macrolotto 1* (industrial zone, mainly garment companies) there so that both the everyday life and business activities of migrants can be observed (see Figure 1.1-1.3). In Wenzhou, the fieldwork location is Li'ao (丽岙), a suburban district of returning migrants with residential and business spaces (see Figure 2.1-2.3).

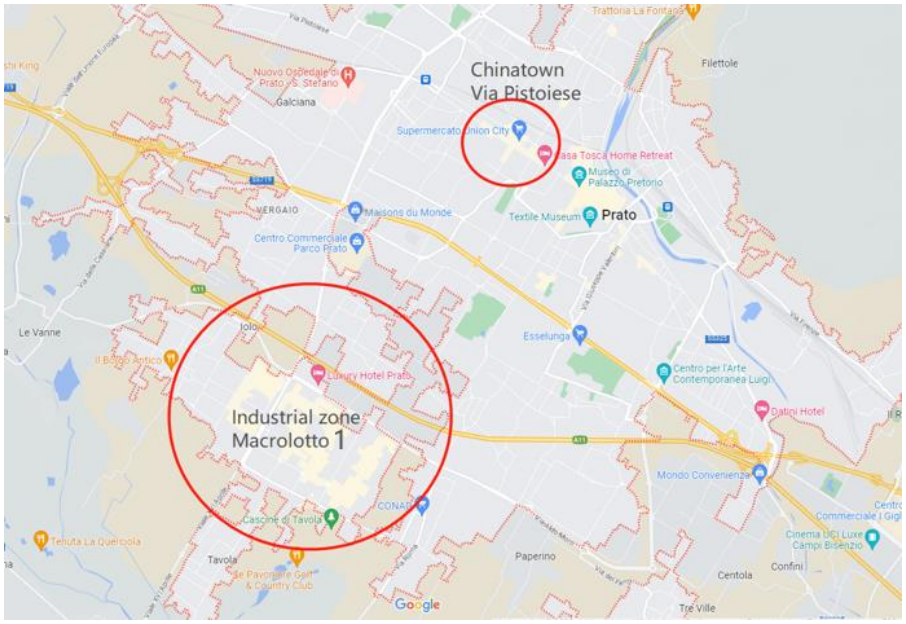


Figure 1.1 Research locations in Prato, Italy

(Source: Screenshot from Google Maps and edited by the author)

Figure 1.2 Prato. A Chinese-run fashion company/apparel company

in the Industrial zone (*Macrolotto 1*)

(Source: Photographed by the author in September 2022)

Figure 1.3 Prato. A Chinese-run stitching workshop in Chinatown (*Macrolotto 0*)

(Source: Photographed by the author in September 2023)


Figure 2.1 Research location in Wenzhou, China

(Source: Screenshot from Google Maps and edited by the author)


Figure 2.2 Li'ao, Wenzhou. Pizza Mafia, a migrant returnee-run Italian restaurant

(Source: Photographed by the author in March 2022)


Figure 2.3 Li'ao, Wenzhou. Prato Coffee, a migrant returnee-run Italian Café

(Source: Photographed by the author in March 2022)

In addition to Prato and Wenzhou, I conducted some interviews in cities relevant Chinese trade and wholesale centres, including Manchester (England), as well as visiting Chinese migrant communities in Paris and Marseille (France). This allows for multi-sited observation, exploring Wenzhounese migration mobility and the business interaction as downstream wholesale and regional retail centres of the industrial apparel chain from Prato and China (Werbner, 2001; Li, 2013b; Ma Mung, 2015) (see Figure 3.1-5.2).


Figure 3.1 Research location in Manchester, England

(Source: Screenshot from Google Maps and edited by the author)


Figure 3.2 Cheetham Hill, Manchester. Manchester Fashion Centre for wholesale

(Source: Photographed by the author in June 2022)

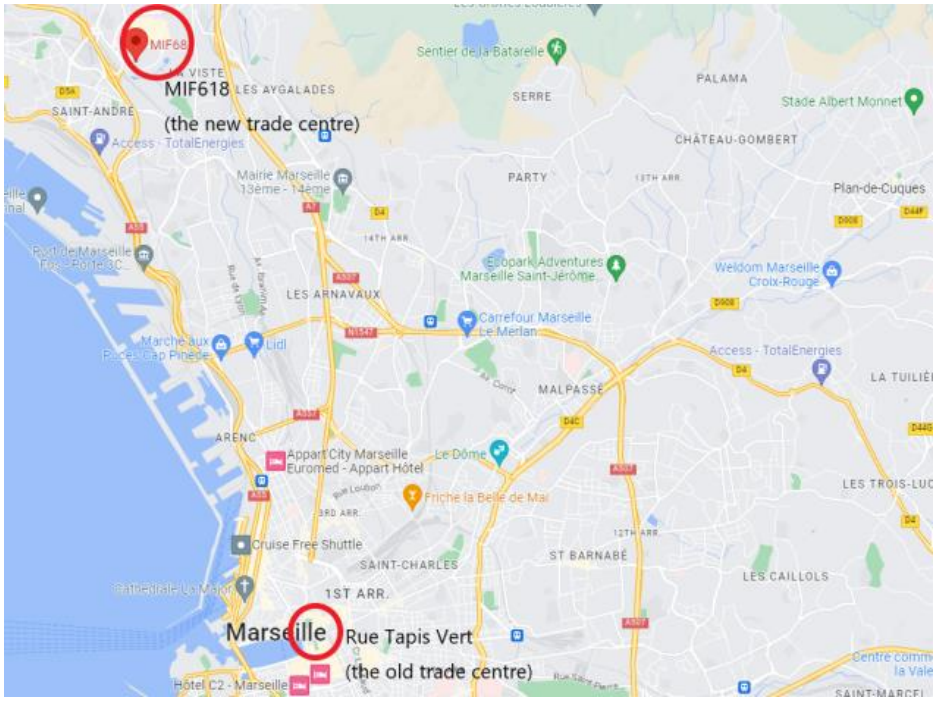


Figure 4.1 Research locations in Marseille, France

(Source: Screenshot from Google Maps and edited by the author)


Figure 4.2 Marseille. MIF68 Fashion Wholesale Centre

(Source: Photographed by the author in September 2022)


Figure 5.1 Research location in Paris, France

(Source: Screenshot from Google Maps and edited by the author)


Figure 5.2 Aubervilliers, Paris. CIFA Fashion Wholesale Centre

(Source: Photographed by the author in December 2022)

As for interview participants' recruitment, I divided them into two main categories to analyse my research subjects: migrant and non-migrant interviewees. The wide range

of interview participants is addressed to draw the whole picture of ethnic entrepreneurship from different angles. When I started interviews with my participants, I supplemented purposive sampling with snowball sampling to expand my participants' recruitment. I tried to interview as broadly as possible to acquire the different angles on ethnic entrepreneurship. As noted, I speak a Wenzhou dialect which made access feasible. I also have beginner-to-intermediate level of proficiency in Italian, and thus interviews with local Italians were conducted in a mixture of Italian and English. The interview volume was determined by theoretical saturation where the repetitive answers are found (Barbour, 2022).

A brief table concludes the interview participants:

| Migrant interviewees | Non-migrant interviewees |
|---|---|
| Include:<br>Migrant entrepreneurs<br>Migrant workers<br>Migrant returnees | Include:<br>Chambers/ Organisation staff<br>Local entrepreneurs<br>Scholars/ Journalists |

Table 1 Interview participants' categorisation

The migrant interviewees are primarily Chinese migrants in the Pratese apparel industry, including entrepreneurs and workers. A straightforward way to understand ethnic entrepreneurship is to interview entrepreneurs about their stories, while migrant workers provide employees' perspectives on retrospect business development and industrial relations with their employers in Prato. Some migrant workers gradually become self-employed and later entrepreneurs as career pathways, so interviewing their biography is to trace the link between the migration and entrepreneurship (Blanchard and Castagnone, 2015). Guided by my research questions, I did not have a preference when it came to participants' gender or age since many Chinese-run firms are family-

based and both husbands and wives are entrepreneurs, sometimes with their offspring's assist. However, the primary recruitment standards are based on 1) Chinese background, mainly migrants from Wenzhou; 2) located in Prato; 3) entrepreneurial experience, especially experience in an organisation such as Chambers of Commerce; 4) preference for working in the textile and apparel industries. I combined grey literature as a source to review the news reports about migrant activities to acquire the potential participant information and used my township network with snowball sampling to develop possible interviewees. However, the participants are not selected from personal friends or close acquaintances to avoid research bias.

In short, Chinese migrant entrepreneurs are focused explicitly on Wenzhounese in Prato, ideally with migrant organisation experience, such as members or presidents of Overseas Chinese/ Wenzhounese Chamber of Commerce (温州商会), Wenzhounese Township Association (温州同乡会), or other similar organisations, so that I can explore migrant's participation within the group and organisational resources. The sampling selection is based on the following reasons:

Wenzhounese has a migration tradition across Europe, especially in Italy, France and Spain, which shows the representativeness of research participants other than Chinese from other regions (Li, 1999a; Baldassar et al., 2015b). Wenzhounese has one of the most challenging dialects in China, and the unique business culture makes the community relatively excluded from outsiders (Zhang and Zhang, 2016; Wang and Beja, 1999). As a Wenzhounese, I know both the local language and the culture, making it easier to access the merchant community.

Compared with Chinese migrants in other European countries, who run service sectors such as restaurant, retail and wholesale in general, for instance, compared with Paris, where clothing manufacture has been gradually replaced by import and wholesale,

the Wenzhounese in Prato have involved themselves in the manufacturing area and maintained the industrial tradition, especially in clothing industries with relatively complete industrial chain, which has been unique over decades (Chuang and Trémon, 2013; Nieto, 2003; Lem, 2010; Dei Ottati and Cologna, 2015). In addition to the majority of migrant entrepreneurs in Prato being from Wenzhou, there are also Chinese migrant entrepreneurs from other regions in China. They are part of the Pratese commercial ecology and work with Wenzhounese entrepreneurs; seeing how the intra-ethnic relationship and geographic affinity are built among the Chinese community is also essential. Similar situations apply to other Chinese migrants working and living outside Prato, including migrant returnees back in Wenzhou and migrants in other European countries. The participants here are selected because either they have business connections with Chinese migrants in Prato, or they personally lived in Prato before and moved to a new country, so I can connect their migration mobility and business contact and explain transnationalism in/outside Prato through their answers.

As well as migrant entrepreneurs, I carried out interviews with Chinese migrant workers who worked or are working for their Chinese bosses and local society. This enabled me to ask how they perceived their bosses, their working conditions and their own career goals.

Lastly, I carried out non-migrant interviewees mainly with Italian staff working at chambers of commerce and other organisation staff, local entrepreneurs working with Chinese migrants, and scholars/ journalists with previous fieldwork experience, these interviewees provide more comprehensive and insightful answers of social impacts on either host or home societies of ethnic entrepreneurship. In this interview category, the interviewees' selection is their personal experience with Chinese migrants or business organisations. For instance, I interviewed chamber and trade union staff to clarify the

business engagement of migrant entrepreneurs in the local economy and organisation development, and I interviewed local Italian textile museum staff to understand the migrant history and industrial transformation between Italian domestic migration and international, especially Chinese migration.

Scholars and journalists, especially Italian scholars, are also part of my research interviewees. They have previous research experience on Chinese presence with their perspective but have not published any relevant articles. Through the interviews, I can compare their observations with mine and comprehend their interpretation in Italian contexts. Furthermore, their responses, shaped by their position as locals, offer reflexive insights that inform my own research positionality.

### 2.3.3 Research Methods

I visited Prato four times for fieldwork, respectively, in September (2022), November (2022) and February (2023) each for one week, and from July to August (2023), spending four months in this region in total. In addition to the main fieldwork site, I started with Wenzhou (February 2022) and included Manchester (June 2022), Marseille (September 2022) and Paris (December 2022) for the migrant network. Based on my fieldwork frequency, I applied follow-up interviews with some interviewees to gain updates.

The research process is conducted in the following locations with the schedule below:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2022. 2-3 | Preliminary study in Wenzhou, Li'ao district and interviewees collection and recruitment.<br>Interview conducted after ethical approval with migrant returnees, members of chambers of commerce, scholars etc. |
| 2022. 6-8 | Fieldwork/ Interviews in Manchester with Chinese migrant entrepreneurs and business partners in Chinatown / Cheetham Hill.<br>Online interview with Manchester Chamber staff. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2022. 9-10 | Fieldwork/ Interviews in Marseille and Prato (Low season after summer sale) with Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, Chinese migrant workers, Chinese co-founder/ staff of chambers and scholars.<br>First contact with Prato chamber, Prato textile museum and Prato Centre of Monash University. |
| 2022.11-12 | Fieldwork/ Interviews in Prato (Low season after Christmas/winter sale) with Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, Chinese migrant workers, Italian locals, Prato chamber/ textile museum/ research centre, business partners in Chinatown/ *Macrolotto 0* (Residential area), Iolo, Tavola and *Macrolotto 1* (Industrial Area).<br>Fieldwork in Paris (Aubervilliers). |
| 2023. 1-2 | Follow-up online interviews in Wenzhou/ Prato due to international transportation and the pandemic policy in China.<br>Fieldwork/ Interviews in Prato (Beginning of summer sale orders) with Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, Chinese migrant workers, Italian locals, Prato chamber/ textile museum/ research centre/ trade union staff. |
| 2023. 3-5 | Follow-up online interviews in Wenzhou/ Prato due to visa and transportation issues.<br>Grey literature search and analysis |
| 2023. 6-8 | Fieldwork/ Interviews (including Follow-up ones) in Prato with Chinese migrant entrepreneurs and workers (High season from May to July/ Low season from July to September).<br>Observations of Prato apparel industry activities/ daily activities.<br>Grey literature search and analysis.<br>End session of data collection. |

Table 2 Research fieldwork schedule

#### 2.3.3.1 Semi-structured Interview

With interviews, I can trace the life story of migrants' membership in related organisations. Due to the pandemic and visa and transportation issues, some interviews are conducted online to overcome mobility constraints and fit interviewees' schedules.

By August 2023, I had conducted 52 interviews with 41 interviewees (including 11 follow-up interviews). The average interview length is one hour. Among the 41 participants, 23 were migrant interviewees and 18 were non-migrant interviewees, mainly located in the Prato region (25 in total with nine Italian interviewees) and the Wenzhou region (11 in total with one Italian interviewee), which are the two research sites.

Here is an overview of the interview summary:

| Migrant interviewees (23), | Non-migrant interviewees (18), |
|---|---|
| Include:<br>Migrant entrepreneurs<br>(12 in Prato, 1 in Manchester,<br>1 in Marseille),<br>Migrant workers (4 in Prato)<br>Migrant returnees (5 in Wenzhou) | Include:<br>Chambers/ Organisation staff<br>(4 in Prato, 2 in Wenzhou/ Hangzhou,<br>1 in Manchester)<br>Local entrepreneurs<br>(3 in Prato/ Florence)<br>Scholars/ Journalists<br>(2 in Prato, 4 in Wenzhou, 2 in other locations) |

Table 3 Interview Participants category overview

And a detailed interviewee information list:

| | Interviewee/ Interview type | Gender/ Ethnicity | Occupation | Category | Interview notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Longda (In-person) | Male Chinese | Online Didi Taxi driver | Migrant returnees | Wenzhounese worked before in Naples in the apparel factory, based in Wenzhou |
| 2 | Maojun (In-person) | Male Chinese | Radiator Factory Owner | Migrant returnees | Wenzhounese worked before in the Netherlands in the wholesale industry, based in Wenzhou |
| 3 | Danjie (In-person) | Female Chinese | Café Owner | Migrant returnees | Wenzhounese worked before in an Italian company in Rome, based in Wenzhou |
| 4 | Jie (In-person) | Male Chinese | Café Chef | Migrant returnees | Wenzhounese worked before in Paris in the apparel factory, Danjie's brother, based in Wenzhou |
| 5 | Weimin (In-person) | Male Chinese | Pizza Restaurant Owner | Migrant returnees | Wenzhounese grown up and acquired cooking qualifications in Italy and re-started business in Wenzhou, based in Wenzhou |
| 6 | Zhaoxie (In-person) | Male Chinese | Shoe Trade Agency Owner | Chambers/ Organisation staff | Wenzhounese, Member of Shoe Industry Chamber of Commerce, operating both company and industrial park, based in Wenzhou |
| 7 | Tianxi (In-person) | Male Chinese | Wholesaler | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese migrated to England from Italy, and later moved to Manchester Member of Manchester Wenzhou Association, based in Manchester |
| 8 | Dahua (Online) | Male Chinese | Consultation Startup Entrepreneurs | Chambers/ Organisation staff | Wenzhounese, Member of Hangzhou Ouhai Chamber, (Ouhai is a district in Wenzhou), based in Hangzhou |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Biao Zeng*[9] (Online) | Male Chinese | Lecturer of Psychology | Scholars/ Journalists | Wenzhounese, Member of migrant association, based in Bristol |
| 10 | Tu Lan* (Online) | Male Chinese | Professor of Geography | Scholars/ Journalists | Investigated before for his research/ doctoral thesis in Prato, based in Durham (US) |
| 11 | Dorothy (Online) | Female British | Manchester Chamber of Commerce Staff | Chambers/ Organisation staff | The Great Manchester Chamber is the largest in the UK, based in Manchester |
| 12 | Jianguo (In-person) | Male Chinese | Wholesaler | Migrant entrepreneurs | Qingtianese[10] migrated to France from Italy, Member of South France Chinese Chamber of Commerce, based in Marseille |
| 13 | Qiangzi (Online) | Male Chinese | Apparel Factory Worker | Migrant workers | Wenzhounese with stowaway experience, and now with a legal residency permit, based in Prato |
| 14 | Yili Zhang* (Online) | Male Chinese | Professor of Economics | Scholars/ Journalists | Wenzhounese, conducted fieldwork in Prato/ Florence before, based in Wenzhou |
| 15 | Zhixiong+[11] (Online/ In-person) | Male Chinese | Smart office Startup Entrepreneur | Migrant entrepreneurs | Beijinger (married with Wenzhounese), Member of Italy Chinese Apparel Industry Association,<br>Interviewed three times (Online and In-person), based in Prato |
| 16 | Hehua (Online) | Female Chinese | Lecturer of Social Anthropology | Scholars/ Journalists | Wenzhounese, investigated domestic migration and grass-root organisations, based in Wenzhou |
| 17 | Changhong+ (In-person) | Male Chinese | Apparel Company Owner | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, Member of Prato Overseas Chinese Association,<br>Interviewed twice, based in Prato |
| 18 | Maige (In-person) | Male Chinese | Apparel Company Owner/ Restaurant Owner | Migrant entrepreneurs | Fujianese (Fujian is a neighbouring province of Zhejiang), Member of the Italian Chinese Apparel Industry Association and Italy Fujian Association, based in Prato |
| 19 | Aling (In-person) | Female Chinese | Café Owner | Migrant workers | A married couple working at their relative's café, worked earlier in an apparel factory.<br>Aling is the main participant, and although her husband was unwilling to do the interview, he agreed to comment during the interview, based in Prato |

[9] * indicates scholars with their real names, and I acknowledge their credit after informed consent, who have research or personal experience on Chinese migration, the fashion industry or associations but without relevant publications yet.

[10] Qingtian county was part of Wenzhou in history

[11] + indicates that I conducted follow-up interviews with the same participants.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | Claudia (In-person) | Female Italian | Museum Curator | Chambers/ Organisation staff | Textile design background, working at Prato textile museum, based in Prato |
| 21 | Ailan (In-person) | Female Chinese | Apparel Company Owner | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, with family business. Ailan is the main participant, while her husband drove me around in the *Macrolotto 1* area for observation, based in Prato |
| 22 | Giorgio (In-person) | Male Italian | Prato Chamber of Commerce Staff | Chambers/ Organisation staff | Working on a local Italian organisation, expertise in the statistical summary of the local economy, based in Prato |
| 23 | Matteo Dutto* (In-person) | Male Italian | Researcher of Cultural Study | Scholars/ Journalists | Investigated before fieldwork/ research in Prato, based in Prato |
| 24 | Fabio Bracci*+ (In-person) | Male Italian | Researcher of Immigration | Scholars/ Journalists | We started from a group interview with Fabio's colleagues, but mainly interview was with Fabio, Interviewed twice, based in Prato |
| 25 | Shenfu (In-person) | Male Chinese | Catholic Priest | Migrant workers | From Hebei Province, studied earlier in Rome and working in Prato catholic parish for the Chinese community (mainly Wenzhounese group), based in Prato |
| 26 | Paula+ (In-person) | Female Italian | Strategist of Digital Marketing | Chambers/ Organisation staff | Sinology and Business strategy background, working at PIN, Interviewed twice, based in Prato |
| 27 | Wanshun+ (In-person) | Male Chinese | Textile Manufacturer | Migrant entrepreneur | Qingtianese, Member of Craftsmen National Confederation (Prato), a local Italian organisation (*CNA*), Interviewed twice, based in Prato |
| 28 | Antonio (In-person) | Male Italian | Restaurant Owner/ Landlord | Local entrepreneurs | Connections with both Chinese business partners and tenants, based in Florence (near Prato) |
| 29 | Pietro (In-person) | Male Italian | Landlord/ Retired | Local entrepreneurs | Connections with Chinese tenants and the Chinese Catholic community, a consent but unrecorded interview with Shenfu's language interpretation, his wife also joined the interview, based in Prato |
| 30 | Daqiang+ (In-person) | Male Chinese | Clothing Accessories Manufacturer | Migrant entrepreneurs | Fujianese, Member of Italy Fujian Association, Interviewed twice, based in Prato |
| 31 | Zhiyuan (Online) | Male Chinese | University Campus Chancellor/ Former Journalist | Scholars/ Journalists | Wenzhounese assigned as chancellor of Italy Campus of Wenzhou University by the government, worked before as an expatriate journalist in Italy, based in Wenzhou |
| 32 | Bianca+ (Online) | Female Italian | Coordinator of Local Trade Union | Chambers/ Organisation staff | Member of *SI Cobas*, Interview with Bianca's colleague for English translation, Interviewed twice, based in Prato |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 33 | Maurizio Vrenna*+ (Online) | Male Italian | Lecturer of Industrial Design | Scholars/ Journalists | Expertise in Industrial design in both Italian and Chinese cases, working in Wenzhou,<br>Interviewed twice, based in Wenzhou |
| 34 | Wenyue+ (In-person) | Male Chinese | Apparel Company Owner | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, Owns two companies, The earliest Chinese migrant group in Prato,<br>Interviewed three times, based in Prato |
| 35 | Xiaomei (In-person) | Female Chinese | Apparel Company Owner | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, Second generation with an Italian fashion design study background, based in Prato |
| 36 | Pangbo (In-person) | Male Chinese | Logistics Company Manager | Migrant workers | Wenzhounese worked for a Chinese logistic company, did business before in Turkey, Member of the Chinese Catholic community, based in Prato |
| 37 | Sanmu (In-person) | Male Chinese | Investor/ Textile Manufacturer | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, Member of Evangelic Christian community, Sino-Italian Chamber/ *Unione Industriale*, owns several companies in both textile and retail sectors, based in Prato |
| 38 | Haojie (In-person) | Male Chinese | Fabric Recycler | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, Second generation with a family business background, based in Prato |
| 39 | Zhenwei (In-person) | Male Chinese | Apparel Company Owner | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, Member of Italy Ruian Association and Prato Buddhist community, based in Prato |
| 40 | Sidan (In-Person) | Female Chinese | Real Estate Agent | Migrant entrepreneurs | Wenzhounese, Member of Prato Buddhist community, work with Italian business partner, based in Prato |
| 41 | Riccardo (In-person) | Male Italian | Accounting Firm Owner | Local entrepreneurs | Business with Chinese clients and organiser of Chinese cultural events, based in Prato |

Table 4 Detailed interview participant overview

For interview respondent recruitment, I used the following approaches with the help of my Wenzhounese identity to acquire the participants' trust:

1) A direct visit to their working/ public living spaces, explaining my research and asking for an interview possibility; 2) Contact via a middleman in my township network, asking them for participant recommendation; 3) An official request of phone or WeChat message to the chambers of commerce, or related organisation. After getting informed consent from interview participants, I mostly prepared for a one-hour interview with

them in Chinese and English, respectively, with a few in Wenzhounese dialect and with interpreters if interviewees only speak Italian. When finishing one interview, I asked for further contact for possible follow-up questions and further recommended respondents.

In a one-hour semi-structured interview with migrant participants, critical questions include personal information, migration motivation, working status and knowledge of the industry, cultural adaptation, social support and attitudes toward migrant organisations. I explored their motives for joining organisations, perceived benefits and detriments in everyday life, and entrepreneurial experience. Whereas for non-migrant interviewees, the questions centre on the impression and personal experience of Chinese migrants, attitudes toward their business activities, influence on local societies, and, conversely, migrants' reactions caused by the local society changes. For some interviewees, I asked for a second follow-up interview in my subsequent fieldwork when new questions arose and updates from the field needed to be followed up on. The follow-up interviews are not only suitable for my fieldwork agenda but also provide opportunities to follow migrant up-to-date experiences and potential attitude changes towards their personal business choices and local industry development.

#### 2.3.3.2 Methodological Triangulation

Triangulation is applied here to understand the phenomenon and reduce bias with different methods, research data and theories (Denzin, 2015; Flick, 2019). Combining with interviews, I used observations to cross-check interviewees' contents, understand both contexts and insights, and associate possible explanations from their answers. Observations in my fieldwork have two further advantages. Firstly, observations provide supplementary information about the migrant's living and working environment, filling the gap between interview narratives and my interpretation.

Secondly, some inspiring or confusing observations are clues to generate new questions in a follow-up interview. In this case, I contacted gatekeepers from my interviewee list to access the environment and have an immersive observation.

The on-site observations comprise two parts: observation of business operations and observation of migrant organisations' activities. I chose several participants after the interview and asked if I could accompany them to observe their daily routine and involvement in migrant organisations such as Chambers of Commerce. During my fieldwork, I visited garment companies (also called *pronto moda*), textile factories manufacturing workshops, laundry and dying factories, and printworks. The visits were usually guided by my interviewees, which made observation at workplaces accessible. Meanwhile, I was invited to a formal dinner in August 2023 to observe the interactions between entrepreneurs from migrant chambers, Italian entrepreneurs and governors, as well as Chinese diplomatic and local government officers. Different associations were monitored and compared to find similarities and differences regarding organisation structure, missions, functions, degree of solidarity, and relations with other parties. As for associations and communities in migrants' daily life, I participated in migrant religious community events, including the Chinese Catholic, Evangelic and Buddhist ceremonies, where I met and developed new interviewees for my research.

Also, I walked around the research sites mentioned above to observe the streetscape, such as buildings, billboards, stores and migrant interactions and get clues about the everyday life of migrants and business ecology, especially the peak and low seasons of the clothing industry. Based on my observations, I wrote field notes and collected my questions through observation for the interviews.

Another approach, online observations, is to know the daily life and popular topics in the destination society via social media. An app recommended by my interviewee is

*Huarenjie* (Chinese street/ 华人街, see Figure 6), where instant job information, house renting, migration life, legal and life experience support and news events are posted and discussed. The online observation methods are helpful during the pandemic and my absence in the fieldwork sites to follow the latest information about the migrant community.


Figure 6 User Interface on *Huarenjie*

(Source: Screenshot from author's phone and edited by the author)

To get data and methodological triangulation, interviews and observations create a wide range of data on entrepreneurs and migrant organisations in the research locations. These two methods provide in-depth and long-term interpretations of research subjects and their activities as my primary data.

Lastly, grey literature and other documents are another way to collect secondary data and connect the results that I obtained from interviews and observations. In this way, I can notice whether Chinese migrant entrepreneurship has any commonalities with the Chinese diaspora in other countries or previous Italian emigration. The grey literature covers timelines from the historical archives and up-to-date news reports, which I can investigate research subjects more validly and comprehensively. To understand the historical context, grey literature, including documentary films and museum exhibitions, offers references and comparisons in the research location and how migrants and/or locals handled similar problems in the past and in other regions. The types of grey literature can be personal records (e.g. blogs) or organisational files (e.g. annual reports). There are two options for collecting the secondary data: The first type is online social media, including WeChat official accounts (Newsletter subscription/ 微信公众号), or vlogs on Bilibli.com (Chinese video website/ 哔哩哔哩) and Youtube.com, which provide edited media report in Chinese, personal life experiences and in-depth reviews of overseas Chinese. I have built a database and coded the posts into categories, such as business stories, significant events, attitudes, etc.

The second type is traditional or published files such as annual reports or meeting protocols of chambers of commerce archives, policy announcements and regulations from the government website, consultancy reports from think tanks or research institutions, documentaries, collections from the local museums and mentioned publications from interviewed scholars. Under this situation, I can use the open-access version or ask for permission to read and make a copy of the files. These files are sometimes in Italian, so translating to English or Chinese is required to get the ideas and compare different cultural contexts. Additionally, I traced news reports from both

English and Italian online media and reviewed the netizen comments to acquire the information.

For the data analysis part, methodological triangulation is carried out with biographical analysis to understand migrants' background, current status, and connections with their homeland and other migrants in other hosting countries and in order to see how their migration is related to various organisations and networks, such as family, hometown fellowship, chambers of commerce, and religious groups. According to Deterding and Waters (2018), flexible coding starts with indexing to get rough ideas of themes, generates thematic memos for analytic codes, and examines the validity of the codes for theory refinement. Themes via flexible coding are generated from the interview transcripts, observation notes and grey literature for further comparison and analysis. Following the logic, I divided the migrant stories into four themes: the embeddedness of immigration and entrepreneurship (Calibrated time), social capital accumulation (Reconstructing Made in Italy), distribution (Community shopping) and amplification (Elite aspirations) to see how Chinese migrants became part of the host society and dealt with challenges with locals. The themes are further developed in the following substantial chapters.

Developing from the themes, I coded, for instance, "fast and slow" to investigate migrants' different living experiences and perceptions between China and Italy and "inside and outside" to examine the choice of migrant entrepreneurs regarding sociocultural identity through the definition of the label "Made in Italy".

Creating comparative case studies helps me iterate my theoretical framework and identify if it works in my selected cases. I can refine the theory to match the causal explanations within and between cases (Yin, 2017; Goodrick, 2019). To explore the reasons and the possible effects, the cases under each code are compared.

### 2.3.4 Research Ethics

I adhered to appropriate ethical guidelines regarding participant recruitment, the research process (interviews, observations, and grey literature), and data analysis and storage after I obtained ethical approval from the University of Essex ethics committee (Application ID: ETH2122-0896) in March 2022. The relevant ethics in my research are informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Since the primary research methods in this study are semi-structured interviews, I explained the research ethics in detail to my participants for their consent. The other two ways follow the same rules to fulfil the ethical requirement.

In the recruitment and interview phase, I sent my participants the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) with my translation and invitation letter, explaining information in each line in Chinese and leaving enough time for participants to read through and raise questions. I presented my research in detail, the intention of the interview process and a rough framework of interview questions to ensure the participants were well-informed and with background knowledge of my research. I highlighted that they could refuse to answer questions or stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable with the contents throughout the conversation. They fully consented to what information they would be asked for and collected. At the same time, they could refuse or stop the interview at any time without providing a reason. The same action applied when I, as a researcher, felt unsafe or threatened during the fieldwork.

In the data analysis phase, I used pseudonyms in my transcription and write-up of the research. The only exception is where the interviewees are scholars and consent to leave their real names for the credit of their intellectual properties. That includes changing any potentially identifying details such as exact positions in educational or work institutions, residency and the names of other people that my participant mentions.

This research has strictly followed the GDPR in the EU and personal data security laws in China. The analysis of the research subject uses labelled aliases to avoid information disclosure.

In the data storage phase following the data analysis, the audio files from the interview and the field notes from observation and social media data are stored in a password-protected file on the university OneDrive cloud network, with an encrypted file on my laptop as a backup. The de-identified transcripts are uploaded to the university cloud. The identifying information is removed from the transcript and set as a password. In terms of my research as a PhD project, the data will be destroyed five years later from the last publication of the dissertation.

## Chapter 3 Calibrated Time: A Wild Growth of Migrant Community and Business Network in Prato

> "Prato is my new hometown, and kind-hearted Pratese share the characteristics of diligence, thriftiness, humour, and helpfulness. My heart hangs no longer in the balance but rather drops downwards to where it can root, sprout with gratitude, and in the future bear the grateful fruits that will return to the generous land and benevolent citizens here."
>
> (Ayu, role of a Chinese migrant in Prato)
>
> - Lines from the TV series *Family on the Go / A Wenzhou Family* (2012)

> "Prato has been famous for the textile industry for centuries in Italy. The reason why Chinese-run businesses can develop and "evolve" well is because of the "soil" of the city itself."
>
> - Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneur (2022)

### 3.1 Introduction

In the 1990s, Chinese migrants, mainly from Wenzhou, became the new wave of population influx in Prato after the local countryside Tuscans and Southern Italians. Fels and Hamilton (2013) noticed the similarities between Chinese migrants and Italian peasants as labour influx and concluded that large immigration emerged at a specific time through coincidence, followed by organisational dynamics and historical fate. The migrants, regardless of domestic or international, have been involved in local industry and have propelled the economy since the post-war period. The Chinese influx in Prato occurred between the economic boom and recession of the 1990s and Chinese migrants dominated the fast fashion production within three decades. A wild

growth, therefore, under this circumstance and previous industrial base, is likely to happen, just as the "seeds" meet the perfect "soil condition" and grow without control. In the Chinese narrative, "wild growth" (*Yemanshengzhang/* 野蛮生长) is often used for entrepreneurship or new emergences to describe the disorganised and rapid development. Although this expression implies a lack of necessary regulation with some negative image, growing wildly demonstrates entrepreneurs' agency in regard to the attitude of vibrant resilience and fighting one's way out of the predicament. Thornton (1999, p. 35) concludes, "(this) community infrastructure facilitates and constrains entrepreneurs, but it is entrepreneurs who construct and change the infrastructure". The interaction between community infrastructure and entrepreneurs implies the ecological and institutional perspective dedicated to integrating individual traits of entrepreneurs into the analysis of embeddedness.

Referring to ecological metaphors, the Chinese presence is like the running bamboo, a herbal plant originating from Asia, starting from the sparse distribution of exotic creatures to a sudden networked forest-wise appearance with its own ecology – it is an occupation of another species of grass in the Pratese "meadow". Despite the "parallel district" criticism from local media, which accuses Chinese communities of segregating from Italian society (Pieraccini, 2008), the migrants are actually seen everywhere: in the cafés as part of daily routines, at Sunday mass in the local cathedral, in the civic park for morning square dancing, but also occasionally festival celebrations such as Chinese new year parade and watermelon distribution on Feast of San Lorenzo.

Despite this visibility, a sense of bewilderment among local Pratese has lasted over decades (Bressan and Tosi Cambini, 2009; Krause and Bressan, 2017) about the lives of Chinese incomers, many of whom are perceived as burying their heads in working in stitching workshops, weaving houses, dyeing and washing factories, and garment

companies with limited interactions with locals. This ambivalent status, including the linguistic barrier, means that locals have limited sources to access Chinese migrants.

The book *I Cinesi non muoiono mai* (*The Chinese Never Die*) by two Italian journalists Raffaele Oriani and Ricardo Staglianò (2008) described the stereotypical way that Italian locals viewed Chinese, such as the belief that some lived eternally as many locals had never seen a single funeral for Chinese, or that Chinese look alike and they passed the residential permit to the undocumented newcomers when someone died. Mistrust was rampant, especially since the 2013 Chinese-run factory fire incidence (BBC, 2013; Kinetz, 2014). But positive perceptions have also grown. One previous city mayor in Prato, Matteo Biffoni,[12] remarked: "The Chinese community set a good example, creating a virtuous circle" during the Covid lockdown, as this city dodged national panic and at one point had the lowest infection rate in Italy (Roberts, 2020; Xinhua, 2020). Over time, Prato expresses its friendly openness by hiring Mandarin-speaking staff and labelling instructions in Chinese.

Placing tension over the visibility and invisibility of Chinese migrants at its core, this chapter has two main sections. In this first section, I provide more historical context to the role of fashion and textile production in the Pratese cultural imagination by offering an overview of the city's evolving role as a textile manufacturing hub in Europe for over five centuries. In particular, I focus on the boom decades over the late industrial period and the eventual decline in the 1970s of the textile industry, providing context for my later discussion of the waves of merchants from China arriving from the 1980s onwards. In the second section, I develop the analogy of plant growth to discuss Chinese migrants' agency in immigration and business expansion in the region.

[12] Matteo Biffoni served as president of the Province of Prato from 2014 to 2018 and as mayor of Prato municipality from May 2014 to June 2019 for the first term, and from June 2019 to June 2024 for the second term.

To understand ethnic entrepreneurship, I introduce temporal embeddedness as the framework for tracing the social meanings of wild growth.

Distinctively from other studies (Dei Ottati, 2014; Johanson et al., 2009; Baldassar et al., 2015a; Lan, 2014; Ceccagno, 2017), my research approach identifies and chronicles four distinct phases in the migrants' involvement, contributing to the local social and economic ecological development. The following section comes with the "Seeding" phase (Migrant's motivation for immigration), "Rooting" phase (Migrant's settlement in Prato and entrepreneurial experience collection), "Sprouting" phase (Migrant's entrepreneurial attempt, industrial preference and rise of the fast fashion industry) and lastly, "Flourishing" phase (Business network expansion and influences on local society).

### 3.2 Fertilised Land: The Pratese Textile Industry before the Chinese Presence

The textile tradition in Prato started in the thirteenth century, turning recycled wool into low-end textile products. With such labour-intensive production, Prato won the title "Capital of rags" (*la capitale dei cenci*) in Europe and cultivated a unique job of rag man (*cenciaiolo*) for textile recycling from used garments. Later, the Pratese industrial advancement came into a new era of recycled wool manufacture, along with the invention of the pulling machine by Benjamin Law in 1813 and the equipment introduction by a Pratese merchant, Giovanni Battista Mazzoni, afterwards to his hometown. The shoddy wool rags manufactured in Prato were for wrapping and protecting the pricey Italian marble, which was demanded and exported worldwide from Livorno harbour. Livorno became the largest Italian rag trade harbour and made Prato the largest shoddy wool manufacturing centre in the world (Neufield, 1961). At the end of the nineteenth century, Prato-produced wool received immense popularity inside Italy owing to domestic protectionism and further investments in education such

as Royal Weaving and Dyeing School (*Regia Scuola di Tessitura e Tintoria*) and in massive manufacture such as "The Big Factory" (*Il Fabbricone*) pushed the city into industrial revolution from the traditional family-based workshops (Vannucchi, 2015; Bracci, 2016). In the interim of industrialisation, the latter manufacturing endeavour inside family production was not forsaken despite technological progress; instead, it served the purpose of mitigating risks amid economic crises. In addition to the incomplete industrial transformation, Pratese entrepreneurs strategically delegated a portion of the weaving and sewing tasks to local farmers, thereby reducing production expenses (Mori, 1988). Moreover, factory owners proposed that their employees purchase the machines at a labour discount (internalisation), divide the total production into stages and outsource the workload to previous employees to minimise the loss during crisis outbreaks (Bracci, 2016; Dei Ottati, 1993). In this way, the coexistence of decentralised and specialised production has intensified the textile industry in Prato and left several unique industrial legacies.

### 3.2.1 Unique Industrial Legacies Born from Leftover Shoddy Wool

Prato is known as "Italian Manchester" due to its textile specialisation and massive production (Zhao, 2018). Bracci (2016) points out that this city maintained a "two circuits" production up to WWII: standard low-end textile productions from wool mills, including rugs and blankets for export to South Africa, India and China; such poor markets at that time; and subcontracted textile and garment works from small firms for domestic women clothing market. Along with the industrial development, some business practices remained and evolved from the tradition. I use the term "industrial legacy" to associate with the future migrant's entrepreneurial practice in the following section.

The massive production in the wool factories and their expulsion strategy during the economic downturn created the role of subcontractor (*contoterzista*), as mentioned above. This trust-based working relationship was fragmented but coordinated: workers were forced to become self-employed but undertook the tasks of previous employers (ibid.). In this way, the *Fabbricone* and other wool mills were able to maintain productivity, produce army uniforms and blankets and gain profit during wartime. Although these factories were bombed by the Allies during WWII and further destroyed by Germans when they retreated, the previous subcontracting was kept and transformed into an industrial legacy, and later in the post-war economic recovery, subcontracting became an efficient way of reducing cost and risk and offered the entrepreneurial possibility.

The second industrial legacy was the role of broker (*impannatori*), who do not have plant ownership, but focus on developing business ideas and promoting finished goods produced in industrial areas (Becattini, 1990). It was common to see brokers' dock business from factory owners to both subcontractors and local peasant families. Brokers played a role in linking manufacturers in different processing stages in a business network, exchanging information and maintaining the fragmented but coordinated system (Fels and Hamilton, 2013; Bracci, 2016; Rong, 1986).

Right after WWII, the disappearance of low-end markets caused the further dissolution of vertically integrated factories. Meanwhile, the establishment of the Bretton Woods system in 1944 and a new world promised by the United States with a series of multilateral agreements (such as monetary support from the Marshall Plan) consolidated the "Western camp" and roles of both Prato and Italy in global production. As Becattini (2001) describes, this was a historic turning point, spurring a production boom. For instance, after WWII, the increasing number of donated clothes and fabrics

around the world were sent to Prato for recycling and regeneration (Gras and Craveri, 1967), which functioned as the fertiliser to local economic recovery; however, the two circuits production model was not functional any longer due to war destruction. A new production model, along with the new world order, was called for. Thus, the importance of the Marshallian industrial districts model was applied in the 1950s to understand post-war development and gradually became another industrial legacy in Prato (Lan, 2014). The concept of industrial district refers to the geographical agglomeration of specialised small- and medium-sized enterprises (usually family enterprises) but can be further understood as rooted socioeconomic organisations (Marshall, 1919; Amin, 2017; Dei Ottati, 2009b). In Prato, this specialised and cooperative textile clustering environment from small firms enabled the firm constellation, business network accumulation, and community market formation (Lorenzoni and Ornati, 1988; Becattini, 2001; Dei Ottati, 2003).

Industrial districts as an economic model were discovered and discussed not only in the Prato or Tuscan region but also all around Italy. These highly dense business networks share an "industrial atmosphere" of entrepreneurship, a sense of belonging based on norms, and trust (Becattini, 1991; Amin, 2017; Fukuyama, 1995). Hence, the scaled clustering of small firms shows a high degree of adaptation to the changing market and fosters the identity of "Made in Italy". In Prato, the new economic system was driven by two dynamic factors: a) the subcontracting firms responsible for the actual production, and b) the front-end firms engaged in product design, work organisation, and sales (Unione Industriale Pratese, no date). These industrial legacies are the fruits of time and the keys for successive migrants to become involved in the Pratese textile and fashion industry.

### 3.2.2 Collapse of the Post-war "From Rags to Riches" Tale

The industrial district model did not only apply to Prato but also a third of the national economic system in Italy, contributing to half of the domestic employment (Baldassar et al., 2015b). In the post-war period, Prato's "from rags to riches" tale benefited from the nationally improved infrastructure and networked market, innovative application to new synthetic fabrics, favourable social and political atmosphere, and local devotional and entrepreneurial mindsets (Becattini, 2003; Rofel and Yanagisako, 2019). From the 1950s to 1970s, Prato basked in the joy of economic recovery, and the industrial district model brought prosperity and domestic migration influx from the rural Tuscany area and Southern Italy. Thanks to this small-scale and specialised production of the industrial district, whether former wool mill workers, nearby rural sharecroppers, or domestic migrants, everyone had the opportunity to become self-employed and start a subcontracting business in this fertile land of entrepreneurship. In contrast, the former employers became the front-end company owners for trade or manufacturers only in the final stage of essential production (Lan, 2014; Rofel and Yanagisako, 2019).

In the early 1970s, the global economic crisis hit the Italian economy along with the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system. The uncertainty threatened especially vertical-integrated big factories in northern Italy, and in Prato, local entrepreneurs like Massimo with big factories were also involved in this trend:

> "The Italian story really begins in the early 1970s, when Massimo Menichetti took over a large, integrated mill from his father. At that time, the company's future – indeed that of the whole Italian textile industry – looked bleak. Labour costs were soaring throughout Italy, and foreign competition was intensifying…Innovation and flexibility had become critical to survival." (Johnston and Lawrence, 1991, p. 196)

The internal and external challenges made the threshold of further decentralisation of the Pratese industry, based on increasing labour costs, more entrepreneurial subcontractors but fewer workers, and the rise of competitive textile industry centres in East Asia (Becattini, 2001; Toccafondi, 2009). Although entrepreneurs in Pratese industrial districts survived the economic crisis and enjoyed a short period of economic growth, they still smelled this sense of danger constantly until the 1990s. The sufficient labour supply from domestic migrants did not solve the labour cost issue. Moreover, global production and competition compressed local subcontractor profits, and the younger domestic generation showed no interest in working in or taking over this low-profit and labour-intensive textile industry (Zhao, 2018). During the crisis in the 1980s, 3,550 small firms were shut down, and 1,500 workers were unemployed in the Prato textile industry, together with the increasing international competition (Denison et al., 2009; Ceccagno, 2017). Pratese manufacturers must either lower the cost by outsourcing abroad or upgrade the textile production into one with premium value.

The Pratese have implemented both solutions. Trials to transform from the sole textile industry into garment production included knitwear yarn production for fashion design and new material renovation, Prato Expo Fair for fashion collections, high-end fibre and semi-raw material procession, or, more radically, entering garment production to avoid the problems in the textile industry and extend the downstream production stage for new market creation (Toccafondi, 2009). Low-end ready-to-wear (*prêt-à-porter*) fashion, or fast fashion, was born in this crisis by making use of cheap and leftover textile materials to gain flexibility in both garment production and trade so that Prato survived another economic hit in the 1990s. But, soon again, garment production was trapped in labour shortages due to business

expansion, and the increased labour costs made Italian manufacturers turn to cheaper migrant labourers and precarious subcontractors. The rise of illegal labour and migration seemed ubiquitous in the past decades and forced Italian authorities to release several rounds of visa regularisation (*sanatoria*) to tackle this issue since the 1980s (Scrinzi, 2016; Allievi, 2014). In this way, the Italian government could legitimise the existing undocumented migrant labour for proper production and taxation. These acts aimed to solve the problem of the present but left an institutional loophole for the future. It became an unintentional attraction for more potential undocumented immigrants to gather in Italy, who sought legal status for work and entrepreneurship.

Overall, it revealed the essential problem of insufficient workers available from among the existing local production, and it broke the "rags to riches" dream if the bottleneck of labour issues or industrial upgrading were not solved. The arrival of Chinese migrants in Prato came at the right timing: an established industrial background, promising potential market, urgent labour demand, and viable transnational immigration access. But how did time play a role in Chinese immigration and their entrepreneurial practice, and how to interpret what "correct timing" is?

### 3.3 Earmarking Time, Rhythm, and Modernity

Time is a critical factor in understanding the immigration process and ethnic entrepreneurship. Time is not solely a physical existence but contains social meaning. As Wajcman (2015, p. 2) interprets as "a social entity, formed through collective rhythms of human engagement with the world". The first notion of "social time" was raised by Durkheim to understand time as a collective presentation (Durkheim, 1965[1915], p. 23; Zerubavel, 1976; Hassard, 1990), and the social time is further

developed by Sorokin and Merton to link a cultural qualitative temporal setting with social life (Sorokin and Merton, 1937; Hassard, 1990), while Schutz created a shared group connection and strengthened intersubjectivity instead of pure subjective or objective standard time (Schutz, 1973; Šubrt, 2021; Zerubavel, 1976). The right timing refers not only to objective chronological causality but also to subjective and even intersubjective empowerment for future decisions. Individuals feel the changing society via time, which reflects the very social contexts for immigration and business opportunities. During this interplay, the sociological temporality reflects both social-life-grounded time and time-mould society.

Meanwhile, time reflects changes and the process of civilisation, as Norbert Elias understands the process as the way to create a modern society, and civilisation rewrites the "natural time" effect with various temporal levels (Elias, 1978[1939]; Šubrt, 2021). For instance, the convenience of human mobility and communication demonstrates new speed measurements and enables scaled transnational immigration. In addition to the empowerment of time, individuals create new activities to push the time evolution. Leisure entertainments such as "teatime", "film night", and "shopping season" and development ideas such as "time to invest" or "to start a business" introduce modern lifestyles, compared with natural time, which is task-oriented and shared in the pre-industrialisation period (Wajcman, 2015). In this way, modernisation is associated with acceleration and rhythm becomes the reference embodiment of the speed of modernity, especially when capitalism, an era related to money and "faster means better", showed up (Šubrt, 2021; Wajcman, 2015; Adam, 2003, p. 67). However, unlike the linear narrative to understand modernisation above, Luhmann reasons that modernity is a growth of complexity; being modern or fast does not always mean being good (Luhmann, 1998; Šubrt, 2021). To survive complexity-caused uncertainty, imagined

futures from actors' fictional expectations play an essential role in affecting decision-making and capitalist modernity (Beckert, 2016). Social changes with time-setting combine with not only the past and present but also the future, especially with entrepreneurial behaviours.

### 3.3.1 Temporal Embeddedness in Ethnic Entrepreneurship

In addition to various material and institutional inventions and the acceleration of lifestyles, capitalist development comes along with the expansion of the global market and shapes the cognition of space. When people from different countries are dragged into this global production and trade network, intersubjectivity and standardisation of time are significant to coordinating different time zones and synchronising the social reality (Zerubavel, 1982).

The invention of time zones and standard time derives from the Greenwich Royal Observatory, where the Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) was introduced. In 1884, GMT was officially confirmed as the standard time and the world was divided into 24 time zones. From a broader meaning, distance is embedded in time and expressed and coordinated by using artificial time. In the new era, people from different parts of the world can refer to the time zones and adjust the jet lag for global mobility, in particular, the case of immigration.

The embeddedness is commonly used to explain immigration, especially ethnic entrepreneurship. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) highlight the importance of social capital, its embeddedness in social structure and its corresponding effects on economic actions. Sun and Fong (2022) further mention the role of co-ethnic networks in cultivating entrepreneurship. In this way, the ethnic community creates the accumulated ethnic capital to guide goal-directed social relations and the trends of entrepreneurship (Lin and Zhou, 2005). On the other hand, scholars explored the scope of the

embeddedness context. They investigated different angles beyond the migrant community to understand ethnic entrepreneurship, including the market conditions, institutions and regulations, known as *mixed embeddedness* (Kloosterman et al., 1999). But this still stops the step inside the destination society without noticing the migrants themselves, their sending countries, or the globalised background. Hence, further explanations, such as *simultaneous embeddedness* based on the multi-level matchmaking between sending and receiving countries or *transnational embeddedness* on global networks and synchronised knowledge applications, came into this research field (You and Zhou, 2019; David et al., 2021).

The current research framework focuses on the history and present social contexts while it overlooks the significance of the future. The future is associated with modernity in the context of migration study: either the motivation of immigration or entrepreneurship should consider the estimated future performance and corresponding "investment behaviours" based on temporal consideration. Therefore, I introduce *temporal embeddedness* in my research. Referring to the usage of *differentiated embedding*, Ryan (2018) points out the static presentation of embeddedness and guides the dynamic temporal process. The same dynamic considerations towards the fluctuation of uncertain temporal pace (time affluence or time pressure) also affect the different entrepreneurial practices in the process (Lévesque and Stephan, 2020). Both strengthen the uncertainty without mentioning whether the existence of corresponding outcomes is temporary or permanent. Hence, not only rational thoughts based on the past and present but also expectations based on the future are necessary to build legitimacy against uncertainty, such as for ethnic entrepreneurship (Garud et al., 2014). Temporal embeddedness is, therefore, embeddedness in both current social facts and

future expectations of opportunities and feasibility combination regarding decision-making such as immigration and entrepreneurship.

### 3.3.2 Fast, Fashion and Modernity

Based on temporal embeddedness, fashion is a business based on the expectations of future aesthetics and modernity. As Elizabeth Wilson (2003, p. 14) concludes the relationship between fashion and capitalism: “Fashion speaks capitalism. Capitalism maims, kills, appropriates, and lays waste. It also creates great wealth and beauty, together with a yearning for lives and opportunities that remain just beyond our reach. It manufactures dreams and images as well as things, and fashion is as much a part of the dream world of capitalism as of its economy”. In general, fashion demonstrates individual identity and taste, social class, and Zeitgeist (Veblen, 2017; Wilson, 2003). Fashion also has temporal embeddedness. Especially after WWII, the acceleration of information communication and technologies (ICTs) hit the whole world, an era of “information society” with accelerated social rhythms and non-linear unpredictable sequences approached (Castells, 2000).

Acceleration has become an major feature of modernity and shapes fashion and fashion production (Rocamora, 2013). Hence, the emergence of fast fashion has sharply shortened the time to market with flexible and fast production and delivery (Ceccagno, 2017). Fast fashion breaks the traditional designer-led rules of specific fashion seasons and merges itself with changing customer demands; brands such as Zara and H&M claim themselves as the liberator of mass affordable fashion (Crofton and Dopico, 2007; Sull and Turconi, 2008). Fast fashion here is understood as post-Fordist production with flexibility and creates a lifestyle of immediacy and ephemerality (Rocamora, 2013). Together with well-developed technology, strong manufacturing capacity and a global supply chain, CNBC International (2022) introduces that the fashion industry has

accelerated from “fast fashion” (such as H&M and Zara, within three weeks) to “ultra-fast fashion” (such ASOS within, one week), to current “real-time fashion” (such as Shein, within three days). Fast fashion shows both the democratised affordable fashion item and convenience in modern society, and it also receives critiques about intellectual property appropriation, environmental pollution and labour exploitation (Brewer, 2019; Niinimäki et al., 2020; Chu, 2020). This industry is developing controversially and continues to gain significant profit.

In the speed-chasing game, fast fashion prevents cities such as Prato in the Global North from being bankrupt, regardless of the dark sides. To address the fast fashion in Prato, production here leads to a different way from the big company-led production; instead, it was born from the downstream textile industry with a decentralised production of relatively unknown brand small companies, mainly including cutter-designers (identical to apparel/ fashion companies/ *pronto moda* as end firms, *Caijian Gongsi/* 裁剪公司), stitching workshops (*Zhiyi Gongchang/* 制衣工场) and dyer-washers (*Ranxi Gongsi/* 染洗公司) and thread-makers (*Fengrenxian Gongsi/* 缝纫线公司) (Lan and Zhu, 2014). The Chinese-run fashion production cycle is shortened to one week due to sufficient raw materials, intensive labour hours, quick reaction to the market, and an extensive manufacturing and trade network. Moreover, it introduced synchronised technologies and resources all around the world, especially from China.

In a nutshell, time is embedded as a result (or at least as a temporary result) in the social structure, representing both history, present and future. Ethnic entrepreneurship under temporal embeddedness is interpreted as a positive fictional expectation in the “developed and fast time zones”, and fast fashion production is a “chasing for modernity/ speed” practice to improve the current status of life.

### 3.4 Investing the Future: Migrants' Motivation and Settlement in Prato

When China encouraged the development of the market economy in 1978 and released the emigration policy in 1985, ordinary citizens were permitted to apply for passports and receive granted invitation letters from their relatives abroad (Chang, 2012; Zhao, 2018). Along with globalisation, especially when the Chinese became a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, and former immigrant returnees got rich via global trade, more Chinese began to look overseas. Those who have never been outside China constructed the imaginations of the Western world through narratives from their relatives, from which a promising future persuaded them to move abroad. In this section, I mainly focus on the Chinese migrants' immigration and settlement in Prato and their employment practices.

#### 3.4.1 "Seeding" Phase – Moving Abroad and Acquiring Legal Status

**Migrants' Motive for Immigrating**

Going abroad became a trend in Wenzhou right after economic reform, and there are towns and villages such as Li'ao in Wenzhou famous for immigration. In 2022, I interviewed a migrant returnee and current factory owner in Wenzhou who was in the Netherlands. He mentioned that living abroad was regarded as a fashionable thing in his village, and people at that time unquestioningly worshipped foreign countries and lifestyles (*Chongyangmeiwai/* 崇洋媚外). I conducted another interview in Wenzhou to investigate the motive for immigrating, where the café owner who had stayed before in Rome said:

> "(At that time), almost all the villagers went abroad. If it took turns, it should be my turn to see the outside world. Everyone was abroad. I wanted to widen my horizon no matter whether the outside world was good or bad."
>
> (Danjie, Chinese, Café Owner)

Based on the two interview transcripts, Wenzhounese, as the immigrant group, shows two features: first, due to previous restraint experiences, they prefer to explore opportunities instead of waiting for ones, which can relate to an acquired entrepreneurial mindset; second, the globalisation trend with family and village overseas networks facilitates the likelihood and feasibility of immigration. This is the prologue of the "seeds" seeking a "fertilised land" for growth.

Chinese migrants (mainly first-generation) who came to Italy had limited educational backgrounds. Their first motivation was to improve their socio-economic status instead of human capital, such as vocational training or local language. Compared with extra efforts in learning Italian and preparing for education, they preferred to earn money to pay off their debts and make a fortune. There are two primary Chinese immigration waves during the "Seeding" phase.

**1980s-1990s: The First Chinese Immigration Wave to Italy**

The first Chinese immigration wave that came to Tuscany was for leather and high-end garment work in Florence and Campi Bisenzio between the 1980s and the 1990s. During my interview with Dr Matteo Dutto, a scholar of Cultural study at Monash University Prato campus, he pointed out that Chinese migrants chose to live in Prato due to the cheaper rent prices and relatively friendly social climate. During the stay, they noticed the local fast fashion industry coincidentally. At that time, Prato was suffering from the decline of textile production and labour shortage of the new-born fast fashion. The economic recession and the lobby from local enterprises' labour demand made the Prato authorities hold a relatively friendly attitude to treating migrant labourers and attracting them to settle down.

Migrants from China were poor and desperate at that period, and the motivation for immigration was to survive and improve their quality of life in China. The standard

immigration path was borrowing money from relatives in China and getting a family visa invitation abroad. In addition to family and relative invitations, there were also undocumented immigrants smuggled into Italy during this period if they lacked a legal route. It was a paid single trip, including either visa application or smuggling costs, as well as transportation, solely for the stowaway families needed to collect ¥150,000[13] for the snakehead (gang for smuggling, *Shetou*/ 蛇头) (Qian, 2016). Even if they borrowed the money and owed the debts, these families considered it worth paying. A maximal two-year diligent hard work in Europe could pay off the costs and, after that, earn money for saving and wealth collection. Moreover, a legal residence permit through visa regularisation was a "lucky bonus" for them. When they returned to China with the "overseas Chinese" title (*Huaqiao*/ 华侨) instead of being illegal immigrants, it brought pride and glory to the family, even to the hometown (NetEase Media, 2019). When they were abroad, they usually stayed where they got employed with an ethnic network (to pay off their debts and settle down) and then moved to where the visa regularisation was released and available (to get a legal residence permit). Hence, it was a strategic decision without country preference, somewhat related to the availability of legal residence permits and co-ethnic support. Meanwhile, in 1985, the Schengen Agreement was signed to encourage mobility inside European countries. That trend also led to the existing Chinese migrants in Europe moving freely around for legal status and working opportunities. Italy was still one of the leading destinations due to the working opportunities for the Chinese, which Ceccagno (2003a) describes as "viewing Europe as a chessboard". It implies constant mobility for any possible chance. Still,

[13] From 1978, families in China with an annual income of over ¥10,000 were called *wanyuanhu*/ 万元户 and were regarded as rich families. Therefore, the smuggling cost is relatively large.

migrants usually settle down and stop moving when they find an attractive place, which I interpret as an analogy of "phototropism" during the plant's growth.

Back in the 1970s, domestic migrants from Southern Italy, such as Sicilians, shared a similar story. A Pratese landlord Pietro and his Sicilian wife I spoke with in their flat shared the Italian domestic migration path: to escape poverty in the South, they borrowed money from relatives, came to Prato for a life in the textile industry or as subcontractors, and eventually settled down in Prato. The difference here behind the experiences is that Chinese migrants, as foreigners, need to additionally strive for a legal residence permit and language before any further activation of their entrepreneurial plans.

**2000s-2010s: The Second Chinese Immigration Wave to Italy**

Like watering the land, every visa regularisation brings about a seeding process of migration influx. There are, in total, nine regularisations from the 1980s to 2012 throughout the two immigration waves, which attracted Chinese migrants directly from China and those undocumented all around Europe.[14] In 2002, the regularisation applicants gathered and queued in the Prato temporary office overnight to get the quota. For many locals, the influx of new Chinese incomers was an unexpected and unwelcomed change. According to the report from the Chinese-run newspaper *Nouvelles d'Europe* based in France, "local Pratese were confused about how so many Chinese appeared at once and 'how they were able to gather between 4,000 and 5,000 people in just two hours'" (Xiao and Liu, 2005). The second immigration wave in Prato occurred in the 2000s, a time when the Chinese economy was growing rapidly. Many interviewees in my research did acknowledge improved quality of life in China, and

[14] For Italian authorities, the visa regularisation aimed for the existing undocumented migrants inside Italy. However, they did not expect that undocumented migrants in other EU countries (France, Spain) and back home in China received the message through ethnic network and moved to Italy for the legal status. The applicants for visa regularisation are more than estimated quotas.

many of them had stable and decent work. Still, they wanted to enter the gold rush team and make a fortune in Italy, especially in Prato. Ailan and her husband had a decent life in Wenzhou but still moved to Italy in 2006:

> "(Although) we earned more than the average, I still felt it hard to meet the living costs in Wenzhou. At that time, I was thinking of going abroad and having a try. Because the currency rate was one Euro, it equalled ten Chinese Yuan. My husband has 2/3 family members abroad, and they suggested in this case that if we found it hard to save money and did not want to depend on our parents, moving abroad was a good option."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Wenyue is another entrepreneur in fast fashion and talked about his immigration regardless of his whole family's objection:

> "I was in the construction industry after graduation and started my own business. A very close friend of mine was in Naples and asked me if I wanted to come to Italy and do business together with him. He mentioned the 2002 *sanatoria* and the benefits, and I was tempted. Originally, I did not plan to come here, but my friend said if I were not comfortable here, I could take the resident permit (with overseas Chinese title) and go back home."
>
> (Wenyue, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

When Italy released a new standard currency with other EU countries, and Prato enjoyed a new boom in the Chinese-run fast fashion industry, the messages about currency rate and the wonderland imagination full of ubiquitous opportunities drove migrants to give up their current lives and choose to explore abroad. Compared with the first immigration wave, moving to Italy became an investment option instead of a lifesaver in this period. Moreover, migrants were glad to bring family members, especially spouses and offspring, to Prato for family reunions and business

development after their lives were improved in Prato. The migrant spouses can be a labour force in Prato and potential business partners for family entrepreneurship. The typical path is a housewife going abroad and applying for *sanatoria* as a housekeeper for Italians or a stitcher for Chinese, who brought her husband to Italy later through a family reunion. When the living condition was improved, the couple would have children in Italy. For their offspring before 18 years old back home in China, the younger generation can attain residence permits through family reunions. The second generation of Chinese migrants, therefore, does not have to endure hardship but instead owns a better starting point for social integration and career development.

In conclusion, the motive for immigrating goes beyond economic considerations; it is a mixture of institutional, cultural, social and familial factors based on fictional expectations for the future.

### 3.4.2 "Rooting" Phase – Settling down in Prato and Collecting Experience

**Why Prato as Settlement Destination**

Choosing to stay in Prato is a combination of coincidence and opportunity. Many Chinese immigrants settled down because of the immigration inertia from business opportunities, registered legal status, and family reunions. At the same time, other migrants kept floating around Europe and later exclusively chose Prato.

Migrants from the second wave were more targeted and chose Prato directly as a destination since there is a Chinese community, especially with family or relative support. The newcomers were likely to adapt to the new environment and start to make money. I got confirmation from a Café owner in Prato:

> "It did not feel well if there were no relatives. One stayed alone in a city without any friends or relatives, that was boring…You just ate along and walked back to accommodation alone."

(Aling, Chinese, Café Owner)

Choosing to stay in Prato prevents social isolation and connects with ethnic networks, such as daily care and work opportunities. As a result of the increasing Chinese population in Prato, the ethnic community provided various working opportunities, ranging from manufacturing to service sectors. For Aling, stepping on the sewing machine was exhausting and needed long concentration; meanwhile, cooking coffee and chatting with Italian customers seemed more relaxed in a café. In contrast, Wanshun chose Prato and left Rome because the majority of ethnic employment there was gastronomy, and he had no idea of cooking or washing dishes. Wanshun was first invited by his relatives and planned to study in Belgium, but he failed the entrance exam and went to France for a living. After working in Chinese-run stitching workshops in Paris for two years, he moved to Rome for a working visa via regularisation. From the 1990s, Paris was also famous for the ready-to-wear fashion industry and thus ethnic enclaves (such as Aubervilliers) for Chinese-run workshops before Prato. However, due to the rise of competitive Chinese textile and garment exports, the local migrant-owned workshops had to either shut down or convert into a wholesale business in the following decades (Ma Mung, 2015). Business messages were spread among Chinese migrant networks in Europe, and Prato provided specified immigration sources with an opportunity for textile and garment production. Some Chinese migrants in Paris with garment-making skills, industrial knowledge, and financial resources noticed Prato's potential and moved here to restart their careers (Ma Mung, 2000). Other reasons for Wanshun choosing Prato were because of the friendly environment and the middle- and low-end production positioning:

> "Prato was very friendly to migrants (in the 1990s) …We (Wanshun and his wife) were more suitable for Pratese garment production than Empoli. Because the production in

> Empoli had a very high requirement, such as making a suit. I had never made one before in France. One could roughly make five suits a day with high payment, but when we were in Prato, we could finish 50 easy-to-make garments a day, even a hundred. Large production brought more profit than single high-value ones."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

For Chinese migrants, fostering artisanship took a longer period, while the acceptable skills for fast fashion and fast wealth collection were shortcuts and more realistic ways. The Pratese *pronto moda* facilitated migrants' identity from the local industrial atmosphere and their settlement also as a result of the dense ethnic network, relatively migrant-inclusive climate, and appropriate industrial match.

**Migrants' Entrepreneurial Experience Accumulation**

The most common cases are Chinese newcomers in Prato who worked in ethnic communities because they have limited knowledge of the Italian language, a sense of risk management in the local society on the one hand, and familiar connections and easily accessible opportunities in the Chinese migrant network on the other hand. Moreover, the newcomers had two kinds of obligations: first, toward the family members and relatives in China who borrowed money on their behalf and were indebted to them; and second, toward the existing employers (usually relatives) in Prato, who had sponsored their residence permit applications and relied on their labour for garment production. In return, they were paid and skills for garment production together with industrial operation experience or future partnership if they are trustable.

Chinese migrants from the first wave worked as subcontractors for the local Italian *pronto moda* companies. Along with the production scale, they started to hire other Chinese to work with or for them, firstly family members, then relatives or migrants from the same places, and lastly, any migrants in Prato looking for work (including

non-Chinese). In Prato, Ailan worked in clothing store sales, and her husband initially continued in the same chef role as previously in China but soon gave up:

> "He came here, but the working style was completely different from China, and he could not get used to it. In China, chefs worked several hours with shifts, but here in Prato, he stood the whole 8 hours a day without any breaks. It was too much for him and caused his wrist problem by holding the wok for a long time."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Prato itself had a social rhythm that was embedded and synchronised with standard Italian social time, such as working hours and working culture. However, Chinese migrants in Prato have created a faster tempo cocoon embedded in the ethnic community, which was even faster and more intensive than in China. To chase their future dream, Chinese migrants had to calibrate their rhythm to catch up with the generated tempo. Therefore, Ailan convinced her husband to learn garment stitching and worked as a couple production, which was and is a common production model in the stitching branch. For instance, the husbands make the fabric patterns and wives sew the garments as a working unit. Ailan and her husband both worked in her sister's stitching workshop and gradually became skilled. They caught up with a couple of other workers within several months. She shared her working experience:

> "Soon, I was the fastest in the workshop. We started with any models (jargon for clothes prototypes), and I was always the first one to finish all the work and go upstairs for a shower…Before, I had often stitched clothes with the wrong side and had to rework the wrong ones. It was a waste of time. That was in December, and it was very cold. I had almost two months without a hot shower (since I was the slowest and the hot water was used up in a queue)."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

In terms of time in the Chinese-run garment industry production in Prato, fast speed is a dimension, and long duration is another. High-volume orders, urgent shipment and labour shortages during the high season are the main reasons for overtime. In this case, overtime for garment making was common, especially during the fast fashion boom period. Ailan worked in the stitching workshop in 2007, where she and her husband worked eighteen hours daily.

> "We could not tell days and nights at that time. I had not seen the sun for almost two months. Do you understand that feeling? I woke up at 6 for work, and when I finished, it was at 1 am on the next day…Before I came here, I supposed those previous migrants were working roughly 20 hours, just 3 hours for sleeping. That generation endured more hardship…Now it is more relaxed, a maximum of 13 hours a day. The Italian government does not allow the night shift. The factories must close by 10 pm in the night. No more voices from the sewing machines."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

The current working hours of thirteen hours a day is shorter than previous working hours, but still, fast fashion production is based on the high intensity of manual labour. The harsh working conditions reflect the increasing market demand and promising industry development despite the toll on migrants' health. Hence, staying in Prato and entering the fast fashion industry in Prato is not a reckless or unconsidered choice but a deliberate decision.

**Fast Fashion in Prato: A Temporal Transition between Fast and Slow**

Some Chinese migrants evolved directly from workers or subcontractors to garment factory owners when they thought the time was ready and the future of fast fashion was promising, which led to an economic boom in the 2000s. There are also migrants pondering for a while to enter this production.

Ailan and her husband left Prato in 2012 after six years of garment-making work, and they moved to Sicily to start a retail business. They first paid off the debt for immigration costs and used the rest of their savings to take over a store. During their first entrepreneurial experience in the retailing industry, they acquired skills such as the Italian language (communication with clients), driving licence (purchase and delivery of goods), and a sense of local fashion (product selection and outfit matching). From 2012 to 2022, the store was well run, and Ailan got along well with almost every local Sicilian in that village. The sense of relaxation was not comparable with previous intensive garment work.

> "It was a great time when I ran the store. We opened the store from 8:30 am to 1:30 pm, then 2-3 hours rest. We would go upstairs for lunch and lunch nap. In the afternoon, I could choose to open the store at 3:30, or 4:30 if I was tired on that day."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

The earnings during the ten years became her investment back in the Pratese fast fashion industry. In 2022, Ailan and her husband sold the business in Sicily and came back to Prato. This time, they became partners in an apparel company with Ailan's sister, the previous owner of the stitching workshop.

> "Having a cutting company (apparel company) is the highest achievement of entrepreneurship among Chinese migrants here. I asked my husband if we should join the partnership. He said yes, and we should always struggle upwards…If you have 2-3 big clients on hand, the rest of your life will be rich…It is not a money issue but giving our children a better room for development. If later they get old and take our business over, we are creating a better platform for them. His words made me convinced."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

The huge market potential in Prato promises the possibility of getting rich quickly. Fast fashion in Prato is changing with various opportunities, and compared with stable income from a Sicilian store, a Pratese apparel company is a fast way to get further upward social mobility for migrants.

In contrast, Wenyue decided to come back to Prato and start a garment business after he returned to Wenzhou and compared the social rhythms in the two societies. He waited one year for a residence permit from *sanatoria* in 2003 and worked as *Maisanke* (jargon for street vendor/ 卖散客) during his stay in Prato. Although he obtained entrepreneurial experience, improved his language, and gradually familiarised himself with Italian society, he still flew back to China for a family visit with his earned savings due to his bad experience. He considered starting a new life in his hometown two years later, in 2004. Wenyue fantasised about a developed capitalist society and chose to go abroad but became disappointed while adapting to life in Italy.

> "I was shocked at how European civilisation looked like this, even more backward than China. Cities were dilapidated, and the walls without painting felt like they were falling. I could only describe it as dirty, messy and bad. No social order, cars drove recklessly."
>
> (Wenyue, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

However, he eventually came back to Prato after consideration and brought his family there in 2005. He was unable to re-adapt to the social rhythm at home and thought over the return to Prato for a more extended settlement. Therefore, he invested in his first stitching workshop and later a fast fashion company.

> "I worked two years in Prato, and (when I came back) things were totally different in China. The development was so fast, and I had handed over my construction business to my friends. If I restarted my business in China, it must take a longer while."
>
> (Wenyue, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Fast fashion in Prato, or life in Prato in general, possesses a mediocre transition rhythm between South Italy and China. Experiences from Ailan and Wenyue reflect Prato's fast fashion business as a temporal transition to calibrate their settlement and entrepreneurial paces. For Ailan, this business is fast enough to accumulate significant wealth and achieve a higher goal rather than easy satisfaction. At the same time, for Wenyue, it is a way to do business with safety and familiarity instead of speeding up and catching up with others back home in China. This temporal transition facilitates migrant agencies to adapt to the social rhythm and future entrepreneurial development.

**A Calibrated Time for Coupling: When Wenzhou met Prato**

Chinese migrants calibrated the time to invest in their futures and overcome the jet lags from both physical space mobility and social development levels. To some extent, the similar "from irrelevance to uniqueness" narrative like Prato and the production-market division of labour model give immigrants from Wenzhou a more familiar feeling to adapting to Prato than other destinations. Meanwhile, compared with other migrants from other parts of China, the uniqueness of Wenzhounese matches Prato's entrepreneurial and productive tradition better. Wenzhounese migrants were released from the Chinese economic reform and wanted to collect wealth abroad. At the same time, the labour shortage from the Prato's local industry needed skilled migrants through a macro-level background (Chen, 2011). The calibrated time during the Chinese influx and settlement in Prato as a calibrated "correct timing" caused a structural coupling based on the similar background and the complementary symbiotic relation.

**3.5 Chasing the Speed: Rise of Fast Fashion and Spillover of the Industrial Boom**

Before Chinese migrants entered the fast fashion industry, it was mainly local Italians who ran this business. However, they gradually left this industry when the Chinese

became apparel company owners at an unexpected speed. In 2011, roughly 75% of the registered apparel companies (4388) were Chinese-run firms (Unione Industriale Pratese, 2012). In this section, I explain Chinese-run fast fashion and the following changes in and out of Italian society.

### 3.5.1 "Sprouting" Phase – Running Companies and Forming Industrial Chain

#### Institutional Empowerment as Acceleration

Let us suppose that Chinese migrants seek long-term development and become entrepreneurial. In that case, institutional recognition is essential, and they strive for their legal residence permit to gain one of their first goals. Many of my Chinese interviewees, as migrant entrepreneurs, started their businesses gradually after they got visa regularisation. Furthermore, according to the document *Legislative Decree no.40/2014*, registered migrants can become entrepreneurial and self-employed without converting the type of residency permit (PratoMigranti, 2022b). The flexible policy made entrepreneurship easy to implement and shortened the time for becoming entrepreneurial. Wenyue mentioned that he also became the visa sponsor for the newcomers.

> "I sponsored the part-time working visa for my Chinese employee. He works for me, and for the rest of his time, he can work for others or take subcontracts…Or to start a business."
>
> (Wenyue, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

However, things were not accessible before the document was released. Wanshun held a working visa after *sanatoria* in the 1980s and was not allowed to start a business unless he passed professional entrepreneurial training and changed his visa type. From visa restriction to the encouragement of self-employment, the updating immigration policy has eased and accelerated the self-employment legitimisation process.

In the 1980s, Wanshun and his wife were subcontractors for garment making, although the work, in essence, was self-employed. His accountant, an Italian, recommended and helped him with the training program registration. He had to spend four hours every day for half a year joining the courses, and his wife had to take over all garment-making work and take care of their daughter. Short-term sacrifice was prepared for long-term family entrepreneurship. After he got the graduation certificate, he was able to run a business legally. His wife became a business partner with abundant industrial practice, and his daughter obtained a local education and gradually functioned as the Italian translator for business communication and development. The institutional support from immigration policy and the education system facilitates the social mobility of Chinese migrants, which they can work likely as a family unit to share workload, gather working experience, industrial knowledge, and start-up capital and let their offspring master the Italian language and cultivate a good business sense.

In addition to the legal status and language proficiency, other institutional integrations such as ID cards and driving licenses are also essential for entrepreneurial development, as is confirmed by Wenyue:

> "When I earlier worked in a restaurant, they said that you need three cards if you want to do business in Italy: the residence permit card (for exit- and entry rights), The ID card (for daily service), and the Italian driving license (for business operation and opportunity search). You need to have a residential permit first, then apply for the ID card, and then register for the driving courses with your ID card. Such a routine like this."
>
> (Wenyue, Apparel Company Owner)

In the main, when Chinese migrants collected sizable start-up seed capital from previous challenging and intensive work, the institutional empowerment reduced the

entrepreneurial trial regarding business identity legitimisation, unobstructed mobility, and the flow of information.

**Entrepreneurship Evolved from Subcontractors**

When Chinese migrants came to Prato in the 1990s and noticed the subcontracting production model, they followed and became self-employed subcontractors for Italian fast fashion companies and stitching workshops to fill the labour shortage. Along with their business expansion and estimation of market potential, they first had family members working together with them and later hired other Chinese migrants to work for them in a small workshop or factory.

The development path resembled Italian peasants in Prato half a century ago, whose family established their factory (*padrone*) when they worked as subcontractors and saw the wool industry profits (Fels and Hamilton, 2013). Furthermore, unlike other ethnic groups working in native-run factories or Chinese communities running service sectors in other European cities, the Chinese migrants in Prato inherited previous industrial legacies and replicated the Italian industrial district in the new era (Ceccagno, 2017; Andall, 2007).

Hiring co-ethnic workers in Chinese factories is an outcome of mutual choice. The Chinese employers needed labourers to undertake large-scale orders and maximise production and profits with low labour costs. At the same time, the workers, as newcomers, were more familiar with the Chinese lingual and cultural environment, and they had urgent demands for wealth accumulation and usually visa sponsorship from Chinese employers. Therefore, the co-ethnic production resulted in a shorter production period and regular overtime possible, and the end products were competitive against the products from Italian-run companies. Along with the speed-up production expansion, the stitching and related garment-making skills were also proficient over

time and led to participation in local high-end premium fashion production (Ceccagno, 2017).

Once again, this is a speed-chasing game, and fast fashion production for Chinese migrants still has an overwhelming dominance over both local textile production and the subcontracting for Italian luxury brands because the flexible and modest low-end garment production creates immediate financial fulfilment with less industry know-how and capital investment required. The imagined huge potential in fast fashion, the optimistic estimation of the improved life quality, and aesthetical fashion sense in these rising new markets contributed to a steady Chinese migrants stream entering fast fashion, opening stitching workshops, and eventually planning an apparel company or a direct cut-in investment in these end firms with previous work savings from various industries.

Entrepreneurship in running a stitching workshop is more of a preparation and incubation for the evolution of the production model to the next level as an apparel company owner. However, the production capacity in the stitching workshops, in essence, determines the existence of these fast fashion companies. Migrant entrepreneurs are quite future-oriented and fantasise about a more extensive and more valuable business vision. Among fast fashion-related industrial chains, the front-end fast fashion companies (cutting/ apparel companies) hold the most significant proportion of profit because they influence this niche market fashion trend and determine what to produce and how many to produce. However, many apparel company owners usually obtain experience from previous stitching work or family enterprise influence. For example, a migrant who sewed blouses previously as their main work would possibly open an apparel company selling blouses, similar to the second generation whose parents ran specific categories of garments and would continue the

similar items. There are also migrants (common in younger generations) who went to Italian design schools and cultivated the local fashion taste during professional training. Ailan shared her experience of tracing fashion by constantly following the fashion weeks and slightly adjusting some parts of the new items. Moreover, she adopted the strategy of "retreat as a means of advancement" in this speed game:

> "It is a process of learning, and I shall calm down. In the beginning, I was very anxious to make a profit and wanted to overtake my previous Sicilian store revenue within a year. Later on, I adjusted my mindset and convinced myself to spend two years on trial and error. I should accumulate clients, industrial experience, and a sharp sense of fashion taste. It took time."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

The path to fast-fashion company ownership requires migrant entrepreneurs to be both agile to market reaction and patient to business operation. They also need to deal with temporal calibration and balance the paces of advancement.

**Rise of Chinese-run Fast Fashion (*Pronto Moda*)**

The expression of *pronto moda* has multilevel interpretations: it refers to both a narrow-down cutting company, as mentioned above, and the whole fast fashion industry in general. The term "*pronto moda*" is used in this section to identify the specific Chinese-run fast fashion production in Prato, differentiating it from other fast fashion such as Zara and H&M global massive and outsourced production. The rise of *pronto moda* has temporal embeddedness, according to a comment from a Chinese entrepreneur in Prato:

> "Yes, its market positioning (in low-end fast fashion in Prato) made the exact rhythm of global transformation. It was Zara, and Zara drove the popularity of the fast fashion market and buyer market. Zara's buyer market and global sourcing strategy promoted the sprouting of various fast fashion manufacturing locations, including in Italy. Until

> Prato showed up with its industrial tradition and unique advantages, its development hit the beat with perfect market demand and supply. It led to a rapid industrial clustering and boom."
>
> (Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneurs)

Zhixiong also mentioned market inertia from the previous French fast fashion industrial relocation. When representative manufacturing centres such as Paris converted the local ethnic production to direct import from China, the skilled migrants gathered in Prato and replicated the previous fast fashion business. The remaining Chinese entrepreneurs in France became garment wholesalers. They depended on the nearby products made in Prato if the logistics from China took too long, and some items quickly became old-fashioned.

The Chinese-run *pronto moda* was mainly in stitching workshops at the beginning, gradually took over Italian-run apparel companies, and expanded to an unexpectedly large number. Accordingly, Chinese migrants stepped into the rest part of the fast fashion industrial chain to maintain a quick supply and production chain, from the upstream textile factories and raw material import companies to downstream dyer-washer factories, clothing printing factories, ironing workshops, logistic companies, and fabric waste recycling companies. Ceccagno (2017) noticed that dyeing and finishing firms (apparel companies) played a significant role in fast fashion mode in terms of quick reaction and flexible adjustment to the changeable market demands before fashion products perished. The Chinese entrepreneurs dabbled in operations at different locations in the industry chain, which placed the risks of fast fashion within a manageable range while gaining more control in this speed game. An entrepreneur in Prato, Maige, originally from Fujian, summarised the entire layout of the fast fashion industrial chain:

> "Anything you need for garment production is available in the Chinese-run full industrial chain…So it (*pronto moda*) can be independent and form a complete self-sufficient system on its own…The spring and summer outfits production here is very ok, the technique is very experienced…As for fashion and clothing patterns, we follow (copy) the local Italian design and produce these easy-to-make spring and summer garments. The Chinese alone can have a closed loop for all possible fast fashion production."
>
> (Maige, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

In the sprouting phase, the *pronto moda* development is an outcome of speed chasing and Chinese migrants' conversion from game participants to game changers. The previous industrial legacies are well applied in the new era of *pronto moda*, and it seems to be a renaissance of industrial districts in the earlier decades and a succession of the previous industrial spirit. In contrast, Chinese migrants, especially migrants from Wenzhou, followed similar production methods in Wenzhou, learned from their compatriots in the domestic migration, and adapted quickly to the Pratese industrial atmosphere.

### 3.5.2 "Flourishing" Phase – Clustering Network and Changing Society

#### A Refined Industrial Network Evolution inside *Pronto Moda*

Compared with the "orthodox" fast fashion, defined by prominent global companies such as Zara with a global production chain and standardised sales network, *pronto moda* evolved another pathway. Maige described the difference as "Aircraft carrier and Small fleets assembly" or "Elephant and Ants":

> "They are different species (categories). The world is big, and it is impossible only to have those popular brands like H&M and Zara. There are many people constantly jumping out to challenge market dominance. It is necessary to have such a market (in Prato) as an opportunity for those people to challenge and to try…We (*pronto moda*) are

flexible; it is easier, like a small boat, to turn around. If you give me ten new outfits, I can probably finish the samples in 2 days and see the final effect after dye-washing. You can display them in your store and test the market. If it works, then you can place an order for 500 pieces for sale and test again. If it goes viral, then there will be a 50,000-piece order. That makes the business keep running."

(Maige, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

*Pronto moda* represents the vivid grassroots ambitions of these migrant entrepreneurs and an economic democracy along with the trend of affordable fashion and demand for increased life quality in a broader social class. Inside *pronto moda*, the proportion of entrepreneurship in different production stages is the interplay between the market supply-demand relationship and the entrepreneur's preference. Although apparel companies as finishing firms own the most profit and therefore become the majority choice of Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, these companies require more investment chips and take higher market risks, while stitching workshops maintain the stead production order and are relatively easy to operate, but with intensive labour and thin margin-based on piecework. The creation of market demands such as ironing or button-pinning workshops will allocate the saturated single-area competition into a further niche production. Even though some downstream niche productions with higher access requirements, such as dye-washing and fabric waste recycling, are mainly occupied by locals, some Chinese migrants also managed to acquire operation licenses and hire local professionals.

If migrant entrepreneurs have more capital and connections with local Italian or Chinese entrepreneurs back home, running textile factories as the upstream suppliers for the *pronto moda* and premium production is an excellent way to integrate economically. After Wanshun shut down his stitching workshop and worked for five

years as a fabric import trader with factories in China, he invested in a textile factory and hired local Italians in Prato. Firstly, he got connections in China and collected industrial experience in fabrics. He thought about the market demand in Prato, as the imported fabric colours were likely to be out-of-season for local *pronto moda*. A combination of textile manufacturing in Prato and foreign trade could catch the fashion speed and overcome the bottleneck, which later turned out to be dual insurance of stable fabric supply during the Covid quarantine. Therefore, apart from the low-cost factor, a stable supply chain and flexible production coordination are further reasons why Chinese migrants depended entirely on neither local Italian nor Chinese back-home productions, instead forming a closed and self-sufficient business production ecology inside Prato and, accordingly, an ethnic network in and outside Prato. Migrants are commercially interdependent, and this interdependence extends into their social relations.

**An Enlarging Transnational Business Network**

Prato was not the only location for *pronto moda*; rather, there were several manufacturing and trade centres in Europe, including Paris, Barcelona, and several Italian cities (Ma Mung, 2015; Wladyka and Morén-Alegret, 2015; Chen, 2015). When other cities started with the de-industrialisation in fast fashion, and Prato embraced immigration and industry, it soon gathered Chinese migrants. It provided a new ethnic entrepreneurship path: a non-marginal manufacturing sector in the host society. The Chinese in Prato can operate a stitching workshop or textile factory in the Italian mainstream fashion industry production, whereas traditional Chinese ethnic entrepreneurship focuses on gastronomy or service industries.

During the *pronto moda* boom, the apparel companies functioned as both cutting designers and primary wholesalers (*toupi/* 头批) and attracting Chinese migrant

wholesalers from other European cities (as secondary wholesalers, *ershoupi/* 二手批) to purchase the fashion items and sell in their corresponding wholesale centres for the further wholesalers and retailers. Meanwhile, some apparel company owners made business trips around European Chinese-run wholesale and trade centres to raise market awareness and promote their garments from Prato. The same business behaviours can be traced among Wenzhounese domestic migrants.

Immediately after the economic reform in the 1970s, the Wenzhounese spread around China to seek business and bring production orders back home for family production, many of whom settled down later as domestic migrants and established trade centres (Zhao, 2018; Yang, 2015). These merchants were called "Supply- and Salesclerk" (*gongxiaoyuan/* 供销员), who functioned similarly as *impannatori* (broker) in Prato and their family members or co-villagers back home and became the self-employed subcontractors to take the orders and work in family-run workshops. In *pronto moda*, the owners of apparel companies merged the roles of designer, wholesaler, and broker all together to maximise the operation speed. Therefore, Chinese migrants created a transnational production and wholesale network across Europe.

In my fieldwork, the first group of clients for Chinese manufacturers in Prato included not only local Italian wholesalers but also Chinese migrants in France (see Figure 7). Their peers in Paris enlarged the fashion business network since Chinese migrants there had transformed garment manufacturing into wholesale earlier. One of the largest fast-fashion wholesale centres in Aubervilliers, northern Parisian outskirt, functioned as a more significant trade hub for the whole of France and neighbouring countries such as Spain and Morocco.

The Chinese wholesalers in Spain, together with Spaniards and Moroccan merchants who purchased the items in Spain and sold them in Morocco, called Prato-

produced garments “French goods” since these goods were handled in France. The boom of these wholesale centres promoted further prosperity of *pronto moda*, so some of the Chinese wholesalers noticed Prato and directly came to the primary wholesalers for purchase over time, which brought other non-Chinese wholesalers’ attention and market transactions afterwards.


Figure 7 Aubervilliers, Paris. A Chinese-run fast fashion wholesale store labelled with “Made in Italy”

(Source: Photographed by the author in December 2022)

Maige gave me an example of the East European market.

> “There are many garment stores in East Europe and Russia, along with over a hundred million people. They like European clothes and aspire to the European style of dressing[15] and fashion here. People from East Europe are also glad to try and develop local brands and send us the OEM[16] production orders.”

[15] The interviewee referred to the West European lifestyle (an imagined modernness), although Italy is geographically a Southern European country.
[16] OEM is short for Original Equipment Manufacturing.

(Maige, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Chinese apparel company owners spread clients all over the world despite the direct market competition from China and the emerging real-time fast fashion. *Pronto moda* synchronises the time zones through the global business network, exchanging fashion trends, raw materials import and final garment products export, and social-economic updates (such as a pandemic, war, or energy crisis) from every corner. Still, the main business of *pronto moda* is among European, Middle East, and African (EMEA) regions due to reasonable production cost, short logistic time, and fashion season. As long as the fast speed of fashion item updates remains, this business network keeps vitality and attraction.

### *Pronto Moda* and Local Society Development

*Pronto moda* and Chinese presence have changed Prato's industry and society. The fast fashion industrial chain attracted local involvement and economic recovery. Some Chinese migrants shifted from stitching workers to subcontractors and later to business partners with previous Italian clients, running together with top-tier brands, while other Italian garment companies reacted accordingly based on their production level: moving to Florence for high-end production or making room for Chinese-run business if it focused on low-end products.

Apart from local-run garment companies leaving Prato, other Italian enterprises are still in collaboration with *pronto moda*, distributing from the upstream raw material supply to downstream dye-washer, printing, logistics, waste recycling and further professional services such as accounting and legal consultation. These enterprises profited from the economic flourish and promoted the *pronto moda* further in return. Not only Italian corporates worked in the business ecology, but also local individuals smelled the opportunities and developed the corresponding businesses, such as driving

service, accommodation, and market consultation. Since Chinese migrants in Prato speak mainly Chinese and Italian, some local Italians are working as brokers and translators for clients who are not Chinese or do not speak Italian. They know each apparel company's style and match the target clients, from which they get paid via brokerage on piecework. The *pronto moda* also attracts non-Chinese migrants working in Prato, such as Bangladesh and Pakistani. In many apparel companies I visited, there is a South Asian packer. More South Asian migrants worked in the production chain, such as dye-washing and printing factories, and some of them became entrepreneurs, too.

Meanwhile, some Chinese migrants stepped out of their ethnic community, sent their offspring to local schools, joined the local associations, and celebrated both Italian and Chinese festivals; conversely, they also created various ethnic township associations and religious groups to maintain ethnic solidarity, creating connections with Chinese local government and spared efforts in inviting locals to Chinese ceremonies and daily life.

The expanding speed of *pronto moda* created more nutrition for local society. The real estate markets, for instance, reflect the popularity of the city's development. The shared flat monthly rent during my fieldwork in Prato was €300 for an eight qm² room (see Figure 8), while the same price in Agrigento (Sicily Island) can secure a whole flat of over 180 qm².

In Prato's industrial zone *Macrolotto 1*, which was desolate and dilapidated before the Chinese arrived, the current average annual rent for a commercial building is now €80,000 with a twelve-year contract, ranging from the company locations. Both the Italian landlord and Prato government profited from the business via developing *Macrolotto 1* and *Macrolotto 2*. Prato became one of the wealthiest cities in Tuscany

with sufficient taxation, which, according to my interviewees, can be perceived through the improvement of infrastructure. They joked in the interview if they reported any road was broken in the morning, the municipality would send someone to fix it in the afternoon. Meanwhile, Chinese migrants were influenced by updated information (e.g. fashion trends) flowing around the world, including their hometown in China. Hence, they brought the accelerated atmosphere to Prato, reactivated this dying industry, and took the lead in Prato's development pace.

Figure 8 Prato. The short-term rent partitioned room during author's fieldwork

(Source: Photographed by the author in July 2023)

However, Chinese immigration and their fast fashion production is a way of wild growth in two interpretations: for Chinese migrants themselves and media at home, they are diligent, flexible and willing to endure hardship and dream big, and their business

achievement is pioneering and innovative against restrictions as a victory of the grassroots; for locals and Italian and West media, it is a sense of bewilderment, and Chinese presence is blamed for eroding "Made in Italy" reputation and creating an isolated "parallel district" and ethnic community, inhuman working conditions and commercial delinquencies, and this Chinese "savage capitalist jungle" is wild and without respect for local regulations (China Daily, 2022; Bressan and Tosi Cambini, 2009; BBC, 2001; Xiao, 2011).

**Quasi-replication of Wenzhou Model in Italy: A Mimetic Isomorphism**

*Economist* (2022), titled "Emigrants from a small corner of China are making an outsize mark abroad", describes the Wenzhounese migrants in Europe and their entrepreneurial experiences, including fast fashion in Prato. In this case, Prato is more special due to high matchmaking to industrial preference and firm embeddedness in time. Chinese-run *pronto moda* is interpreted by some of my interviewees as another replication of the Wenzhou Model, as Krause (2018, p. 79) mentions, "spreading Chinese-style commerce across the globe". It resembles the domestic production back in China but also has similarities with Italian industrial districts, in particular Third Italy, regarding the trust-based network, specialised niche production, and export-oriented economy with a sensitive market based on small and middle-sized enterprises (Walcott, 2007). On the one hand, Chinese migrants applied local industrial legacies and followed the previous Italian domestic migrant's production for quick adaptation; on the other hand, the Chinese-run *pronto moda* mixed the *gongxiaoyuan* role (expanding larger markets through ethnic network compared with *impannatori*) and the specialised wholesale market (expanding the sole production to production plus sales) from Wenzhou Model.

Compared with what Ceccagno (2015) summarises as an "emplacement", which emphasises the single connection with the host society, I refer to the term "*mimetic isomorphism*" from DiMaggio and Powell to understand the formation of *pronto moda* and the industrial district of the similar fast fashion companies, as a result of their reaction to the uncertainties and imitation with "worldly knowledge" beyond home and host societies (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Rofel and Yanagisako, 2019). Moreover, it is a co-production with locals since they joined the production chain and interacted with Chinese migrants during the time, ranging from official policies to private commercial behaviours. Fast fashion draws a promising but adventurous and risky picture. Therefore, the time calibration embodies those Chinese migrant entrepreneurs who first followed the path of locals to operate apparel companies, and meanwhile, they updated their business practices and shaped Prato society accordingly. When new challenges came, such as industrial chain coordination, they followed other models with their transnational network, including the Wenzhou Model from China, to synchronise the world time wherever the most advanced and to cope with the problem and eventually evolve into a large business ecology.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the formation of Chinese immigration in Prato and ethnic entrepreneurship, following an analogy of plant growth with temporal embeddedness. Following the two drives of investing in the future and chasing speed, I concluded the four growth phases, seeding, rooting, sprouting and flourishing, to understand migrants' decision-making and their practices. As a result of temporal embeddedness, I shall explain the mechanism and outcomes of time calibration in the final section.

Time calibration is a critical feature in temporal embeddedness and demonstrates the individual's agency to calibrate the social time zones for synchronisation and

coordination (Zerubavel, 1979). The imagined futures make the time calibration meaningful. For Chinese migrants, moving to Prato was a chance to experience a faster time zone and its modernity since China, in particular Wenzhou, was poor and backwards in the 1980s. To chase the wealth collection speed, engaging in the fast fashion industry is a relatively immediate and quick way. Time calibration played an essential role in overcoming the jet lags between China and Italy, between stable-income industries and fast fashion production. Moreover, the calibration is editable in multiple directions once they adapt to the current social rhythm. By employing different types of time calibration, Chinese migrants have been able to adapt to Italian society and create their own time zone.

In conclusion, the wild growth of Chinese immigration and fast fashion production in Prato is a result of temporal embeddedness, in particular, the influence of imagined futures. Chinese migrants calibrated time to experience the future in "the advanced time zone" and gradually overcame the "jet lags". Furthermore, when they adapted to the host society and the fast fashion production, Chinese migrants calibrated time to accelerate and synchronise the sending country's development for wilder growth. The time calibration not only brings the structural coupling between the "seeds" and "soil" but also indicates the evolution path of mimetic isomorphism to understand migrant entrepreneurship in Chinese-run *pronto moda*.

## Chapter 4 Reconstructing Made in Italy: by Chinese or with Chinese

> "As many as 50,000 Chinese live and work in the area, making clothes bearing the prized 'Made in Italy' label which sets them apart from garments produced in China itself, even at the lower end of the fashion business." (Aloisi, 2013)
>
> - News Report from *Reuters*

> "I imagine entrepreneurs, weavers, companies and designers all gathered at a wonderful place. Do you realise that people start talking about the "Italian look" abroad? ... For us who work in fashion, it is a magical moment. Let us all unite."
>
> (Beppe Modenese, "Prime Minister" of Italian fashion)
>
> - Lines from TV Series *Made in Italy* (2019)

### 4.1 Introduction

In Europe, Italy is the second largest manufacturer after Germany and the third largest economy in the Eurozone; among international competition, Italy is the eighth economy and largest exporter (Italian Trade Agency, no date). According to Bertoli and Resciniti (2013, p. 7), "Made in Italy" is specialised in four As, "*Agrolimentare* (food farming), *Abbigliamento-moda* (fashion clothing), *Arredamento-casa* (home furniture), *Automazione meccanica* (mechanical automation)". In the 1990s, a large influx of Chinese migrants poured into this small industrial city, settled down and practised their entrepreneurial dream (see Chapter 3). Along with the vast amount of opportunity and profit in Prato, locals were surprised by the Chinese presence and their business scale (Zhao, 2018). The previous friendly vibe in the local community became suspicious, and the Chinese community, described as a "parallel district", has been blamed for

having rare connections with locals, operating sweatshops, and taking advantage of the "Made in Italy" reputation.

The influx brought about concerns and critiques from local and international society. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the tension between the Chinese and locals was mitigated to some extent with the recognition of their contribution during the economic crisis and praise of the self-discipline that Chinese groups displayed during a quarantine period at the beginning of the Covid outbreak in Tuscany (Blundy, 2017; Roberts, 2020). In April 2023, another controversy occurred when Italian financial police in Prato blocked over one million items of clothing in Chinese-run fast fashion shops due to insufficient traceable production on labels, investigating the qualification of the "Made in Italy" tag (Il Tirreno, 2023). The local attitude towards the production of the ethnic garment industry has thus fluctuated over the past decades, and it is difficult to judge whether the Chinese community has integrated into local Italian society in the process or not.

This chapter uses the "Made in Italy" label as a springboard to explore debates on migrant integration. "Made in Italy" was a marketing tactic embraced by the Italian government over the 20$^{th}$ century to help satisfy a high command for "luxury craftsmanship and entrepreneurial creativity" (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2013, p. 7), which is related to the cultural identity and national pride. Conversely, the factual "Made in Italy by Chinese" has blurred the boundary between "Made in China" and "Made in Italy" (Donadio, 2010), and the Chinese migrants want to express their interpretation and definition after they collected wealth and gained economic power. Papadopoulos (2013, p. xi) raises a rigid, stereotypical and even racist question in the book *International Marketing and the Country-of-Origin Effect*: "To what extent might 'cheap fashion made in Italy by Chinese companies and workers' undermine the

prestige of 'Made in Italy' in traditional high-end markets?". This triggered my doubts about "Made in Italy" being consistently recognised as high-end in the past and whether Chinese entrepreneurs could rewrite the fast fashion production in Prato. Hence, the research question comes: "How do Chinese migrants reconstruct national branding in fast fashion production and identify organisational resources?"

This chapter puts the "Made in Italy" label in a broader socio-cultural context and discovers the socio-cultural identity and social capital behind the label. Starting with a profound understanding of "Made in" labels and comparative production cases in other countries, "Made in Italy" is discussed critically, from its creation to current development, to disenchant the glamour and target the essence of fashion production. It also focuses on the identity reflecting the local attitude toward migrants' behaviour, both the tensions and the efforts to ease the tensions between the two groups. It addresses the positioning of Chinese-run fast fashion production. It also evaluates the contribution and industrial limitations to explore the sustainable trajectory and future opportunities for collaboration and social integration.

## 4.2 Understanding "Made in Italy"

A "Made in" label demonstrates not purely the place of production but more about the social label of defining "who I am" or even "who we are" associated with social capital. Information is delivered with certain stereotypes to intensify both the collective identity of the involved group and social recognition from others, especially in the case of "Made in Italy".

### 4.2.1 "Made in" Labels and Country of Origin Effect

In the 19th century, the British government launched the *Merchandise Marks Act 1887* to regulate imported foreign products, firstly using the expression "trade mark", which is known as "Made in" labels nowadays. It was initiated to prevent counterfeits or low-

quality goods circulating in the UK market, and foreign manufacturers were forced to label their products with "trade description". The "description" must be traceable and requires indications such as place of production, composed material, existing patent, privilege or copyright confirmation (UK Parliament, 1887). It is seen as a strategic exclusion to protect the interests of local manufacturers and customers along with industrialisation, massive production, and global trade. Such strategic exclusion measurement derives from the labelling theory, in which negative stereotypes are generated and remain from self and others due to the deviant label attachment (Bernburg, 2019). Conversely, products from a particular region share a good reputation. In that case, this place-related image makes consumers react to the products and stimulate the purchase decision, known as the "country of origin effect" (Matarazzo, 2013). This consumer psychological approach is widely used to analyse "Made in" studies and functions as a cognitive, affective and normative mechanism to arouse customers' awareness of product quality, emotional value, and personal and social norms (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1989; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999).

Another popular analysis approach started with global value chains, shaping a hierarchical and institutional stratification of production networks, industrial upgrading paths, tacit knowledge communications and entrepreneurial practices across the Global North and Global South (Gereffi, 1999; McCaffrey, 2013; Doeringer and Crean, 2006; Sarpong et al., 2024). However, fatalistic overtones arguably overemphasise the place of origin and solidify the mobility of upgrade and progress. These theoretical thoughts above ignored the development of either stereotype or image with a static perspective, and the label is more likely defined or given by others regardless of the agency from the corresponding countries and their manufacturers. The "Made-in" label ranges from

the basic qualification for quality guarantee and trust creation to a higher level of affection to premium branding value to certain production.

From entrepreneurial subjectivity, the creation of excellent products and collective efforts leads to a sense of achievement and corresponding accumulated social norms among the local society and its social members. It implies that human agency can actively socialise oneself to shape identity, especially in historical intergeneration relations. This identity formation is associated with social capital based on accumulated social relations over time. As Aronczyk (2013, p. 61) notes: "By imagining the nation as a bounded territorial space, the work of transnational actors would not be seen as an inherent part of national activity but simply as a means to "facilitate" the nation's drive toward competitiveness." Such commercial nationalism seems challenging for migrant entrepreneurs when they arrive as outsiders in the new society and are more likely to discover business opportunities from their own "country of origin" advantages instead of being recognised by locals and adapting the existing "Made in" labels (Van Gelderen, 2007; Morgan et al., 2021). Migrant entrepreneurs are initially neither part of the indigenous social network nor sharing the social capital with locals since they, as strangers, are not the "owner of the soil" and "intrude into a group which the economic position is actually occupied" (Simmel, 1950, p. 403). As a result, they need to rely on their own social relations and cultivate collective identity through internal coupling for group solidarity and further foster enterprise creation with this solidarity (Granovetter, 2000; Chung et al., 2020). Hertog (2022) argues that the insider-outsider divisions caused a segmented market economy with ossified power and barriers to resource acquisition: unlike the Italian locals, who can take the social capital and "Made in Italy" identity for granted, migrant entrepreneurs had limited access to these resources and hardly form the same social identity to share the same pride from the beginning.

Hence, “Made in” labels can be seen as social capital intertwined with both the commercial value in the trade network and social capital here, as the sociocultural collective identity here plays a role in local socioeconomic recovery (Putnam, 1996; Lin, 2001; Antonietti and Boschma, 2020). From the analysis above, social capital behind “Made-in” labels displays two parallel sources of identity formation: either as “insiders” getting integrated and applying the existing identity or as “outsiders” building a community and creating a new one.

### 4.2.2 Comparison between Worldwide “Made in” Patterns

Alongside the example of “Made in Italy” labelling, there are comparable cases from across the world that also adopt this national brand strategy. In the next section, I explore various examples that help to illustrate differences and similarities between national strategies, enabling me to identify common patterns from across different countries. Furthermore, from these “Made-in” patterns, I analysed the stratified global value chain and the possibility of industrial upgrading.

#### Flipped Label – Developed Country Patterns

“Made in Germany” and “Made in Japan” are seen as high-quality and well-designed labels, while in the past, both started to copy and produce cheap items, as the negative side of the labels was flipped. German products were stigmatised by the British government and forced to have the “Made in Germany” label tagged as a result of fake counterfeit and poor quality (Lutteroth, 2012). However, “Made in Germany” products, especially automobiles, machine equipment, electronics and chemicals, have become “a perception which is characterised by notions of reliability, precision and punctuality” (Head, 1988, p. 239). When this perception spreads further from the products to the German nation, a national identity based on trust and high quality is reconstructed, which played a significant role in the economic boom after WWII. A similar story

happened in Japan during the post-war recovery, when American consumers thought Japanese products were low-quality with cheap prices firstly. Yoshimi (1999) points out that Japanese self-confidence in technological advancement has been strongly associated with the national identity regardless of copying behaviours. The artisanship or *Monozukuri* (thing-making/ものづくり) spirit and technical innovation, such as electronic products and robots, are highlighted to confirm Japaneseness and "Made in Japan" (Kovacic, 2018; Zhang and Su, 2009). "Flipped" means both productions with a successful transition to the high-value industry from a disadvantaged position, and the production-related labels are firstly defined by others, and they received recognition after the German and Japanese industrial efforts.

**Flipping Label – Developing Country Patterns**

In contrast, "flipping" shows the dynamics of the industrial transition, usually with top-down national strategies. Along with global production, "Made in China 2025" and "Make in India" are being heard and discussed widely. The two models are striving to flip their national labels over and redefine production, with the advantage of the demographic dividend. China has been famous for the name "world factory" since its economic reform and policy of opening up. The development of "Made in China" is based on massive production on a large scale while associated with low cost, low quality, and even counterfeit products to some extent. Therefore, China initiated "Made in China 2025", a strategic 10-year national plan raised in 2015, aiming at industrial progress, mastering cutting-edge manufacturing power and pioneering new economic opportunities such as E-commerce, new energy, and infrastructure construction (Li, 2018). Chinese strategy reflects considerations about the next industrial transformation before the demographic bonus ends; in contrast, the Indian government needs to reckon firstly the poor infrastructure, lagging human capital, bureaucratic regulation and

insufficient financial support (Rajan, 2015). The Modi Government in India, therefore, launched "Make in India" in 2014 to encourage foreign investment and promote the local economy. With the present and active tense of the expression "Make" instead of "Made", this initiative shows the Indian government's ambition to build a reputation internationally, which they failed to do with "Made in India" products in the past decades (Srivastava, 2019). The sector selection overlaps with "Made in China 2025", such as infrastructure, manufacturing and information and communication technologies (Goswami and Daultani, 2022). Different from the flipped label pattern as either Germany or Japan, the Chinese and Indian governments prefer a proactive action to challenge, reconstruct and redefine the national production label, showing the world the attitude to shuffle international production.

### 4.2.3 "Made in Italy" and Fashion Production

Italian production, at first sight, resembles the flipped pattern, representing the refinement of artisanship from small- and medium-sized family enterprises. "Italian competitiveness is based not on the mere cost-efficiency and high volumes, but rather on style elements and on technological innovation" (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2013, p. 7). This geography-based indication creates cultural distinction and association with a certain level of quality, such as the Darjeeling or Champagne with the "*terroir* effect" (Besky, 2013).

Moreover, Italy and "Made in Italy" labels impress an aura of high fashion and style among global consumers. In the rhetoric of marketing experts and entrepreneurs, "Made in Italy" has a longstanding cultural and artistic tradition and inherits Renaissance taste and the aesthetical sense, known as the "Renaissance effect". In contrast, this effect merely facilitates Italian fashion as a convincible marketing tool to get international cultural recognition and legitimise itself as a Renaissance craftsmanship heir for the

global market (Belfanti, 2015; Pinchera and Rinallo, 2017). Nonetheless, Americans are glad to buy this message; for them, “Italian clothing, accessories, and food are perceived as part of desired, refined, and sophisticated lifestyle” (Paulicelli, 2014, p. 156). The same opinion is expressed by Gundle (2002, p. 113): “Italy had long possessed glamour. It presented an enticing image that incorporated beauty, sexuality, theatricality, wealth (as heritage) and leisure”. As the most potent consumers of luxurious goods after WWII, Americans took Italy as their perfect consumption image when Italian films such as *La Dolce Vita* (*The Sweet Life*) hit the cinema in the US, and the lifestyle and the dress became imitation objects. Moreover, films with these aspirations, such as *Roman Holiday*, have been constantly produced in Hollywood. Through its global influence, the glamour effect of Italian fashion has been promoted and spread all around the world.

Somewhat ironically, however, “Made in Italy” was officially launched in the 1970s as a national slogan at the very time when fashion industry accelerated, meeting a global market demand for the *prêt-à-porter* (ready-to-wear) fashion which became a core of “Made in Italy” (Paulicelli, 2014). Before that period, Italy had recovered from WWII and worked as a subcontractor for some high-end French brands with its extraordinary craftsmanship. Earlier in the 1930s and 1940s, Italy stayed in the era of lack of innovation, just copying Parisian designs for local customers in spite of good artisans and materials (Gundle, 2002). “Made in Italy romanticises small craft-based firms competing against the odds on the unforgiving field of hardscrabble capitalism” (Ross, 2004, p. 212). Along with the trajectory of the “Made in Italy” label, it evolved from craftsmanship to imitating French designs, then to self-design of ready-to-wear fashion.

Meanwhile, Italian cultural glamour is accepted by American customers and entertainment production and marketized to the rest of the world. Furthermore, fashion

implies Italian cultural memory and collective sentiment, which can be created and merged in the media campaign of "Made in Italy", whose artisanal tradition becomes a shared identity among Italian nationals (McRobbie et al., 2023). The same opinion is shared by an Italian scholar with expertise in design during an interview with me, who works currently at a university in Wenzhou, China:

> "I think Made in Italy was and is an instantly recognisable brand that was born out of the necessity of rebuilding a country and an entire economy (after the war). It is something I am proud of because it is the result of work that my ancestors did and also the result of work that my colleagues and I are doing, and somehow, I keep working."
>
> (Maurizio Vrenna, Italian, Lecturer of Industrial Design)

In this way, Made in Italy shows an accumulation of social capital through efforts over the generations. It serves a collective trust and a sense of belonging in the Italian nation. This national pride or sense of belonging shapes an identity as ethnocentrism; residents inside the country, therefore, like other international customers, accept the additional premium price (El Banna et al., 2018; Cappelli et al., 2019). However, it remains a question whether the identity is formed by internal recognition through local manufacturers or external feedback from the international market. The current right-wing Italian Meloni government renamed *Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico* (Ministry of Economic Development) as *Ministero delle Imprese e del Made in Italy* (Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy) in November 2022, aiming at protecting Made in Italy products domestically and internationally (see Figure 9). A researcher interviewee pointed out the word game:

> "It is exactly this one: 'Made in Italy' is the only English expression you find in the titles of the ministry in Italy. It is quite paradoxical and ironic…We are defending; it is our

identity through this kind of definition in the name of the ministry, that is, in the English language."

(Fabio Bracci, Italian, Researcher of Immigration)

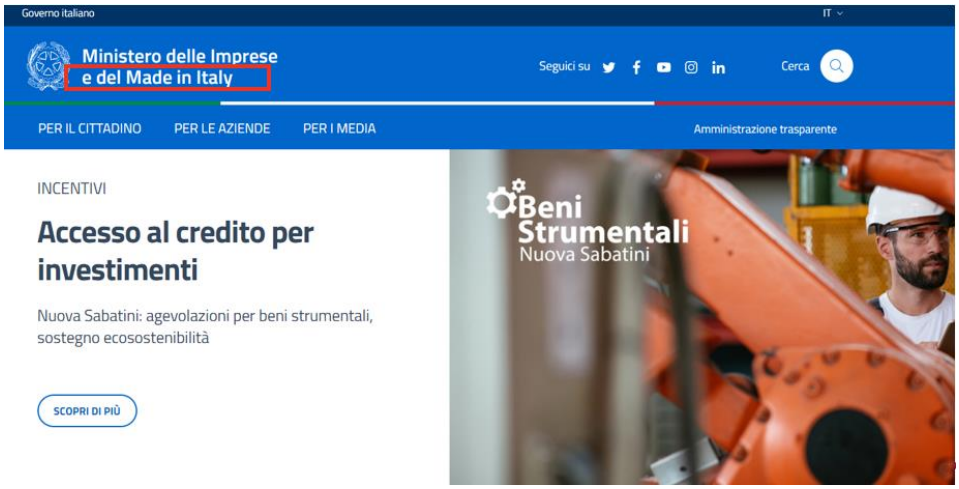


Figure 9 Official website of *Ministero delle Imprese e del Made in Italy*

(Source: Screenshot from government website and edited by the author)

This paradoxical expression leads to an compelling and somewhat ironic implication: if the identity is highlighted via national pride among Italians, the Italian government could easily use the expression "*Fatto in Italia*" in the Italian language and minimise the influence from external judgment; if the government chooses to embrace globalisation and depend on the international market recognition with English expression, then there is no need to be xenophobic, especially concerning the Chinese-run made-in-Italy business.

Italian authorities positioned Milan as the height of high-end fashion. The dedication of Beppe Modenese helped to drive this, Modenese, praised by publisher John B. Fairchild in *Women's Wear Daily* (*WWD*) as the "prime minister of fashion", worked to allocate resources together in the National Chamber for Italian Fashion and pushed Made in Italy to a world level. In contrast, Prato is relatively deficient in such

kinds of opportunities, even though products made in Prato also count as Made in Italy. Another scholar compared two different productions of Made in Italy:

> "We think Made in Italy is like high-end fashion and luxurious products, but this narrative was never just that because not everyone can buy GUCCI. We do not dress like that…Not everyone was producing textiles for GUCCI for Valentino. Most factories were doing small production, recycling garments, then they went out to workers, to the middle class, to the lower class. It was not like Milan. It was a different type of production...Historically, it (Prato) was always with recycled garments for the working class, for the masses. It was not Milan fashion or high-quality leather in Florence."
>
> (Matteo Dutto, Italian, Researcher of Cultural Studies)

Prato was famous for low-end woollen textile recycling and production. Now, the recycling tradition is interpreted as sustainable fashion; the city alone contributes 15% of recycled material worldwide (Basham, 2020), which adds extra value and glamour to the Made in Italy label. It shows the ambition of the production mode in Prato to catch up with the Milan-style Made in Italy narrative and shorten the gap of bipolarity. Italian high-end and luxurious brands in textiles and garments just experienced industrial decentralisation and outsourcing to control the cost. Eventually, they kept the advantaged position when Italy lost competitiveness after the expiration of the *Multi Fibre Agreement*, [17] suffering from the economic crisis in the last decades. Unfortunately, the small-sized family workshops in Tuscany, in particular Prato, had to simultaneously close down along with the collapse of this well-known Third Italy production model (Ceccagno, 2012; Micelli and Sacchetti, 2014). Since Italy joined the European Union, any decision-making has become a result of negotiation and

[17] Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA) is an international agreement on global trade in textiles and garments, which regulates the quotas of import and export and expired in 2005 January.

coordination to balance the overall interest, including the origin of goods regulation. According to *European Regulation No.952/2013 Art. 60*,[18] as long as the last essential procedure is in Italy, the local manufacturers can outsource the majority of fashion production in developing countries with cheap labour and ship the goods in Italy for the final part and label Made in Italy (European Union, 2013). More conveniently, they either recruited migrants or subcontracted the orders to migrants and domestic precarious labourers (usually housewives) inside Italy, known as the "outsourcing at home" effect (Ceccagno, 2003b) or Italian manufacturers affordably focused on fashion production, along with this trend are their followers from both Chinese subcontractors and Chinese-run fast fashion in Prato.

**4.3 Positioning the Chinese-run fast fashion in Prato**

Since Italy joined the European Union and China became a member of WTO, global production has promoted closer interaction between the two sides. The "Made in Italy" designation does not guarantee that a product is necessarily made by Italians, as the production process often involves various international components. Unlike the ready-to-wear Milan fashion production, Prato gradually became the centre of mass production and affordable fashion for the middle- and low-end market. Local Italians tried to operate fast fashion companies, linking with the strong upstream textile industry, and subcontracting the garment orders to migrant labourers. As the description of Prato textile museum shows:

> "The development of Prato textile manufacture is the answer to the need of employment. It attracts many textile workers, starting with the transfer from the Tuscan countryside,

[18] Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code (recast)

and the south of Italy in 1950s, and concluding more recently with the migration of thousands of Chinese people" (Museo di Tessuto, no date).

### 4.3.1 Made in Italy by Chinese

With the expansion of the global market, there are two approaches to Made in Italy fashion production with Chinese involvement in Prato:

1) Chinese workers or subcontractors in Italy, taking orders from Italian companies (including non-Italian foreign brands) and finishing the whole production in Italy, such as Champion and previous Italian-run fast fashion companies;[19]

2) Independent Chinese-run fashion companies (cutting companies) in Italy, especially in Prato, cut the models from fabric and outsource the garment production in Chinese stitching workshops along with other production within the Chinese community.[20]

The interpretation of Made in Italy with Chinese involvement demonstrates multiple ways: from the view of markets and end customers, it can refer to the existing reputational Italian brands or any elements with Italianicity such as the production made by Italian people with the Italian material and artisanship; conversely, from manufacturers' perspective, it can be purely the description of the production location and the fulfilment of the legal regulation. According to *Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2446 ANNEX 22-01, Chapters 61 and 62* regulate that Made in Italy indicates either a complete apparel-making process, such as sewing in Italy, or production from the yarn if the previous case does not apply (European Union, 2015). It facilitated Chinese migrants to enter the garment industry and legitimised their

[19] An interviewee Maige, current apparel company owner. He worked in Chinese workshops in Verona and sewed clothes for the American sportswear brand Champion for Italian clients; it was also common in Prato for Chinese workshops to take orders from Italian clients in Tuscany before Chinese-run fashion companies entered the market.

[20] An interviewee Wenyue drove me through Prato and introduced different Chinese-run factories in the whole industry chain

products. Regardless of the enterprise ownership, the raw materials, the final products, the place of production, or the relevant labourers, there is hardly a pure Made in Italy label in the globalisation context. Both the customers and the manufacturers, including Chinese entrepreneurs in Prato, tend to choose the part that suits their definition of Made in Italy and strategically ignore the part that is not in their favour.

Made in Italy has always been a blurred concept, especially under transnational interactions. Taking the example of ownership as a Made in Italy criterium, German and Austrian entrepreneurs Kossler, Mayer, and Klinger established the first large textile factory, *Il Fabbricone,* in 1889 in Prato and created circa a thousand jobs for local Italians. Such things happened not in the past but also continue in the present. The French giant luxury group LVMH acquires Italian brands such as LORO PIANA, FENDI and EMILIO PUCCI to maximise its interest. The Chinese-run garment industry, including both garment factories and fashion companies, is another case of this interaction, reflecting the rise of fast fashion in Italy and international involvement. Reinach (2005) summarises three layers of modern fashion: *haute couture* representing luxury with class taste, ready-to-wear guiding the modern lifestyle and fast fashion fulfilling the flexible demand of a "temporary' identity". She comments that fast fashion has three key features: imitation (from the other two), speed (within one week from workshop to store), and trend (following the latest fashion weeks). Although there are around 4,000 fashion companies in Prato, Chinese migrants did not invent fast fashion production; rather, they learned from Italians, took over the market, and expanded the industry to an unexpected size. Different from Florence and Empoli, which are famous for high-end leather and garment production in Tuscany, Prato is a city famous for textile production, in particular recycled materials. In the 1990s, the Chinese came to Prato coincidently and found the market demand for local fast fashion companies. They

started to take orders from Italian clients to fill the local labour shortage. For Pratese manufacturers, Chinese migrants are precarious workers, just like previous housewife subcontractors and domestic migrants from the South. In contrast, for Chinese migrants themselves, it is the first step to being independent entrepreneurs and working with and hiring other Chinese peers. In this context, the subcontractors have double meanings, being both employees and employers. Wanshun introduced the industrial development in Prato in the 1990s:

> "When the Chinese came to Prato and worked as subcontractors for Italian companies, that was the golden time. Both were happy because the Chinese could earn higher wages, and the Italians could enlarge their business scale…There were in total 30 (Italian) cutting companies in the telephone book; I remember it very well…Stitching clothes is demanding because it is hard work, labour-intensive, and exhausting. Long-time sitting causes the backache. Locals did not like the job, so Chinese took it over."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

With the support of the ethnic community, Chinese migrants followed their Italian clients and became fast fashion company owners, defeating the Italian competitors and taking over the whole market. They rented the suburb's dilapidated warehouses from local landlords, turning them into thousands of brand-new fashion company showrooms. In the interview with Maige, he concluded the phenomenon:

> "In fact, the Italians wanted to save money and let the Chinese work for them, but they gave up the whole cake (fast fashion business). It turned out that the Chinese unexpectedly managed the production and market in the end."
>
> (Maige, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Along with the fast fashion industry development, Chinese migrants created opportunities in Prato and gave this city a second life from the economic recession. This

narrative has been popular among Chinese migrant communities. In fact, it contains both demographical and commercial contributions: Prato was subordinate to Florence in history and has been striving for its independence and autonomy. The influx of the Chinese population guarantees the administrative position of being a province (*Provincia*) and enjoying more considerable freedom with a socioeconomic foundation. Meanwhile, Chinese production pushes Prato into an international garment wholesale centre instead of solely dependent on the existing textile industry. Chinese migrants prevent the city from being marginalised and formulate their identity as new citizens in Prato. This shared identity among Chinese migrants stems from the social capital of mutual support within ethnic communities. They share the quality of being diligent and hardworking, standing on their own feet and seizing every minute to be work devotion. With the ethnic trust of trade on credit and backup of the whole completed production chain from fabrics to logistics, the fast fashion industry scale, as a result, is able to bulk in a short period. However, some entrepreneurs demand that evaluation should be objectively addressed. Wanshun had access to local statistical data from his association and evaluated the Chinese presence:

> "Chinese do contribute but do not exaggerate the contribution. It is not 100%. Chinese enterprises only make 25% of the whole GDP increase; the rest is from local Italian ones…With this proportion, it does not mean Prato relies on Chinese, but the Chinese part promotes the whole city's economic growth, which is extraordinary as a driving force."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

Made in Italy by Chinese indicates the whole industry development, an extension of the industry chain from textile to garment production. It can be seen as a flipping made-in label embedded in the flipped made-in label since the combination of two

patterns overlapped, and the transnational interactions are embedded in fashion production in Prato. As new residents in Prato, Chinese migrants want to get respect and recognition for both themselves and their efforts. In reality, Made in Italy by Chinese is often covered with negative images such as low-end, exploitation, and disqualification as Made in Italy, and their presence and efforts are usually ignored, even denied, despite being a part of the production. Instead, Chinese migrants are accused of denying the local's effort to cultivate the Made in Italy brand as a result of cheap fast fashion production and the unlikelihood of industrial transition. This mutual refute of each other's endeavours is the essential destruction of both kinds of social capital.

### 4.3.2 Confronting "Parallel District" Rhetoric

Since the fire incident in a Chinese factory in 2013 with seven deaths, news reports and academic papers have frequently and widely used the term "*distrito paralelo*" (parallel district), coined by Pieraccini, to intensify the tense atmosphere without actually questioning its essence. Pieraccini (2008) intends to express the fear and resentment of Chinese migrants in Prato. Hence, responsibility for unfavourable local economic development is shifted to the Chinese as a perfect scapegoat (Bracci, 2015). When the Chinese had limited capacity to speak for themselves and started to refuse media and local contact to avoid future risks, this "parallel district" impression again intensified, and locals deepened the mistrust. In contrast, decades ago, locals were quite friendly to the Chinese. Wanshun shared his first impression of locals when he came to Prato:

> "I felt that when we Chinese came to Prato around the 1980s, Pratese realised Chinese could make clothes, and the local garment factories were suffering from a labour shortage. So, they were very nice to us and attracted us to work for them. These local enterprises told the Pratese government to absorb Chinese migrants due to their good craft, who can

be useful in their factories…Earlier, the policemen who wanted to check our IDs would salute first and then ask for the document, not like now, now they are rude."

(Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

The attitude change started from the industry development when locals realised the Chinese gradually took over the garment industry and led a good life. At the same time, Pratese local textile factories lost in global competition and went bankrupt, and they became unemployed. From the perspective of the industry chain, the boom of fast fashion and the decline of textile production are two parallel timelines: Chinese presence in Prato did not cause the crisis but instead developed the downstream niche industry and took over control of local loom plants. Chinese migrants rented the suburban abandoned factories and renovated them into fashion companies. Speaking of parallel district of the ethnic community, Chinese migrants did not entirely cut off the connections with local society during their business and daily activities. Rather, limited language skills and occupied working hours restrained Chinese migrants from exploring and communicating with local society. Voluntary exploitation and poor working conditions are regarded as short-term investments in hardship endurance and future entrepreneurial preparation. Moreover, overtime is inevitable during high seasons due to fast fashion production features. Yang (2021) points to a mindset of cultural essentialism behind these phenomena since Italians over-emphasize their cultural taste, global cultural influence and Italian lifestyle of enjoying life, and they feel unhappy when Chinese migrants come here only for work and show no interest in the local marvellous cultural legacy, especially the value behind Made in Italy. Lastly, when it comes to the delinquency of Chinese incomers, many migrant entrepreneurs mentioned it as a survival strategy learned from other local Italian companies. For instance, Haojie expressed his view when we talked about improper business practices:

"Actually, we Chinese, most of us who are able to survive here, afford a house in Wenzhou (back in China) with a decent life, have earned money from the grey zone; otherwise, it is tough to solely depend on saving money…Italy has the highest taxation in Europe with 67% corporate income tax; you know, 2/3 of the revenue does not come to the enterprise. That is why Chinese, actually not just Chinese, but local Italians do (the tax evasion) …A Chinese who does not even speak Italian well nor deal with the Italian receipt, who tells Chinese these loopholes? Of course, Italians do. Because some Italians make money in this way."

(Haojie, Chinese, Fabric Recycler)

Apart from the isomorphic patterns mentioned above, there are different interpretations towards business interactions. A part of fast fashion production in Prato is the selection of raw textile materials. Prato itself produces the fabrics, but Chinese entrepreneurs in Prato import the fabrics from China. Claudia works for textile design and exhibitions at the Prato textile museum, and she assumed it is caused by price:

"Our textiles are too expensive, so they cannot use them and have to import them from China. They cost less even if they (Chinese) import them because it is less quality textile; we cannot do less quality because we do not sell it anymore."

(Claudia, Italian, Museum Curator)

Claudia points to a viable reality behind the lowered Chinese prices, but Chinese entrepreneurs who I spoke with also offered further considerations beyond the price:

"There were mainly small enterprises at that time; how could they financialise such a big amount for fabric purchase locally? It was impossible. Only the entrepreneurs in China had the vision and courage to gamble the market potential here and export the fabrics to Prato. They gave an opportunity to the market here…It is like a credit system to boost the market at a rocket speed."

(Maige, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

As a result, the large market and industrial cluster creates various opportunities in both direct and indirect ways. Some locals gradually accepted fast fashion, and they profited from the business ecology chain. Starting with direct benefits, Italian involvement in Chinese-run businesses ranges from cooperation between enterprises to individual employment. In particular, the previous owners of Italian fast fashion companies became landlords for Chinese entrepreneurs. Apart from Italian employees in Chinese companies, locals work as independent market intermediates and translators for Chinese fashion companies. Conversely, the Chinese presence brings taxes, daily consumption, and business expenditure, which, for instance, keeps the residential and industrial land prices booming in Prato. Furthermore, they show a willingness to settle down and make their children integrate into local society. Indirectly, clients from all around the world come to Prato to trade business and promote local catering, accommodation, and tourism. Moreover, the Chinese community replicated the lifestyle in China to Prato, which facilitates Chinese life quality and gives local Italian a chance to experience "exotic" Chinese experiences (such as dining) closer to home. The Chinese community might seem, in sum, to develop in parallel, but it intersects with the local community in many ways.

Despite the biased and stigmatising media coverage as well as public opinion, especially right after the fire incident in 2013, the Prato government has tried to embrace the Chinese presence as an opportunity instead of a threat and dedicated itself to assisting the progressive legalisation of Chinese enterprises, together with socio-cultural integration. This has helped some residents to re-accept incomers more readily. Putting aside ethnicity, Chinese migrants in Prato are seen by some locals as essentially another wave after the domestic migrants from Tuscan suburbs and Southern Italy.

Riccardo is Pratese and works with Chinese clients. He mentioned his personal experience as a comparison:

> "I remember my father went to the office on Saturdays; it was normal on Saturday afternoons to work. Maybe in other parts of Italy, it was not normal or usual. But here (Prato) was usual. So Chinese, in this sense, they are very close to us."
>
> (Riccardo, Italian, Accounting Firm Owner)

Acceptance and tolerance from local society are the cornerstones of long-term mutual trust and the construction of collective social capital. The Chinese-run fast fashion business has been important for local economic recovery over time (Ceccagno, 2007a). It provides the possibility for Chinese migrants to join the discussion of what Made in Italy is in reality.

**4.4 Firefighters: Who Seek Solutions for Social Cohesion**

In 2013, the reconstruction of a collective social capital in Prato needed efforts from both sides after the severe fire incident happened in a Chinese garment workshop. On 1st December 2023, Prato municipality initiated a "Safe Work-Analysis and Perspectives" conference to remember the 10th anniversary of the Teresa Moda company fire and discuss safety at work. As long as the Chinese presence is not taken as a "biological invader" which may cause "local species" extinction, there is a chance to help Chinese migrants integrate into local society, solve the problems, and make use of this trend. The big picture starts with individual interactions. In my fieldwork, many entrepreneurs mentioned that their business progress could not be achieved without Italian help, ranging from everyday life to professional business development. Along with the goodwill comes a long-term close relationship. In return, Riccardo mentioned the same story:

> "I have to tell you that if you finally get to know someone, this friendship will last for many years, and that is a very good quality of Chinese people that I appreciate a lot. Maybe we do have the same in a certain kind in the Italian (mentality). We spend time getting friends, but whenever you get real friends, you want to maintain the friendship for a long time."
>
> (Riccardo, Italian, Accounting Firm Owner)

However, such kind of one-on-one endeavours among individual migrants and locals seem to have had little effect in improving the overall hostile and tense social climate. Just as to extinguish the "fire", individual "drops" are not sufficient, and rather, a "timely rain" is in urgent need. Necessary roles are functioning as firefighters and seeking solutions for social cohesion. In the aftermath of the 2013 fire incident and follow-up measurements as a key case study, there are both Italian and Chinese standing out for the collective well-being. Two case studies will be introduced to understand how the correspondent solutions are raised and how they help the Chinese community.

**4.4.1 Case of Italian Noblemen: Making Chinese Understand in a Chinese Way**

In Chinese culture, the notion of "meeting noblemen" (*Yuguiren*/ 遇贵人) is a matter of luck, which people should value, especially when they are away from home, with special sociocultural meanings. The noblemen often refer to valuable weak ties who do not belong to one's regular network but are connected through coincidental occasions. The noblemen's assistance enables a shortcut to problem-solving, sharp improvement and acceptance from higher class networks. In my interviews, many Chinese mentioned that they had Italian noblemen assisting (*Guiren Xiangzhu*/ 贵人相助) their career from the beginning and in emergencies such as the 2013 fire. To prevent fire incidents and enhance awareness, the Prato provincial government issued *Document No. 4258 of*

*17/12/2014,* "*Outreach of Enterprise Regularisation and Legal Education Initiatives*", and found a cross-cultural ambassador, Paula, to implement the plan.

Paula, an Italian born near Prato in her 40s, is a sinologist and digital marketing strategist. She learned Chinese in Beijing at the age of 19 and has always had a passion for Chinese culture.

> "When I was a teenager, I was having a walk in Chinatown, and this sounded so magic to me, so exotic. I wanted to know more, and I wanted to study the language…Everyone told me no, it was so difficult because the Chinese community is so closed, you can never reach a relationship with them. It was a total lie for me because I was so welcome, and I spoke the language. Now, in the Chinese community, I am known as the 'Chinese' girl with big eyes."

As an Italian, she claimed that she passed herself into the Chinese community and feels proud of her cultural and linguistic acquisition. Meanwhile, with this identity, she taught Italian in Chinese schools in Prato and eventually got noticed by the Tuscan regional government for intercultural communication projects. The administrative entity needed her to build a relationship with the Chinese community since the Italian officials had little clue how to access it.

Especially after the 2013 fire, the local government needed to take immediate measures and control the situation. She was the communication officer to assist the government in finding the solution. Eventually, the whole team initiated a series of animations based on a fictional character called Molly, a female entrepreneur, to show Chinese entrepreneurs correct behaviours on safe production, such as hiring qualified electricians (Fondazione PIN, 2015b) (see Figure 10) and no open-fire cooking at the workplace (Fondazione PIN, 2015a) (see Figure 11).


Figure 10 Animation of proper regularisation in Enterprise Episode 1

(Source: Screenshot from YouTube video)


Figure 11 Animation of proper regularisation in Enterprise Episode 3

(Source: Screenshot from YouTube video)

“We sent this type of video to all the entrepreneurs, and it was a success. Because they understand it and have fun in Chinese style. In China, public communication usually

comes in a little animation. It (the campaign success) was also broadcast on CCTV (the largest Chinese official television channel)."

Paula combined her experience in China with the use of Chinese-style publicity to market various Italian workplace regulations. Compared with complicated legal articles in a foreign language, a cartoon in the first language visualises the understandable behaviours and consequences for Chinese migrants, as this communication strategy is a smart move to put Italian policymakers in Chinese shoes and gain a good impression. Furthermore, the recognition from the migrant's homeland strengthened the impact of publicity. When migrants browse the news reports from their home country and see that their experience is covered and recognised by Chinese official authorities, it leads to an easier and more persuasive path to acquire Chinese migrants' active responses and follow the safety production instructions.

Another beneficial project by Paula's team is to initiate general government communication with a Chinese WeChat official account, Comune di Prato. In the 1990s, the Prato government passed a specific law (which expired in 1996) that allowed workers to be accommodated in a factory as long as it was equipped with rooms for sleep, a kitchen and a restroom. Due to constant massive Chinese population influx in Prato, the local government regulated the new registered factories were not allowed for the accommodation, but the government was overloaded in administrating the existing sleeping areas in the previous factories. The information was neither entirely reached to all Chinese factory owners, nor strictly implemented. The inconsistent communication set the stage for the fire incident in 2013. Since reading Italian newspapers is uncommon among Chinese migrants, there is a longstanding information gap between the two communities. To reach them, Paula researched in order to convince Italian authorities of the popularity of Chinese communication apps and to digitalise

the ways of communication with Chinese. In contemporary China, e-government has become a routine matter (see Figure 12).


Figure 12 Comune di Prato announcement posts (left) and Wenzhou Post by the government publicity office (right) on WeChat

(Source: Screenshot from author's WeChat, edited by the author)

Migrants often suffered from overloaded, out-dated and fake messages among ethnic community since it was hard for them to identify the trustful information sources. However, information via this official WeChat account is verified and published by the Prato municipality. As long as migrants follow this account, they will receive up-to-date official announcements such as civil services and migration policies in both Chinese and Italian languages.

> "Now you have the municipality that tells you in your language what the problem is and how to solve it."

This innovation helps migrants integrate into local society and maintain smooth communication. Hence, a virtual ethnic enclave which links Chinese migrants' home-feeling practices with the support of Prato officials is established. In this way, migrants

are likely to develop a sense of belonging to the local community with the help of noblemen like Paula and other Italians.

### 4.4.2 Case of Chinese Middlemen: Making Italians Understand in an Italian Way

When a migrant community tries to become involved in and embrace the local society, middlemen are pioneering the first step. They function as liaisons, striving for the legal rights of the ethnic groups and obtaining a local understanding.

The 2013 fire incident with seven lives lost shocked Italian and global society, many of which did not know or had ignored the Chinese migrant presence in an ordinary Italian city and just knew of the booming migration influx and fast fashion industry development from that moment on. The incident was so critical that the Italian government had to take measurements and express its attitude. Regarding the fire incident in Prato, the original plan from the Italian Ministry of Interior was to follow the "1/3 principle": shutting down one-third of the enterprises, imposing severe penalties on another third, and keeping the remaining third, which may cause a fatal blow to the whole Chinese-run fast fashion industry. However, the previous president of the Tuscany Region, Enrico Rossi, who was in charge of policy implementation from the central government, wanted a better solution and asked Wanshun, who I introduced above, for suggestions.

As mentioned earlier, Wanshun is a Chinese migrant living in Prato for over 30 years. He currently runs a textile factory and has been the vice president of the Prato branch of an Italian national industrial association, *CNA*[21] since 2000 – a rare role for Chinese man to hold given that typically Italians held senior positions with this national association. He was supported by his Italian neighbours regarding business operations

[21] *CNA* stands for *Confederazione Nazionale dell' Artigianato* in Italian (Craftsmen National Confederation). According to my Interviewee, this associations contains five main sectors of craft industry for small- and middle-sized enterprises.

and joined the Italian local association afterwards. Due to his excellent performance in the organisation, he was promoted to vice-president and well-known in the Italian community. Wanshun shared his opinion when asked by the regional government:

> "When Rossi's team came to our association, I raised an opposite argument: the Chinese-run enterprises were not too many because they thought it was too many to handle; even before the Chinese came there, they thought 30 *pronto moda* (companies) were already too many. Their eyes could only see Italy. No, that should depend on the potential market size. Because the Chinese came here, they sold the garments to France, England, America, and Japan. Prato became a European manufacturing centre; we needed more enterprises to reach the supply."

This argument seemed convincing and shifted the attitude toward the previous principle of a third. As for the next step after the persuasion, Wanshun raised two possible solutions among the other three local industrial associations for a more comprehensive discussion and consultation since these Italian associations are empowered to give feedback for legislation. Wanshun's association has the influential weight to speak out for local entrepreneurs and industry. One solution was to eliminate the Chinese-run garment industry; the other was to keep it. At that time, local enterprises largely depended on the downstream Chinese factories. When it was tied to the enterprise's direct interest, they were the members of these industrial associations; it was soon agreed in discussions to keep the Chinese industry in Prato.

In the end, a consensus of progressive legalisation within three to five years was reached to help the involved factories improve the working conditions step-by-step, such as separate accommodation and removing gas tanks from the factory. Wanshun further suggests that Italian policymakers deal with Chinese delinquent cases in a more considerate way.

> "If any noncompliance is detected, you should punish them with small fines. The garment industry is not a high-profit industry. An average garment workshop which operates 12-14 hours a day does not earn much money. If you give them too much pressure (with heavy penalty), the workshop will shut down, and consequentially, your market will shrink…Taking the €1,000 as a rough standard fine, if the factories break several rules, an accumulative fine is too heavy. It is better to fine €1,000 with a correspondent limit rectification time (to keep them sustainable)."

Wanshun presented the facts to Italian association members and policymakers in an Italian way and helped them understand the objective and realistic conditions of Chinese-run businesses. In order to achieve sustainable development of industry and the local economy, versatility and flexibility are essential for both Italian and Chinese communities to formulate a larger community, especially when both parties are reasonable and open to communication.

In addition to the industry standardisation process, there is another case showing Italian authorities try their best to understand the Chinese community with the help of Chinese middlemen. As known in Chinese life practice, the daily main dish is rice, and therefore a rice cooker is ordinary in Chinese accommodations and workplaces. It was banned after the post-fire regulation, which caused grievances among the Chinese community. Italian authorities mentioned that the rice cooker was not safe in the workplace due to its electricity usage. Wanshun tried to persuade governors in an Italian way:

> "It is legal to use coffee machines in every Italian factory, while our rice cooker will turn off automatically when it reaches 100 degrees. Besides, both machines heat water…I told Rossi this; he said he would sign for approval to cancel the rice cooker ban if I have authorised technical proof."

Wanshun received the first technical support from his association since there are electronics industry enterprises and found engineers who are qualified to issue certification at the regional level in the same organisation. Afterwards, he hired a lawyer with correspondent expertise, and the association funded the cost, which was initially from membership fees. Along with the process, the association sent an Italian secretary to assist with Wanshun's communication and paperwork. The next step was to find a rice cooker on the market in Italy with the product information. Because most rice cookers that the Chinese have in Prato are usually bought from China and brought to Italy, Wanshun had to seek help from the exhibition department in the association. He found out the rice cooker import information, and the Italian supermarket chain brand COOP had imported rice cookers from China for sale, which meant that COOP had the product parameter for the engineer to demonstrate as proof. Wanshun told me the solution step-by-step:

> "I told the association president, 'Since your brother worked as COOP manager, you can help me get the product parameter.' Later, his brother sent all the data from the headquarters, which indicated the rice cooker was qualified according to EU regulations...I got the data, and I bought a rice cooker from COOP. As long as we had the Italian coffee machine as a comparison, then it could prove that the rice cooker was not dangerous in the factory."

Eventually, Rossi approved the technical report and advised Wanshun to call journalists and organise the press for public announcements. *Il Tirreno* (see Figure 13) covered the public debate and the professional certification on rice cooker safety usage at the workplace from the local industrial association (Lardara, 2014).


Figure 13 News report "Prato, take away everything but not the 'rice cooker': the request of Chinese entrepreneurs."

(Source: Screenshot from newspaper website, translated by the author)

Wanshun helped the Chinese fight for proper rights, and he, as the middleman, also acquired Italian routines to solve professional problems and socialise in the commercial context. As a result, Italians understood the Chinese demand and promoted social cohesion.

From the two case studies, the endeavours are started from an individual level but supported by Italian society. Both Paula and Wanshun created effective communication ways to approach the two communities and set good examples for future solutions, which is seen as a progressive achievement for accumulated social capital construction based on coordination of different paces and overcoming the social "jet lags" to reach mutual coordination. After the first step of acknowledging the Chinese presence and role of the Chinese-run Made in Italy industry in Prato mentioned in the last section,

the second step is to mitigate the tension and promote a mutual understanding for the coming reconstruction of collective identity along with Made in Italy.

### 4.5 Redefining "Made in Italy"

The word "Renaissance", translated from the Italian word "*Rinascimento*", means "rebirth" and reflects the Italian wisdom to find solutions against dark medieval crises. Originating from Florence, achievements such as literature, science and art have been a status of diversity. Migrants such as Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci from different parts of Tuscany came to the cultural centre of Florence to co-create Made in Italy in history due to the inclusive social atmosphere and strong support from the ruling Medici family. History repeats itself as migrants from China, Pakistan and other countries come to Prato and rewrite the fast fashion production history in Italy. As Paulicelli (2014, p. 164) describes: "Made in Italy as a creative and fluid laboratory that reflects the composite, rich, and plural identity of a nation soaked in hundreds of years of fashion history that goes as far back as the medieval workshops that produced fine fabrics, clothing, and accessories". There has always been a debate between authenticity and legitimacy based on the sequence of arrival in terms of the ownership of interpretation (Ha et al., 2023). The latecomers such as Chinese migrants in this context, also challenge the Made in Italy definition owned by locals. Along with the increasing scale of production and market, the transformation of fast fashion remains difficult. Made in Italy by Chinese gradually became unsustainable for fashion industry development, especially since the pandemic; challenges such as skilled labour shortage, global economic recession and industrial transformation have been bottlenecks in ethnic entrepreneurship.

### 4.5.1 Challenge for Fast Fashion Development in Prato

As mentioned above, the definition of Made in Italy has multiple understandings under the precondition of the legal framework and the consensus of quality guarantee. Every market participant wants to define the label and sell their interpretation to the correspondent markets. In spite of the various definitions, each participant lacks an actual conflict with each other since the fashion market is huge and market demands are segmented from high-end and luxurious to low-end affordable ones.

In order to upgrade the production target to the middle- and high-end market, Prato authorities and local manufacturers promote environment-friendly production and make the fabric value sustainable. Some Chinese migrant entrepreneurs have started to use locally produced fabrics, hiring Italian professionals and sending their offspring to Italian design schools for business succession to fit in the mainstream trend defined by the national strategy. By contrast, the wholesalers and end customers around the world perpetuate market inertia, which pushes the garment manufacturers and fashion company owners to continue producing cheap and low-end clothes in a fightback against cultural dominance. This resembles the bazaar's role to represent mass culture and modernity consumption of commodity aesthetics (Deka, 2023). Prato becomes a representative of fast fashion culture for the masses where fashion standards are not guided by top-tier designers but by end markets. They led another trend in Prato since "a new variety of cheap fabrics and trendy versus classic clothing styles began to dominate the fashion market, reducing the demand for expensive and durable goods" (Zhao, 2018, p. 86).

Meanwhile, due to a large number of market orders and labour shortage in the post-Covid period, some Chinese entrepreneurs breached the regulations and imported processed or semi-processed garments from China and faked the Made in Italy label,

which caused a new round of industrial inspection, goods seizure, and penalty in April 2023. In spite of the multiple understandings of Made in Italy, an overall guideline from the top-down level is necessary to regulate the market. As a result, both trends interplay in the fast fashion production in Prato, and this industry development stands at a crossroads.

Taking other "Made in Italy" productions as a reference, Chianti wine, a famous Tuscan wine, follows the restricted rules of vertical categorisation from the basic level (*Annata*) to the reserved class (*Riserva*) and the premium selection (*Gran Selezione*). All wines made in the Chianti region are counted in the Chianti production, while the hierarchy requires different wine grape selection and winemaking processes (Costanigro et al., 2017). Following this logic, Chinese migrants are welcomed to integrate into Italian society and Made-in-Italy production since they live and work in Prato. In principle, any enterprise has the opportunity to apply for an upgrade qualification check to maintain market mobility. In reality, despite the trial of industrial transitions, the overall enterprises remain in the expected low-end fast fashion production. Yet, this leaves open the question of how this production will evolve in the future.

### 4.5.2 "By Chinese" or "With Chinese": A Shift from Strangers to Guests and, possibly, to Families

As for the Chinese-run "Made in Italy" products, they are accepted by the market with correspondent customer groups. The local economy benefits from the fast fashion ecology and is connected with Chinese business in many aspects. Along with social integration, both migrant and local entrepreneurs strive for high quality to redefine the label in the long term. The expression "Made in Italy by Chinese" seems an exclusion of migrants' efforts and shakes the collective identity, even though some immigrants

have joined the citizenship and been Italianized. Social capital is embedded in identity formation, so a collective identity puts an additive function to two sources of social capital accumulated from both Italian and Chinese communities. Behind the naming game, economic and cultural power is the bargaining chip, and the Chinese presence in Prato gained the qualification to bargain over time. In essence, "Made in Italy by Chinese" as a media invention is born with prejudice and social segregation. In this context, "by Chinese" is linked to low-end and cheap "Made in China" production. At the same time, the Chinese only take advantage of the glorified and marketized "Made in Italy," and Italian society needs to differentiate its high-end position from this group and its products. Ricardo insisted on treating Italian fashion production from a developmental perspective:

> "If you still think that you are the best and the rest of the world is not able to catch you, sooner or later, you will be abandoned. In a country (like China), they invest money, and every year, millions of engineers and designers graduate. For sure, they will find someone who will create a new trend. You think we are the best now? In the future, who knows, competition will be open. That is a big problem of Italy."
>
> (Riccardo, Italian, Accounting Firm Owner)

Chinese migrants have drawn a bigger picture with huge market potential in Prato for locals and shown the possibility of even from a low-end industrial niche. Moreover, they are also actively thinking with locals about future development in the face of crisis and challenges. "Made in Italy with Chinese" seems to be a better way to understand the procedure since the word "with" stands for collaboration and the attitude of the new social member instead of "by", which is merely for task assignment to specific groups. Furthermore, "with" means the fact of working together as well as the ambiguity of how both parties work together, which is precisely the current exploration phase, as

mentioned above. The identity of the migrant community shifts along with the expression from “by Chinese” to “with Chinese”, from the “strangers” role with limited and bounded connections, gradually to the accepted and invited “guests” role with more interactions and voluntary contribution. For the next stage, as “families”, there would potentially be no extra need to highlight “Chinese involvement” since the Chinese are part of the Italian culture, with a merged and unified identity that shares the same social capital. In this case, the following question to explore is how the social capital looks like: more Chinese, more Italian, or a new combined variation.

### 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I followed the timeline between the Chinese-run fast fashion expansion and regulation in Prato. I re-thought the entrepreneurial legitimacy of its existence through the lens of “Made in Italy”. The analysis started from an understanding of the country-of-origin effect and comparisons with Made in Italy along with the trajectory before and after Chinese presence. Made in Italy by Chinese is seen as a dynamic mix of flipping label patterns embedded in flipped label patterns, and Chinese production in Prato should not be regarded as a harmful biological invader due to its positive influences. The second part of the analysis acknowledges the contributions of “Italian Noblemen” and “Chinese Middlemen”, addressing how good communication practises promote collective identity formation. The last part demonstrates the exploration of Chinese-run business development with possible approach as reference. It reviews the social meaning behind the expression “Made in Italy by Chinese” and “Made in Italy with Chinese”. In short, “Made in Italy” production in the context stands not just for quality guarantee, lifestyle association and national strategy but also represents the identity along with the embedded social capital. The social capital behind the label should be restructured and reconsidered in a broader way to gain a collective identity

with collaboration from both locals and migrants. Over time, social capital can be accumulated like an hourglass for a sizeable collective identity to formulate a broader and more stable social cohesion against crises and challenges. “Made in Italy with Chinese” seems a better solution to maintain sustainable entrepreneurship and mutual trust, while the dynamic remains for further exploration.

# Chapter 5 Community Shopping: Migrants' Community Involvement and Social Integration

> "Being a relatively young province compared to other cities (provinces) in Tuscany, Prato and, recently, for Chinese migration... (On the other hand, regarding Chinese migrants) many people ignore the difference between Dongbeiren (Chinese from the Northeast) and Zhejiangren (Chinese from Zhejiang), like between a Ruianren and a Qingtianren."[22]
>
> - A Prato-based researcher (2023)[23]

> "We will promote dialogue between two communities…In this city, we shall learn about diversity in our diverse reality."
>
> - Teresa Lin, the first Chinese-origin city councillor in Prato (2019)

## 5.1 Introduction

Chinese migrants in Prato and their Made-in-Italy garments blurred the socioeconomic boundary since they work together with local Italians and migrants from other countries. They upgraded roles over time from migrant workers to migrant entrepreneurs and spared efforts to gain entrepreneurial legitimacy in fashion production (see Chapter 4). Their business practices, networks and identity formation are closely linked with their social background and involved communities. Chinese migrants in Prato tried to find their position between Chinese and Italian. However, they are constantly blamed for a low effort to integrate into society. On the other hand, along with the increasing Chinese

[22] Ruian and Qingtian are counties in Zhejiang Province, both known for their emigration tradition.
[23] The researcher preferred to be anonymised.

population, they need to balance existing and emerging group interests among themselves and maintain collective solidarity.

**Enclaving in *Macrolotto*, The Chinatown in Prato**

The expression "Chinese community" is used mainly to identify both the geographical enclaves (places) shaped by Chinese migrants and the existence of Chinese migrants as a large group (people). Most Chinese migrants in Prato settle around the area *Macrolotto 0,* where the main street Via Pistoiese extends from the ancient city wall and goes through various Chinese restaurants and service facilities (Bressan and Tosi Cambini, 2009). Over time, *Macrolotto 0* became the "fishbone shape", with a long main road for the main commercial area and small dead-end alleys full of Chinese-run stitching workshops, while half a century ago, this area was dominated by local-run textile factories with the uninterrupted roar of machines and typical hybrid housing and workplaces (Bressan and Radini, 2009; Gras and Craveri, 1967; Denison et al., 2009). The fast fashion industry promoted the boom of the Chinese population influx and their settlement. At the same time, local Italians moved away from this district due to the previous economic recession, population ageing and unacceptable lifestyles of Chinese neighbours. Therefore, this area gradually became an ethnic enclave for Chinese migrants.

The Chinese ethnic enclave is a worldwide phenomenon. Zhou (1992) explored the Janus-face of these enclaves, which can both compound migrants' social segregation and employment disadvantages, on the one hand, and can build careers and social mobility among fellow Chinese migrants, on the other hand. Ethnic enclaves do not always mean low-end dwelling communities; instead, some blurred the boundary with local society and gradually evolved into multiethnic communities and exotic bourgeoise neighbourhoods and tourist spots (Zhou, 2004; Khan, 2015; Han, 2014). Some scholars

feel there is an overuse of the "ethnic lens", limiting thinking about other dimensions of enclaves (Barabantseva, 2016; Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2015). The same research approach is hard to apply in domestic migration studies based on the same race, for instance, the Chinese urban-rural migration during the gentrification trend. It also failed to explain diasporic differences in the global immigration context, such as the Chinese migrants' compositions and everyday practices between Europe and Japan (Wang and Miao, 2019). Along with the fast fashion development, the city's southern outskirts near the highway formed the Chinese-run industrial area converted from dilapidated factories and empty warehouses, named after *Macrolotto 1* (later developing another industrial area, *Macrolotto 2*). Intermixed with dwelling areas, many Chinese-run apparel companies, other industrial-related enterprises, and supporting infrastructures such as hotels and restaurants are located here. At the same time, commercial interactions with local Italians and clients all around the world remain during operation hours. Still, the factual residential and commercial segregation makes Chinese communities relatively independent and develops further into self-sufficient systems.

**Same Issue, Different Attitudes**

The wild growth of Chinese-run fast fashion and explosive population increase co-exist together with the lagged regulations over two decades due to absent communication. According to a podcast programme on *Radio France International* (*RFI*), for the local society, the prevailing mayor of Prato Roberto Cenni sought to engage in dialogue with any spokesman in the Chinese community.[24] However, he did not know who the person was and waited for a list of interlocutors from the Chinese Embassy (Xiao, 2011).[25] In

[24] Roberto Cenni served as mayor of Prato municipality from June 2009 to May 2014.
[25] There is no similar role as imam (as the religious leader in Islamic migrant community) in Chinese migrant communities because of increasing immigration and insufficient regulations inside migrant communities.

April 2023, Prato finance police seized 1.3 million fast fashion garments with an estimated value of €8,000,000 in the central Chinese-run industry zone due to the unidentifiable critical information such as place of production and textile components on the product labels (La Nazione, 2023). Similar inspections targeting Chinese-run businesses happened and were reported before and under the translated news pages on Chinese social media. Comments and opinions from migrants are divided: some agreed with and fully supported the market regularisation. In contrast, others complained that "Italians are racist against Chinese", "the Italian government is running out of money and making a profit from Chinese", and that Italy is "a country famous for penalties and weak in social security management". From online comments to offline everyday interactions, the disparity exists inside the Chinese community. Migrants speak for the interests from different standing points despite similar immigration origins from China. How do migrants formulate different attitudes based on similar overseas paths? Possible assumptions on this disparity are that: 1) the Chinese migrants are from various immigration backgrounds or statuses; 2) the Chinese community has evolved into various refined sub-communities; and 3) the Chinese migrants have chosen specific communities. Based on their choices, migrants created their connections and networks, norms and values, and further identities and senses of belonging. If their experiences of community involvement and entrepreneurial practices are different, then the social capital as an outcome contains different components instead of a standard one.

In this chapter, I aim to answer how Chinese migrants choose their communities and cultivate organisational resources. In the following section, I shall introduce the literature based on migrant communities and community involvement, organisational preference, and rational scheduling strategy. For the analysis part, I first summarise four central communities in which Chinese migrants are involved for comparison and

specific organisational support from each community. Secondly, I analyse migrants' agencies to strategically schedule their community involvement for social integration and business development based on four case studies. In the last part, I conclude the interplay between rationality and social capital regarding balancing the networks and social integration outcomes.

### 5.2 Community Involvement and Acquired Scheduling Strategy

Among the Chinese immigrant communities in the global context, scholars argued the dynamics in different aspects, such as the temporal evolution from sojourning to settlement and later to transnationalism (Yang, 2012a), functional tools from problem-solving to positive public image and further to social cohesion (Li, 1999b), and fluid continuums between interpersonal networks and organisations (Zhou and Lee, 2013). Ethnic communities influence the migrant's integration into the local society by providing social connections and ascribed identity, which can be measured through organisational density and diversity as "institutional completeness" (Breton, 1964; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005).

Similar to the working class in the UK in the 1830s, who were ascribed and excluded by the official acts and laws, the migrant identity is also initially defined by the external environment. Hence, social capital is the organisational resources formed during community involvement by creating new social connections, values and identities as a process of integration. Through Owenism, Chartism, and other collective community involvement, the British working class acquired their subjective awareness; similarly, for migrants, social integration is the outcome of a second socialisation into a new society to form subjectivity.

However, social integration may take the risk of overstating social relations and norms but ignoring other rational considerations, understood as an "over-socialisation"

status, and migrants are institutionalised by collective rules and expectations without individual agency. On the contrary, an "under-socialisation" status refers to the opposite side, that migrants put the egoistic rational behaviour and utilitarian approach first while social relations are put aside without considering the collective interests (Wrong, 1961; Granovetter, 1992). Social integration means migrants need to use their agency and find the balance point between the two extremes by choosing the community for involvement.

Meanwhile, communities develop along with the migrant's involvement: traditional communities may explore new functions, and new communities emerge when traditional ones do not fulfil their needs. As the process of immigrant integration is intricate and involves multiple aspects, including their legal status, language and culture, housing and education, work and business, religion and other daily practices, it followed the multi-polarisation trend and inevitably emerged various communities, embedded social relations and senses of belonging (Lamanna et al., 2018; Ma Mung, 2015). Most studies on Chinese migrants in Prato tend to generalise the "Chinese community" to describe immigrants and their practices as a whole (Becucci, 2017; Baldassar et al., 2015b), while others notice the diversification and polarization as a result of stages of immigration and ethnic entrepreneurship (Denison et al., 2009; Lan, 2016). The emerging communities provide more options for migrants to attain social capital. Therefore, migrants can make use of social capital at a community level together with their attributes to influence entrepreneurship development (Kwon et al., 2013).

To understand the migrants' motivation for community preference, one classic model is the "push-pull theory", which demonstrates the attractiveness and constraints of the environments (Lee, 1966). By identifying the push and pull factors of each

community, migrants find the proper ones. Nevertheless, it sidelines the agency of migrants as actors have a reaction force in shaping both and pull forces. Another approach starts with the actor's agency, namely "implicit contract", focusing on the mutual expectations between actors and organisations regarding connection establishment (Baker et al., 1997), while it fails to explain the risk aversion and long-term organisational maintenance without mutual trust as a precondition. Both theories echo the logic of "rational choice theory", which assumes that instrumental individual actions are the leading cause. However, actions can be axiological rather than purely instrumental (Boudon, 1998), and this instrumental approach is unable to clarify the difference in social relations and the temporal-spatial embedded actions (Lachmann, 2000).

Weber (1978) introduced different types of rationality to delineate between values that stem from affective affinity with kinship or community ties – sometimes described as "substantive rationality", versus instrumentalist rationality linked to objective measure of progress, like efficiency targets, and he stressed the role of multiple, sometimes conflicted types of rationality in guiding organisational development. If collective actions suit specific "value postulate" and is considered as a "valid cannon", then joining group membership and involving oneself in community become a substantive rationality (Kalberg, 1980). Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993, p. 1325) further define social capital as "generated by individual members' disciplined compliance with group expectations". Hence, individuals and groups may benefit from social capital, depending on the level of other forms of capital that are available (Li, 2004). Also, in this vein, Flora (1998) points out another factor, such as "entrepreneurial social infrastructure", to both overlap with and supplement social capital regarding community development.

In essence, accumulating and applying social capital in organisations and communities is a process of rationalisation by personal resource allocation. An apparent personal resource for migrants is their time, namely how they spend their duration of stay in a foreign country, their scheduling and time-budgeting in community involvement (Zerubavel, 1976). Building on Zerubavel's timetable concept for understanding the social organisation of time, I take the logic of shopping behaviour and trade-offs to understand migrant community involvement. Since the membership for involvement requires certain costs or commitment, this implies that the communities themselves are commodified. Taking the "shopping demand" as the migrant's social integration and their "shopping budget" as the disposable time to spend, the communities become the "stores" offering social capital. During the social transaction, migrants' involvement in specific communities has, therefore, cultivated a social capital combination in return. How to spend the budget of time wisely reflects the practice of social integration, such as prioritising the necessary and allocating the premium parts, releasing more capacities via self-improvement, or merging different parts as a package.

The rationalisation behind community involvement shows migrants' social status and the way of scheduling strategy acquisition. Despite the trials, rationality does not always work well, as Simon (2000) notes as "bounded rationality" as an explanation and outcome for a possible suboptimal choice. Moreover, it is not just a rationalisation based on *homo economicus* consideration; rather, it is a scheduling strategy acquisition process embedded with complicated social relations, which echoes Owenism's conviction of new society creation with associated effort, that "if only the right method was found, man's existence could be restored enabled the roots of the movement to penetrate that deeper layer where personality itself formed" (Polanyi, 2024, pp. 194-195). The time-scheduling strategy behind community involvement is essentially social

integration, the self-empowerment of autonomy and ambition, with which migrants challenge the existing community ecology and re-construct their social capital in communities.

### 5.3 "Shopping Options": Community Involvement among Migrants

In this part, I shall introduce the communities available around migrants' daily lives and their features. Based on migrants' living and working scenarios, together with temporal-spatial interactions, I developed four categories of community beyond the dichotomous classification between Italian and Chinese contexts: dwelling community, working community, commercial community, and religious community. In each community, both Chinese and Italian are involved, either as individual participants in the community interactions or functioning as organisations to attract participants.

#### 5.3.1 Dwelling Community: Family and Neighbourhood

Family is a common working unit in fast fashion production and facilitates most apparel company entrepreneurship. Family provides not only the economic function of enlarged income guarantees, a solid foundation for entrepreneurial advancement, as well as shared costs and risks but also it contains the value of trust and social support, which plays a crucial role in immigration stability and social solidarity.

Along with visa regularisation, visas for family reunion purposes create a rapid population gathering in Prato and the fast fashion industry. Chinese migrants took the opportunity to bring their spouses to Italy for both life and work. My interviewee Ailan mentioned that the previous stitching workshop employment was based on seven couples and a single male worker. Couples took turns to rest and keep operating the workshop. Later, when they started to run their own business, one could stay and deal with clients, and the other was able to purchase, deliver goods and extend the business. When they plan to return to China for a family visit, the couple may also choose to

rotate one for travelling. At the same time, the other maintains business operations and saves travel costs. Once they settled down with legal status and stable income, they brought their children and raised them in Italy. Inside the family, their offspring is also likely to gain trust and take over the business in succession. The new generation is born or raised in Italian society, and they have more time to adapt to and integrate into local society. Their parents prepared stable socio-economic status and the possibility to choose future development in Italy for them; in return, they helped with the family business with their language and sociocultural knowledge to some extent. The family business is always a backup plan if they are neither able nor willing to work in mainstream Italian society, and their previous observation and learning-by-doing experience with their parents make a difference.

My interviewee, Haojie, is a second-generation Chinese immigrant, and his parents own a fabric recycling company. He stepped into the business training of collecting debts and paying bills from business partners when his mother set this task for him. The family business facilitates straightforward entrepreneurial education and alternative options. Another research participant, Xiaomei, graduated from an Italian design school but chose to work for her parents and later started her own apparel company. She said:

> "It is all about observing how parents do business. I did not start from scratch but mostly relied on parental support… (When I compare both opportunities working for Chinese and Italian), the entry-level salary (in Italian companies) is not so high (€1,000/month) while working with my parents' business earns more (€3,000/month) from the same career starting point; it is mainly an issue of salary. If I start my career in a local company, from an entry-level position, my parents may think it wastes time."
>
> (Xiaomei, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Moreover, Xiaomei's business got customer sources from their parents' recommendations and inside the family; her apparel company focuses on different items and styles from her parents' company to avoid internal competition. Italian scholars Oriani and Staglianò (2008) also notice the consecration of fundraising during the migrant new couple marriage ceremony, when Chinese migrants come to the dinner and prepare the red pockets with money for good wishes. In Chinese culture, marriage and family creation are the parental recognition of independence and responsibility to make own business decisions. An interviewee, Sanmu, mentioned his entrepreneurial story:

> "My entrepreneurial story started after I married my wife, and we started the business together. My wife is the only child, and the first start-up funding came from my mother (after marriage)."
>
> (Sanmu, Chinese, Investor/ Textile Manufacturer)

Another interviewee Qiangzi pointed out the same message about family support:

> "I have thought many times about starting a business, but my mother did not agree or support if I were alone; she said I would be cheated and lose money (by others)…Maybe when I create my own family later, they (my parents) will feel ok to support me to have a try. They will be relieved to say you have someone to discuss it with, and it is better."
>
> (Qiangzi, Chinese, Apparel Factory Worker)

In this way, independence means being entrepreneurial and ready for exploration, while creating a family signals independence. Family functions as both wealth collection and risk diversification. When browsing housing rental or job recruitment advertisements, I found out that the family is usually the popular unit for the same reason above.

In most cases, Chinese migrants live with their co-ethnic neighbours as a result of cost-sharing and cultural affinity (Bressan and Radini, 2009), either living with Chinese landlords or sharing a flat. To manage the costs and illegal migration inspections, the living spaces were merged upstairs of the workshops or factories. After the 2013 fire incident, the local government legislated for safe production and vigorously implemented the separation of living spaces between factory and residence. Since many Chinese-run workshops are gathering along Via Pistoiese, the migrant workers prefer to live nearby for convenient commutes and daily services. Meanwhile, with the increasing Chinese population and the formation of ethnic enclaves, different life habits and sudden Chinese presence bewildered locals, and the Italian neighbours gradually moved out of this district. Another trend follows that some Chinese migrants also moved out, either renting or purchasing houses near locals when later they were able to improve their living conditions.

Still, the connection between migrants and locals is not cut down; there is a smattering of cafés inside each street corner where, regardless of the café operators, clients are usually mixed with both Chinese and Italians. Cafés serve beyond the function of providing beverages and food; they connect social relations and local neighbourhood identity (Deng, 2020). Some of my interviewees mentioned they got support from locals via casual coffee chat. Wanshun, for instance, got financial advice from an Italian neighbour to deal with the arrears of penalty bills and later on the suggestion of joining a local business association. Wenyue also knew an Italian realtor during a coffee chat, with whose support he finally found a suitable factory location for starting his business. Chinese migrants started communicating via neighbourhood business providers and getting friendship and necessary support, while over time, Italians entered into ethnic communities and became customers of Chinese-run

restaurants and nail salons (usually with televisions playing Chinese programmes); they also sold products to Chinese. An Italian street vendor frequently sells fruits and vegetables in Italian, Mandarin Chinese and Wenzhounese dialects, driving his lorry around the Chinese residential area during my fieldwork (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 Prato. An Italian vendor selling his fruits and vegetables on the lorry

(Source: Photographed by the author in July 2023)

Other neighbourhood facilities, including education and entertainment, are available to Chinese migrants. For the younger generation, there are Chinese language schools and after-class tutoring centres. The older generation gathers in the park for square dance (mainly women) and chess and cards (mainly men) or walks the dog with other Italian locals. This reflects the attitude toward long-term settlement and home-like lifestyles, as these lifestyles are synchronised with urban life in China. The dwelling community provides the transition and adaptation zones for migrant newcomers and, conversely, for the non-working population, such as children and retired groups, a necessary place for specific ethnic activities and family settlement. Furthermore, the dwelling community is a place combined with rest and leisure time

where Chinese migrants can follow the trends from their home countries, and local Italians can get specific life services and business opportunities.

### 5.3.2 Working Community: Colleagues and Employees

Compared with the dwelling community, the working community is another important source of time allocation for Chinese migrants. The working community pictures symbiotic relations among migrants. It relies on migrant labour for developing the business, while ensuring living opportunities, either visa sponsorship or economic rewards, as well as entrepreneurial incubation in and outside the fast fashion industry.

During the fast fashion boom period in the 2000s, the most common workplaces were Chinese-run stitching workshops, with Chinese employees working overtime more than 13 hours a day. Along with the improved working conditions, some employees gradually have more personal time and can afford separate accommodations and commute costs with certain subventions from employers. In contrast, other Chinese-run businesses, such as apparel companies, dyeing washer workshops, textile factories, logistic companies and fabric recycling companies, are mixed with Chinese, local Italians, and migrants from other countries, especially from Bangladesh and Pakistan. One of my interviewees, Wenyue, drove to a Chinese-run dyeing and washer workshop and delivered the goods; he brought me together for an observation and explained the production. During my short stay in the workshop, I noticed that the owner and business operation team are Chinese, Italians working as engineers for technical support, and other nations are plant workers. Meanwhile, the elemental composition of an apparel company is based on family entrepreneurs (usually husbands pick up and deliver goods among different production stages, wives deal with the clients, staff management and finance), a full-time draughtsman for drafting the fashion models, a full-time pattern maker for cutting shapes from the fabrics and a seasonal part-time

packer (usually either a family member or South Asian migrant worker) who stocks and labels the goods for shipping. Since there are high and low production seasons, migrant entrepreneurs need to require an extended working intensity in the peak months and maintain a high revenue to fill the gap of the low season for the overall cost and full-time workers' salary.

Most fast fashion companies and affiliated enterprises follow the two main fashion seasons (the summer sale from February to July and the winter sale from September to November). The remainder of the year, including Christmas, *Ferragosto* (mid-August) and Chinese New Year (between January and February), is the time for Chinese migrants to relax, travel back home and prepare for a new round of business. A previous migrant worker in a stitching workshop, Longda, mentioned:

> "We celebrated Chinese festivals there (abroad), too. The boss would go to a restaurant and book a table for us or buy some takeaway dishes and we eat together."
>
> (Longda, Chinese, Taxi Driver)

With industry development and population expansion, there are more social mobilities inside the ethnic community. Firstly, workers are recruited from family members, then relatives and people from the same place, and then Chinese from other parts of China, which shows the industrial attraction to the sending society. Secondly, along with the communication technology, information such as job recruitment and factory transfer updates more frequently, from a printed way on the walls of stores and restaurants to a digitalised and instant app push message. Smooth information flow creates a flexible market. Any advertisements on plant or equipment transfer provide a new opportunity for entrepreneurship. Lastly, migrants can switch jobs, especially when they do not have fixed contracts. Migrant entrepreneurs tend to risk the costs for employees' tax reports, and migrant workers desire immediate cash instead of a salary

after tax deduction. So, there is a tacit understanding of a high degree of freedom of movement between the two sides. An interviewee, Changhong, worked for his relatives and now owns an apparel company. He disagreed with this business practice as creating potential competitors:

> "It is like an apprentice; you have learned for half a year, and your master thinks you are ready to graduate and set you free. It is simple…just like I worked a couple of years for you and want to explore myself. If I feel your working conditions are not good, I try another one; maybe the situation is better…Moreover, the boss acquiesced to your entrepreneurship, too."
>
> (Changhong, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

This tacit understanding between employers and employees promoted mobility in the workplace. The mobility is also reflected in entrepreneurial practices, such as incubating more fast fashion companies and supporting industries based on mutual expectation and fulfilment (Zhou, 1992). The booming number of stitching workshops and apparel companies is the outcome of migrants' roles from employees to employers. However, industries such as catering services, real estate, and other supporting businesses take advantage of the large population and fast fashion industry. For instance, after the 2013 fire incident, apparel companies and stitching workshops were not allowed to cook at the workplace. So, there are Chinese-run central kitchens in charge of the takeaway food in the industrial district, with a rough estimation of 3,000 lunches per day. Further examples include my two interviewees: Sanmu acquired an Italian supermarket and turned it into a Chinese one, in addition to his textile factory and other investments; Daqiang started a second business with another migrant entrepreneur and ran a high-end restaurant to host business dinners, especially the Chinese officials

hosting banquets. Migrant entrepreneurs expand the boundary of business partnership and connections in the local society, as my interviewee Zhixiong concluded:

> "The earliest contacts can be suppliers or customers. In gradual and constant interactions, our roles, shared ideology, and values will converge, so our relations will change; from business partners to friends or vice versa, our roles will overlap."
>
> (Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneur)

Through business interactions, migrant entrepreneurs, particularly apparel company owners and textile manufacturers, socialised their Italian language and commercial skills, knowledge about law and taxation, and developed networks in the working community. Before opening the factory, Daqiang got a job recommendation from a Chinese friend and worked in an Italian-run ironing workshop and yarn factory. Meanwhile, he insisted on going to language classes in order to learn Italian outside of his working hours. He explained:

> "Why did I choose an Italian factory? Because I wanted to get close to the locals. Spending every day together (with them) helped my Italian learning…I had worked as a mechanic in China, and the Italian boss was happy that I did free maintenance machinery besides work. The boss left a good impression on me, and later, he helped with my visa sponsorship during regularisation without asking for any costs."
>
> (Daqiang, Chinese, Clothing Accessories Manufacturer)

In his new factory, over 60% are Italian employees together with other migrant workers from Pakistan and Senegal. Taking the example of Daqiang, he switched the role of factory and restaurant owner and gained independence with the support of the working community. Migrant entrepreneurs take the working community as the economic purpose and experience accumulation, including industrial and managerial knowledge. Meanwhile, their entrepreneurship potential and personality are shaped and

testified during their involvement in this community. Similar to the dwelling community as the necessary part of time expenditure, the working community helps migrants to create their social capital, such as a trust for further business development and network connections.

### 5.3.3 Commercial Community: Local and Migrant Associations

Working as an entrepreneur means balancing internal management with employees and personal leisure activities with family, as well as external commercial practices and networking with other entrepreneurs, politicians, and social members.

Association involvement is instead an optional choice for migrant entrepreneurs because association membership usually requires a stable business operation, a trustable personality, a good reputation, and a willingness to pay membership fees. This participation is suitable for neither migrant workers nor the non-working population. Although there are dozens of associations in Prato, they can be categorised into three main types among the migrant entrepreneurs' involvement. The first type is the Italian associations with local branches, such as the Italian Confederation of Crafts Trades and Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (*CNA*) and the Italian Manufacturer's Association (e.g., *Unione Industriale*).

Seen as a way of economic integration, as the local associations offer not only the national network and information flow but also the local industrial support in professional services (industrial relations, finance and taxation, etc.), political and social participation (lobbying government and collective bargaining with trade unions etc.). My interviewee Wanshun joined a local association and mentioned the benefit of taxation support and standardisation of operation with less inspection penalty:

> "For example, if I had a fine, and an association would represent me and communicate with the tax office, I could feel the officer trust more from the organisational level…I

indeed did not cheat on my tax, but there is a trust, a reputation here. When the officers see your tax declaration form with the association title, they know I would not mess around. Besides, it is not easy for a single Chinese entrepreneur to communicate with tax officers about any issues. At the same time, for us as an association, we had an exclusive reserved slot to proceed with any communications with officers."

(Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

Other entrepreneurs do not favour local business associations since these organisations may not provide attractive enough support to their business development or use Chinese entrepreneurs as scapegoats for business delinquency and victims of political struggle.

Under this circumstance, some migrant entrepreneurs prefer to organise their associations, usually embodying township fellowship associations, friendship associations or nominal chambers of commerce (see Figure 15). Different from local associations with events and services available for participants, migrant associations


Figure 15 Prato. Workplace of Italy Prato Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce

(Source: Photographed by the author in September 2022)

need more self-dedication, and members need to run the organisation by themselves, including membership fees and time spent, which vary from the corresponding titles. The interviewees I contacted with migrant association background are either the founders of their association or invited by the founders to operate this organisation together, and most of them are male. According to my female interviewees, they do not want intentionally to join since they are occupied by their business and family and feel the limited value of these associations if it is only for dining and networking with people.

The purpose of organisation establishment is usually externally driven: dealing with the local social problems (assist with migrants' regulation and social support), functioning as a non-governmental liaison office (reception of officials and business delegation from China) or seeking political and social resources (peer-to-peer with politicians from both China and Italy). This type of migrant association is embedded in a more extensive migrant network beyond the geographical border.

Members in Italy, Europe, and all around the world, as most migrants in Prato, are from Wenzhou. It is easier to find contact or expand the network with association membership. Although Chinese-run associations in Prato are not permitted to influence local politics and are restricted to a very narrow scope of function, they still managed to keep relations by inviting some local politicians to their membership renewal events and Chinese government officials to visit banquets. Moreover, the association presidents put weight on recognition from Chinese officials from the consular office in Florence to the local government in their hometown and further to the central Chinese government. My interviewee Changhong, a president of one migrant association, was honoured as a representative of overseas Chinese leaders and invited to participate in a national-level activity at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. For a migrant entrepreneur developing from scratch, official recognition from their home country is

a reward for the upward social mobility transferring from his economic achievement and social capital investment in his future transnational practices. Another interviewee, Daqiang, is the president of another migrant association. He told me the importance of the organisation:

> "After my business success with some foundation, I want to join a good social circle and make some contributions. The association is a good platform to gather us with dinners and events and share the same affection for our hometown. Of course, information sharing is important, too. In this way, we can talk to the overseas offices in China directly and create connections for future demands."
>
> (Daqiang, Chinese, Clothing Accessories Manufacturer)

Despite the broad network expansion, this type of migrant association is based on self-regulation among migrant entrepreneurs without full-time staff. Therefore, associations are unable to provide professional services for business operations, such as an NGO helping with migrants' daily lives and official Sino-Italy communication, rather than purely offering a platform for networking and entertainment. Furthermore, only presidential members enjoy the political rewards from the Chinese government, and this leads to the proliferation of homogenous associations with more "presidents", which Wang (2010) describes as a "village simulation". Lastly, the younger generation is not interested in associating with older generations, as my interviewee Haojie expressed his attitude:

> "(These associations) are more about dining with people. My father joined two associations and paid for double membership fees. He is a vice-president, and as long as you are willing to pay, you can sit in that position…However, participation also means you can make friends, including commercial interactions. It is essential, especially doing business among Wenzhounese; you cannot avoid it many times."

(Haojie, Chinese, Fabric Recycler)

The last type of association exists between the two mentioned above, organised mainly by a younger generation of Chinese migrant entrepreneurs (see Figure 16).


Figure 16 Prato. Workplace of Association of Chinese Youth Entrepreneurs in Europe (Source: Photographed by the author in February 2023)

They focus more on business functions and industrial development and tend to create industry-based associations instead of hometown-based ones. Zhixiong is from Beijing and came to Prato in 2014. He participated in the establishment of an industrial association with other Wenzhounese migrants, and said:

> "The associations, or nominal chambers of commerce here in the early days, were non-profit organisations, dedicating the solidarity among Chinese from different regions, such as the 'Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce' and 'Ruian Chamber of Commerce'. They

used the title of 'Chamber of Commerce' but worked essentially as fellowship associations…Our association is the first one based on industry; a commercial organisation focused on the apparel industry."

(Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneur)

His association was initially founded for social security in the industrial district and developed works on security patrolling, fabric waste recycling support, enterprise management forums and third-party arbitrary. Compared with local associations, this type of association represents the interest of migrant entrepreneurs directly and focuses on industrial development. Still, Chinese-run industrial associations make up a relatively small proportion compared with other migrant associations because industrial associations have limited mobilising and disciplining capacity without proper emotional bonds from the same hometown or various business interests among entrepreneurs. For instance, other migrant entrepreneurs have the right to join the organisations or follow the rules carried out by migrant-run industrial associations. Zhixiong as a current association member, analysed the bottleneck:

"It is about the migrants' cognition…If you are the garment industry chambers of commerce in China and they are usually under governmental supervision. With government endorsement and support, many enterprises will pay attention to them…(Or like) Italian garment association, it is a really big one, almost every Italian garment brand must join this organisation…When your association has enough resources, your membership participation and the demands become mandatory for them. In reality, there are many things you cannot do."

(Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneur)

The commercial community extends the possibility of involvement for migrant entrepreneurs in both business and social interests. People taking part in commercial

communities have considerable flexibility when it comes to their participation, including options for online participation. The organisational platform empowers them to reach corresponding resources at a specific price and negotiate with both local Italian and Chinese governments with the scale of the commercial associations for collective bargaining and negotiation. As a result, the association members created elite circles in name or fact, due to relative selectivity and exclusivity. Compared with individual dedication, organisational endorsement facilitates trust and efficiency. On the other side, various association types further polarise migrants' solidarity, cognition, and identity. Migrant entrepreneurs may have opposite opinions towards the same topic, and the associations become, in essence, fragile communities of interest. Overzealous participation in association activities also drains time and energy, especially since associations hope to increase their influence by fawning over one another.

### 5.3.4 Religious Community: Catholic, Christian and Buddhist Groups

As well as joining commercial organisations, many Chinese migrants are members of religious organisations. Migrants can distribute specific time for religious services and activities to balance their daily work and life in Prato. Nevertheless, different from the commercial community, which has specific requirements for entrepreneurial roles with certain financial expenditures for membership and organisational hierarchy among members, involvement in the religious community includes both migrant entrepreneurs and workers, older and younger generations, and male and female.

Due to its inclusiveness, the religious community functions as a social glue to combine the other three communities in many ways, such as family as a standard unit for religious participation, social support, especially for migrant workers and newcomers, and collective discussion and collaboration with other Chinese-run associations on socio-cultural topics.

There are three main religious groups for Chinese migrants in Prato: Catholic, Evangelic Christian and Buddhist. There is no exact statistical data on the membership due to the migrants' transnational mobility and irregular participation, based on my fieldwork, the capacity of each religious site volumes roughly 200-300 persons. The Catholic group is similar to the above-mentioned Italian association since it is a local branch of the Holy See from Vatican City, and members can make use of the involvement to get closer to local Italians and society. I interviewed a Chinese priest who came to Prato in 2020, and he told me about the church's history:

> "Our group was built twenty years ago. With the increasing number of Chinese Catholics in Prato parish, they wanted to find a Chinese priest to take care of the belief. The local parish chose a church near the Chinese residential area for us, close within seven to eight minutes on foot…I was studying Ethics at a Catholic institute in Rome then and took over the vacancy in Prato to offer the Chinese mass."
>
> (Shenfu, Chinese, Priest)

The Chinese church shares the venue with the local one and offers the mass every Sunday afternoon and other occasional events (see Figure 17). The Holy See regularly sends Chinese clergy to study and assist the Prato parish. The Catholic group offers free Italian language courses, after-class tutoring and language translation services for non-English speakers when seeing a doctor or dealing with government paperwork. According to Shenfu, the participants vary from dozens to hundreds with a high degree of mobility, and their involvement largely depends on disposable time during production high or low seasons.

Figure 17 Prato. Sunday mass in the Catholic Church

(Source: Photographed by the author in July 2023)

I participated in masses several times and observed that among roughly 30 participants each time, the majority of the participants were grandparents with their grandchildren and had more non-working time. Sometimes, the Italians joined the mass regardless of the Chinese language since both were familiar with the ritual. Moreover, some Italians are glad to know and help Chinese migrants via this religious community. Shenfu guided me to visit a local old couple. They are Pratese landlords for Chinese migrants and go to the same parish as them. One of their tenants, a Chinese couple, is also Catholic, doing business in Prato, and has limited capacity to take care of the child. The landlord Pietro and his wife participated in the newborn child's baptism with the Italian name Dante, helped with babysitting the boy, and accompanied the child.

It demonstrates trust on both sides: the Chinese parents feel comfortable giving their offspring to the Italian landlord, and the Italian landlord shows kindness in taking care of the "Chinese grandson". Because locals understand better the familiar Catholic religious community and tend to combine Chinese Catholics with social integration,

they also like to express more kindness. When I joined an excursion with the Catholic group, and they brought a flag with a bilingual expression “Chinese Catholic Community in Prato”, the hosting church and local Italians showed more hospitality than bewilderment.

Compared with the Catholic group pulling migrants into local society, the Buddhist group shows cultural affinity and pulls locals into the Chinese community. They invited the Catholic bishop and local governor to ring the bell for Chinese New Year and organised cultural activities such as the dragon dance and New Year parade to celebrate with locals. It is operating on behalf of the Buddhist association. With fundraising and donations from association members, they purchased the current land and built the temple in 2007 with the local parliament’s approval (see Figure 18).


Figure 18 Prato. Buddhist Temple Main Hall

(Source: Photographed by the author in February 2023)

The Buddhist temple strictly maintains its Chinese authentic display and is strongly linked to Chinese roots, from inviting monks via short-visit visas to shipping status of Buddha and temple decoration to following religious puja and a regular vegetarian diet. Unlike the Sunday mass in the churches, the Buddhist group started with daily morning chanting, which attracts retired, chiefly female migrants who are more available to get up early and pray for their family members. On occasional significant events such as Buddha's birthday, migrants come with their families, pay tribute, ask for blessings on their families and careers, and join vegetarian dinners afterwards. According to my interviewee, a volunteer helping in the Buddhist group, there were 60 dining tables for over 600 people before COVID-19, on average, dinner each time. The migrants have a familiar feeling in the Prato temple: a feeling of returning to their hometowns in rural China. The village customs are created for them in a foreign land.

Due to its religious and cultural function, the Buddhist association has a good reputation and large audience and further promotes business collaboration and solidarity. Zhixiong mentioned that his industrial association was founded with the help of a Buddhist association:

> "A large number of Chinese here, especially the first settled generation with certain social status and influence, are Buddhist. With their efforts and organisation, we had a forum among migrant entrepreneurs on market security. Other entrepreneurs and I got to know each other through the forum and discussed our association plan afterwards."
>
> (Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneur)

Like other associations mentioned in the commercial community, the Buddhist association represented the interests of Chinese entrepreneurs and incubated further Chinese organisations in Prato.

The last religious community is the Evangelic Christian group, which was also founded and run by Chinese migrants on their own. Wenzhou, as the central origin of migrants, was influenced by British missionaries in history, and many believed in Protestantism (Hong and Bi, 2018). The Christian group among the Chinese is narrowly understood as Protestantism.[26] Like Chinese Buddhists, migrants replicated the belief from home and created Christian associations in Prato with fundraising and donations among themselves. Furthermore, they developed a third path compared with the other two mentioned religious communities in Prato based on my observation. Firstly, unlike a leading religious centre such as a Buddhist temple or a Catholic church for the migrant population, the Christian associations are more decentralised and distributed into several sub-groups in the city. The Chinese Christian church venues can be as simple as a warehouse or an ordinary residency with the cross symbol in a very discrete and pragmatic way.

Secondly, away from any macro socio-cultural attachment to Italy or China, Christian communities show more independence and focus on their Chinese migrants themselves in Prato and their connection with the global Chinese Christian network if mentioned. They invited Chinese priests into their network and organised specific preaching sessions for younger audiences (lecture style and knowledge sharing) and older audiences (drama style and empathetic experience) so that family members could spend the whole Sunday together at the same place, create parent-child interactions and mitigate the generational gap (see Figure 19).

[26] Christianity includes Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and other denominations, while among Wenzhounese migrants, Christianity (基督教 or *Jidujiao*) mainly refers to Protestantism/Evangelism. It is, therefore, distinct from the Chinese Catholic community in Prato.


Figure 19 Prato. Sunday mass in Christian Church

(Source: Photographed by the author in July 2023)

Lastly, the Christian communities pay attention to the younger generation and their identity formation. The membership involvement in the Christian church is based on family, especially the younger generation born or growing up in Italy with an identity crisis and double stress from family and school. So, they find their peers and develop friendships with co-ethnic groups through weekly mass Chinese language courses and summer growth camps when they can speak Italian but are not integrated into the local society. My interviewee, Sanmu, is an entrepreneur and a volunteer who offers counselling for adolescents in a Christian church. He was brought to Italy via family reunion during his school time and shared his story:

> "Having grown up in Italy, I admit that children like us do not have roots in China, and we are different from pure Chinese or Italian. My mother brought me to the church, and

I found that children who grew up in church like listening to the pastor explain the Bible and gradually think about the meaning of life."

(Sanmu, Chinese, Investor/ Textile Manufacturer)

The Christian church helps cultivate migrants' identities, particularly the younger generation and fosters social cohesion among generations. As with the other two religious communities, Chinese Christians also work in social support and charity.

Among the three religious groups, membership and community involvement are mutually exclusive, and spending time in religious groups is not mandatory but is rather complementary to family and work. The religious community has online chat groups and offers online religious participation, while for dwelling and working communities, the majority of community involvement needs to be offline with physical interactions.

### 5.3.5 "Shopping Basket": Diversified Expressions of Social Capital

Based on the four central communities related to migrants' life in Prato, it is possible to summarise the differences among the Chinese migrant population, their life and career stages, preferences and time for involvement towards specific communities. Taking social capital as the combination of various networks and connections, the formation of social capital for each Chinese migrant, especially migrant entrepreneurs, is the presentation of a "shopping basket" based on rational community selection and dedication to time expenditure.

The dwelling and working communities are "essential shopping items" and more fundamental for migrants' adaptation and settlement, providing more bonding function based on a personal concentric network and personal development transition. In contrast, commercial and religious communities as "non-essential items" focus more on bridging the network with the help of the organisations and expanding the potential joints into an organisation-embedded network, as well as taking on more social

responsibility and autonomy for civil society. In some extreme cases by compressing time of personal life and childcare, migrant gained the time for involving in career development (Ceccagno, 2007b). As a result, all community involvements are highly flexible for migrants, and there is no static or fixed allocation of time to a specific community.

Moreover, each community type is not a pure ethnic community but is linked with both Chinese and Italian options. As migrant entrepreneurs, spending time interacting among different communities is not only what Goffman (1959) mentions as "dramaturgy", reflecting correspondent reactions as a result, but is also the acquisition of social capital as a process.

In most cases, the four communities do not have clear boundaries but are fluid, overlapped and merged. To allocate their time and resources and invest in communities for social capital, migrant entrepreneurs have the agency to find another suitable shortcut by establishing their community or to strategically multitask by folding several communities at once. For instance, if migrants are not from Wenzhou and are not satisfied with existing associations, they can create a new Dongbeiren (northeast Chinese) association based on their expectations (see Figure 20).

If some migrants want to spend more time with family and balance business and personal beliefs, they bring their children to workplaces to watch the business or to Sunday mass to save time. I conclude the two scheduling strategies, "decentralisation" and "fuzzification", with a discussion in the following section.


Figure 20 Prato. Workplace of Association of Northeastern Chinese in Italy

(Source: Photographed by the author in July 2023)

### 5.4 Strategic Community Shopping: Balance between Chineseness and Italian-ness

Migrants can rationally set preferences for specific communities, start "shopping" for the interactions and connections inside and eventually cultivate entrepreneurship. There are Chinese and Italian networks as end products embedded in each community. Behind the process, it is, in essence, the allocation of personal time and schedule for the formation of social capital, including networks, social norms, cognition and identity of belonging. The outcome of an individual's shopping basket is the diversified expressions of social capital. Cohen et al. (1972, p. 2) observed the potential risk of organised anarchies during the community shopping process and raised a "garbage can

model" to "view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which participants dump various kinds of problems and solutions as they are generated". In my research, the problem of Chinese migrants is the integration status being either under- or over-integrated. Echoing the last section, I refer to decentralisation to tackle under-integration and fuzzification to over-integration, respectively, based on the four case studies.

### 5.4.1 Decentralisation: Trade-off of Priority

Decentralisation refers to the refusal of adaptation or integration to specific centres and the solution to hedge risks and prepare for backup plans when migrants are under-integrated. It is typical to see how migrants take institutional restraints into functional benefits, especially when they are not sufficiently capable of confronting and solving problems straightforwardly.

**Case One: Efficient Communication - A Choice of Learning Languages**

Mastering the local language is a crucial part of social adaptation and migrant entrepreneurship (Portes and Rivas, 2011; Wei et al., 2019). The first generation came to Prato with a limited cultural background and was urged to support themselves financially as a vital purpose. Although local authorities and NGOs arranged Italian courses for integration, most of them had insufficient time to attend language classes and systematically learn Italian. Limited language skills removed the opportunity to obtain local information and resources, and further dependence on ethnic groups for life and work reinforced this vicious circle. Therefore, some migrants of the first generation either squeezed their time with family and ethnic work to have the language course or intentionally looked for communicative jobs such as vendors or worked for Italian companies to learn during employment. As a result, this incomplete language acquisition among some first-generation migrants created a unique expression system

among themselves by speaking Chinese with fragmented Italian words (sometimes with typos) and using alternative descriptions. For instance, many are used to saying *acqua* (water) instead of the Chinese word and call the Italian beer brand Moretti *laorentou* (older man's head/ 老人头) as the logo on the bottles shows an image of bearded man (see Figure 21). When they set the meeting point Via Pistoiese, the main road of the Chinese community, they say *Zhongguojie* (China Street/ 中国街) instead or describe


Figure 21 Prato. Beer Bottles of "Birra Moretti"

(Source: Photographed by the author in September 2022)

other landmarks such as well-known restaurants or supermarkets. Their offspring have a proper Italian school education and speak better Italian but still get used to and follow

the mixed expressions when they talk to other Chinese migrants. Again, migrants are afraid that their children know only Italian and forget Chinese, and they try to send their children to language schools to learn Chinese. My interviewee Daqiang expressed his opinion:

> "You notice the Sinophobia everywhere, and foreign countries (here: Europe) have the left and the right in the parliamentary system. Today, the leftists come to power and are pro-immigration, but tomorrow, the right-wing anti-immigration. I personally do not feel integrated; maybe my child feels better. However, anyway, as a Chinese ethnic, it is important to learn Chinese and remember your roots. At least we can return to China, we have much better houses at home in China. I always educate my child, you are Chinese, although you grow up here and love Italy, you also need to love China."
>
> (Daqiang, Chinese, Clothing Accessories Manufacturer)

Not only did the Chinese migrants see the importance and opportunities of the Chinese language and China, but also locals noticed the increasing Chinese migrant population in Prato as well as the Chinese travellers and businesspeople from China. As a result of cultural siphoning, some locals started speaking Chinese to attract Chinese business, and local Italian authorities launched Chinese social media accounts and posts on buses and websites to communicate with Chinese migrants. In a way, Italians are also pragmatic in prioritising hybrid messaging. However, this trend means more Chinese migrants in Prato speak Chinese and see learning Italian as unnecessary when their children speak Italian and can translate for them, or they can use translation apps or pay for any language translation service. Most importantly, the majority of their daily needs can be found and fulfilled without leaving the ethnic community.

**Case Two: Bypassing Problems - Rational Use of Institutional Loopholes**

Getting an Italian driving license is an institutional recognition and integration for entrepreneurial development since migrants need to acquire a legal residency permit as a precondition and pass the driving test in the Italian language. Migrants who were under illegal status and did not speak Italian could exchange their Chinese driving license for a temporary Italian one (Ambascita d'Italia Pechino, 2024). My interviewee Zhixiong explained it further:

> "On arrival in Italy, your Chinese driving licence can be exchanged into a temporary Italian one, valid for half a year. However, once you have registered a household (getting the residency permit) in Italy, the system can easily trace your data, your arrival date and how long you lived in Italy. Meanwhile, the illegal migrants are undocumented, and they can always exchange their driving licence whenever the current temporary one expires. There is no requirement to show any local identification files during application. The system was originally designed to offer convenience for the travellers."
>
> (Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneur)

In addition to the freedom of mobility regarding the right to drive in Italy, this freedom also includes the transnationalism between China and Europe. The Italian authorities followed the *EU 2019/1157, Article 4*[27] and cancelled the permanent residency permit (European Union, 2019), which requires migrants to switch the old paper document into a chip card and renew it every ten years. For Chinese migrant couples who have Chinese passports with Italian residency permits, if their child is born in Italy, the child has the same legal status as the parents and must stay in Italy until the age of 18 for an Italian citizenship application if needed (PratoMigranti, 2022a).

[27] Regulation (EU) 2019/1157 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on strengthening the security of identity cards of Union citizens and of residence documents issued to Union citizens and their family members exercising their right of free movement.

Correspondently, Chinese authority adheres strictly to single citizenship and is used to regulate that overseas Chinese citizens with foreign permanent residency permits are often required to cancel their *hukou* (household registration for civil administration). Since Italian-born Chinese infants no longer have Italian permanent residency permits, some parents will bring them back to China and apply for Chinese *hukou* registration to maintain their civil rights in China in case of any risks during policy changes. One of my interviewees said it is a way of creating two options as backup, and the child can later freely choose to be a Chinese or Italian citizen. Although there are also migrant offspring who have no interest in China and want firmly to join the Italian citizenry, the younger generation will likely stay inside the co-ethnic community without fully integrating into local society. Therefore, gaining the freedom of transnational movement with institutional endorsement mitigates the uncertainty and avoids the consequences of globalisation.

### 5.4.2 Fuzzification: Incorporation of Interest Binding

Compared with decentralisation, fuzzification represents the confronting tactics of incorporating common interests and expanding a larger community with migrants' over-integration into either single community. When common interests are more attractive and valuable, different parties can put disputes aside.

**Case Three: Maintaining Visibility - Mutual Invitation and Presence at Events**

Chinese migrants, who are active in commercial community associations, use events to raise both individual and collective visibility. Browsing from the new reports on events organised by migrant associations, such as forums, membership renewal congresses and celebration or host banquets, migrants often invite presidents from other associations, Italian officials, diplomatic staff of Chinese consulate and ideally officials from the Chinese local government attend, with follow-up press release on Chinese

social media. Conversely, when Prato authorities or the Chinese consulate organise migrant-related events, they also invite migrant associations' presidential members. Migrants see several overlapping advantages to attending or hosting these community events. Firstly, having guests from other communities is a sign of status and external recognition. The time investment for participation means the influence and the importance of the community itself along with the relevant persons. Secondly, being able to invite and host shows the confidence and sincerity for transparent communication. The migrant community involvement releases the signal of "I am ready and open for networking" to reduce misunderstanding and get regular feedback. Lastly, it demonstrates the constructive and collaborative atmosphere and social cohesion of the whole society, especially for further recognition from Chinese officials when they returned home. The same logic works for the Italian and Chinese authorities to document their efforts for a more significant interest acquisition.

During my fieldwork, I was invited to join a trade and cultural exchange banquet organised by a migrant County Chamber of Commerce in a high-end Chinese-run restaurant in the industrial area (see Figure 22). All participants drove their luxurious cars to the venue and followed the formal dress code. Their names were arranged and distributed to different dining tables based on their status and relevance to this event. It was the host event for the corresponding county officials from China and their business visit. In addition to the dinner, there was networking for information sharing and business promotion from both the Chinese and Italian sides.


Figure 22 Prato. A Trade and Culture Exchange Banquet

(Source: Photographed by the author in August 2023)

I was placed by the host to sit with Italian guests, and one was the wine dealer who provided wine products for this banquet. He is a friend of my interviewee and wanted to promote his wine business to the Chinese-run restaurant and global trade to China. Others shared their visit cards while toasting and introduced each other for further contact. The banquet or the migrant association played a role in providing a platform and network package for mutual communication, which saved time for repetitive multilateral meetings and created potential opportunities at the same time. Migrants via this event created the double ideal images for both Chinese and Italian authorities. For Chinese officials, they are outstanding overseas migrant representatives who are valuable for hometown economic investment and development, whereas for Italians, they are good citizens and brokers who bring international resources to Prato. Furthermore, the dual ambiguity creates a better foundation for communication. The event organiser strategically arranged for two Chinese councillors with Italian

citizenship to work as interpreters for the guest speeches. For Chinese officials, they felt respected since local councillors translated for them. The "Chinese" label from councillors created trust, and Chinese officials thought the communication would be smooth based on the same cultural context. The same is true for Prato authorities; the councillors are Italian citizens, and they represented the local interests and hospitality. Hence, being visible is the first step in creating good images, mutual trust, and collaborations for merging a common interest.

**Case Four: Creating Alliance - Local Political Participation**

As the proportion of Chinese residents in Prato grows, some migrants – particularly those from the second and third generations – have acquired Italian citizenship. They want to express their voices and have political participation and a choice when it comes to electoral deliberations. For instance, two Chinese-origin councillors in Prato are examples of further social integration. They are the first two migrant councillors in Prato, elected in 2019 (Francone, 2019). My interviewee, Wanshun, witnessed the whole process of the election, and he told me:

> "At first, many Chinese migrants did not want to be involved in the election because of the political struggles. They thought the political system was like the Chinese one, being sacrificed and kicked out without noticing anything.[28] Nevertheless, here in Europe, it is different…However, still, our candidates must choose wisely to be the civil (independent) candidates so that we can avoid getting involved in local party-political battles."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

One candidate, Teresa Lin, is a second-generation Chinese migrant who acquired Italian citizenship. Her father has a membership in a local industrial association. With

[28] According to interview excerpt, the political struggles in Chinese system are opaque and unpredictable, the tactics are subtle and implicit, and people need to interpret the signals from the words and actions based on the given context. Migrant entrepreneurs feel unwilling in dealing with untransparent environment and in offending any political party in Prato to lose personal interests.

the persuasion of a local Italian friend, Teresa was encouraged to join the election in the name of the association member. To gain more votes and increase the probability of winning the election, Teresa built an alliance with another candidate, Marco Wong, with a Chinese background as the group combination (Francone, 2019)(see Figure 23).


Figure 23 Poster for city councillor election of Marco Wong and Teresa Lin

(Source: Screenshot from website and edited by the author)

Therefore, they received votes from both the naturalised Chinese group and the local Italians from her father's association and were eventually elected as councillors. It is the strategic interest binding for both ballot boxes. For Chinese migrants, they raised an ethnic representative to follow, discuss and influence local governmental decisions, minimise the risk of severe discrimination and protect social rights. For Italians, the entrepreneurial experience and industrial background of candidates ensured their business interests. As a result, each community association member takes what he/she needs.

My interviewee Wanshun holds an optimistic attitude and commented:

> "It is too early for the councillors to raise proposals and to promote legislation; at least we shall wait one more generation. However, from now on, if we Chinese actively integrate into local society and respect the laws and orders here, then there must be a Chinese-origin mayor in Prato in the future. We need this confidence."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

The Italian also needs Chinese migrants to develop their interests. One of my interviewees is a member of a local association and helped with lobbying the local political election. Being Chinese and holding a Chinese passport, the canvassing actions for local candidate competitors would not raise suspicion. For Pratese authorities, migrants' involvement established an example for other Italian cities and proved its political progress and endeavour to socially integrate. The perfect fuzzification makes the buffer not only against conflicts and misunderstandings but also for arbitrage in many aspects.

### 5.4.3 Consequences of Strategic Community Shopping

By applying either decentralisation or fuzzification to balance migrants' personal social ties preference and identity cultivation, both strategies bring about ambiguity to an explicit confirmation and the buffer zone to gain profits and avoid risks. In most cases of ethnic entrepreneurship and social integration, it is beneficial and functional, But the consequences and the potential long-term damages are hard to ignore. Firstly, both decentralisation and fuzzification create unclear accountability for failures, and an inequitable allocation of credit and praise for successful resource-building accomplishments. When migrants come across problems, they could evade the situation or dilute their responsibility, or when they get praised and recognised, everyone could claim the maximal credit. Wanshun complained that his efforts were unseen by Chinese authorities:

> "At first, rice cookers were not allowed in enterprises. I spared so much effort in convincing local governments to amend the law, but they (other Chinese) had no idea and thought it was as simple as finding an acquaintance (connection) and asking for a favour. It does not work here. We (Chinese entrepreneurs in local associations) did this (convinced the local authority to approve the rice cooker), but the consulate did not know and just believed it was promoted by other migrant associations."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

Secondly, mutual indulgence and silence lead to continued problematic situations and more social division. When business disputes arise, communities are more likely to be peacemakers, and no one wants to stand out and confront the problem. Therefore, many associations have only limited enforcement without essential solutions. During the April garment label inspection and product seizure in 2023, many Chinese entrepreneurs were involved and fined due to their untraceable "Made in Italy" products. Changhong as president of a Chinese migrant association, failed to unite other migrant entrepreneurs for collective bargaining. He recounted the experience:

> "If we (Chinese migrants) are a united group, we can hire lawyers and organise press conferences…I called other migrant associations, but they kept silent and refused to express any attitudes. I planned to invite professionals and government officials to explain what 'Made in Italy' is for future improvement. No one responded in the end…It seems we have many associations. However, do they work? No. Every president is for himself, bragging about his photos with politicians. No one contributes."
>
> (Changhong, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Lastly, mutual toxic assimilation emerges when there are constant problems and unclear responsibility. Both Chinese and Italians will follow mutual solutions as shortcuts even though some approaches have adverse effects. For instance, Chinese

migrants insisted they learned about tax evasion and other business delinquencies from Italians since they rarely saw punishments or adverse news reports targeting local enterprises. My interviewee Haojie expressed his unsatisfaction:

> "When you see the news reports, it is always about Chinese delinquency and misbehaviour. They need political correctness; otherwise, their treasury is always in deficit. They can only throw all problems to the Chinese (to shift attention), and you barely hear any scandals from local enterprises in the media."
>
> (Haojie, Chinese, Fabric Recycler)

There are also Chinese who bring inappropriate behaviours into the local society. During my fieldwork, a migrant returnee Weimin, now running a pizza restaurant in Wenzhou, mentioned his wife's experience of giving birth in an Italian private hospital, since he had learned from other Chinese that some doctors in public hospitals were accustomed to implicitly requesting informal medical payment and therefore, he switched to the private one for better service. Migrants were angry but had to accept the fact that some Italian doctors asked for monetary favours since previous Chinese patients bribed them for quicker and better treatment and assimilated the locals. Similar reverse assimilations may happen in business operations.

**5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter starts with the multi-polarisation trend of the Chinese community and migrants' involvement in the process. The Chinese-run "Made in Italy" garments reveal the blurred boundary between the Chinese and Italian communities under the globalisation trend. Migrants are also shaped in the process and need to find out their identities, social ties, and communities to which they belong as entrepreneurial traceability. Instead of seeing the Chinese community as a whole, I argued that there are four central communities: dwelling, working, commercial and religious

communities to fulfil the migrants' demands from everyday life and career development. Among their involvement, Chinese migrants used "decentralisation" and "fuzzification", two strategies to overcome social integration problems. By confirming community preference, participating in organisations and communities, and making an impact, migrants acquired a scheduling strategy to accumulate and form the distributive social capital as a combination of different community sources. Hence, social capital here is formed as organisational resources. Referring to the perspective of time consumption and scheduling concerning community preference and involvement, the cultivated social capital is distributed and displayed as personal timetables of Chinese migrants and eventually embodied as their identity and sense of belonging. In other words, the social capital they own through community involvement defines what they are.

As for the identity trade-off of being Italian or maintaining Chinese, it is the ultimate reflection of migrants' social integration. For local Pratese, Chinese and Italian resemble to some extent such as family orientation and work devotion (Weibel-Orlando, 2012; Fels and Hamilton, 2013). It is not the pure result of imitation or integration but rather convergence and matchmaking. Most immigrants do not intentionally become a specific type of people via integration but rather balance their own identity perceptions in between, as well as path-dependent accumulation of their own social capital to form their own characteristics.

## Chapter 6 Elite Aspirations: Morality as Power on Migrants' Upward Social Mobility

> "In twenty years, the Chinese in Prato have been driving through from a broken-down Ape Piaggio to a luxurious Mercedes."
>
> - Antonio Selvatici (2016, p. 9)[29]

> "How do they (Chinese migrants) start from 'minus' (owing debts for) three years, or minus ten, twenty or thirty thousand euros, to becoming a downtown pub owner after a few years? It takes effort, of course. But sacrifice only is clearly not enough. Apart from working capacity, Chinese reply on relations to improve their social status."
>
> - Raffaele Oriani and Riccardo Staglianò (2008, p.26)[30]

### 6.1 Introduction

The influx of Chinese migrants in Prato has led to polarised outcomes over three decades (see Chapter 5). Along with their social integration process, some of them have managed to reach a higher social status in communities, while others remain unchanged. Accordingly, local attitudes towards Chinese presence fluctuate over time: from embracing the Chinese labour supplement after the industrial recession to expressing bewilderment at the migrants' sudden wealth. Then, an angry sentiment came along with the boom of Chinese-run businesses while the native economy continued to languish. The fierce confrontation and hostile environment continued over the years,

[29] Antonio Selvatici, Italian journalist, his books include Chinese illegal presence in Prato (*Il Sistema Prato:Il distretto industrial illegal dei cinesi e degli italiani*), Corona virus and Chinese propaganda (*Coronavirus made in China. Colpe, insabbiamenti e la propagangda di Pechino*), and Belt and Road Initiative (La Cina e la Nuova Via della Seta: Progetto per un'invasione globale).
[30] Raffaele Oriani, Italian journalist; Riccardo Staglianò, Italian journalist, both co-authored books on Chinese migrants in Italy (*I cinesi non muoiono mai* and *Miss little China*)

and gradually, many migrants successfully integrated into local society and strive for upward social mobility. This chapter explores the vertical polarisation in more depth.

**Two Portraits from the Chinese Community**

As a result of the large population and influential fast fashion production, Chinese presence has been an essential topic in the Pratese municipal elections between the parties and mayoral candidates for decades. However, in the latest June 2024 election, this topic was removed from the public discussion list due to a positive integration outcome and exotic touristic value, according to the local newspaper *Corriere Fiorentino*. Compared with previous independent candidates, this time, two Chinese-origin migrants joined different local coalitions: 18-year-old Luna Moggi for Gianni Cenci's centre-right and the cultural expert Xiaping Yang (known as Caterina, 60 years old) for Ilaria Bugetti's centre-left (Bernardini, 2024).[31] But for locals, their presence remains paradoxical since "a neighbourhood with evident Chinese populations, workshops, restaurants, shops, and other ethnic businesses in Prato has become a ghetto-like 'Chinatown' in the eyes of local *Pratesi* and a 'Chinese problem' to be 'fixed' if the city is to maintain its *italianità*" (Deng, 2024, p. 17).

Therefore, this "Chinese problem" image is strongly linked with various delinquencies and crimes through local Italian and international media exposure, such as the "Chinese mafia". *New York Times* covered the arrest of 33 Chinese mafia members by Italian police in Prato, who dominated transnational logistic networks across European countries and ran businesses such as prostitution, gambling, and drugs. They soon released the mafia leader Zhang Naizhong, however, who is known as "the black man" or "boss of all bosses" and who appeared in the well-known Italian magazine

[31] Ilaria Bugetti has been elected as the latest mayor of Prato municipality from June 2024.

*Panorama* as the cover photo (see Figure 24); he accompanied a political delegation from Beijing on a visit to Rome before his arrest (Pianigiani, 2018; Panorama, 2018).


Figure 24 Magazine cover "On a trip with the boss"

(Source: Screenshot from website and edited by the author)

It shows two portraits of Chinese migrants achieving upward social mobility and becoming elites in Prato: some strive for social and political participation through legal forms of economic achievement and positive social integration, while others embrace criminal activities to impose their power and create influence. For instance, in Selvatici's book, *Il sistema Prato: Il distretto industriale illegale dei cinesi e degli italiani* (*The Prato system: The illegal industrial district of the Chinese and Italians*), he exposed Chinese business delinquencies in Prato and their criminal interplays with Italian professionals (Selvatici, 2016). What Selvatici failed to understand is the motives and goals of these migrant entrepreneurs, which constantly drive these crimes.

In this chapter, I follow the elite formation framework and focus on how Chinese migrants justify organisational resources for their entrepreneurship and upward

mobility. First, I review the Chinese migrants' outward explorations and relevant literature on elite formation and analyse how moral power shapes migrants' resource acquisition. Then, I take migrants' three-step vertical social mobility from workers to entrepreneurs and at times to migrant leaders with moral considerations, such as hardship endurance, innovation, and efficiency. Lastly, the conclusion discusses the social capital duality shift behind the elite formation and the risks of overreliance on moral power.

### 6.2 Exploring Transnational Connections Beyond Prato

Recognition of their social status and elite titles comes not only from the ethnic community but also from the local society, even from the country of origin. Beyond Italian society, there are Chinese migrants acknowledged as *Qiaoling* (community leaders of the Chinese diaspora/ 侨领) with a positive reputation and social influences, another way to achieve elite roles through transnational activities (Zhou and Lee, 2015). For instance, the migrant leaders played a role in Prato and promoted cooperation among other Chinese migrant associations in and outside Italy.

They also attended governmental and diplomatic events at various administrative levels in both countries. In particular, the Wenzhou government highlighted the *United Front Work* (Chinese Communist Party's tactic alliance with non-party members/ 统战工作) and hired *Qiaolings* as international merchandising ambassadors for attracting talents and investments from Italy (Cheng, 2019; Wenzhou United Front Department, 2024; Hua, 2021). However, some migrant leaders' close relationship with Chinese authorities and the emerging overseas Chinese police stations based on their association headquarters in Prato raising discussions about China trying to intervene in Italian public security and violating the human rights of Chinese migrants (Pompili, 2022; Orlandi, 2022). The disputed media expression constantly tried to attain attention for

political debates and aggravated public panic and xenophobia. Apart from the practices of the sporadic migrant elites in receiving society with high media exposure above, local residents had limited knowledge of the majority of Chinese migrants.

In the book *I cinesi non muoiono mai* (*The Chinese Never Die*), Oriani and Staglianò pointed out the confusing facts that some Chinese could suddenly purchase local properties.

> "When they (Chinese migrants) can afford a house, no one knows where the money comes from. Suppose a Chinese family is able to open a shop. In that case, the curious locals are usually divided between supporters of the shadow of the triads and proponents of a mythical (Chinese) state economic expansion plan." (Oriani and Staglianò, 2008, p. 22)

The same story happened in Prato. Locals tend to focus on only the marginalised and isolated Chinese community with its self-sufficient business network and overwhelming working hours. Later, the rising Chinese groups could afford luxurious clothes, cars and houses in short term while locals were still suffering from unemployment and hard lives. It is not necessarily easy for locals to understand the entrepreneurial trajectory of Chinese migrants or figure out their influential sources. They read news reports and witness factual delinquencies such as labour exploitation, tax evasion, and organised crimes and simply attribute migrants' entrepreneurial development to those unethical behaviours (Bracci, 2015). In contrast, Chinese migrants highlighted their "innate" self-employment and competence in mobilising social capital among networks to fulfil the intrinsic "code of ethics" and gain their *mianzi* (face/ 面子) and respectful social status (Blanchard and Castagnone, 2015). Compared with horizontal social mobility among migrants, which embodies in same-level transition among groups and societies, ethnic entrepreneurship presents social

climbing to approach the higher position from a lower stratum (Sorokin, 2019). Deng and Xiao (2016) describe Chinese migrants' mobility in Prato as a bottom-up pyramid: from wage labourers to patty entrepreneurs and eventually to capitalists. The new challenge then shifts into how to maintain their advantage positions and ensure the acquired resources with proper and reasonable rhetoric when they have not become elites yet.

### 6.2.1 Way to Elites: Migrants' Upward Social Mobility

On the way to upward social mobility, the Chinese migrants face challenges and need to gain the power to legitimise their path, especially when they are not from the guest society but eventually replace the Italian part under the elite circulation trend (Pareto et al., 1935). Among Chinese presence, some migrant entrepreneurs have demonstrated not only leadership inside specific communities but also the agency to allocate organisational resources, which echoes the definition of "elite" from Lachmann (2000, p. 12): "Agents are included in an elite if they are essential to the operation of the elite's organisational apparatus and if they can leave and create their own apparatus". Rahman Khan (2012, p. 362) agrees with Lachmann's mention and concludes further that the elites "are those with power and resources" and manipulate power as "vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource", which implies implicit inequality and the possible exploitation through a privileged dominance due to Marxist interpretation. Tilly (1998) points this out as opportunity hoarding to perpetuate inequality and privilege since elites can manipulate power for resource control and dominance maintenance; the non-elites who acquiesced to inequality but managed to acquire power and resources can be transformed as elites in this upward mobility dynamics, including entrepreneurs.

Scholars have explored elite formation and social mobility in terms of marriage and family (Padgett, 2010; Adams, 2007), education and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1998; Lamont, 2009) and occupation and bureaucracy (Friedman et al., 2015; Lachmann, 2003). For some elites, their privileged class is born and inherited in an entrenched society where aristocratic legacies are distributed. The boundaries embedded with norms and distinctions are created. In contrast, others need to find a way to gain that position in the elite circle or create a new circle since they are not beneficiaries of the aristocracy. Rather, as outsiders excluded from the privilege, they firmly believe in meritocracy with their efforts. This logic applies largely to the first generation of migrant entrepreneurs.

### 6.2.2 Boosting Prosperity: Leverage of Social Capital

In essence, the elite formation reflects not only the success stories of individuals with leadership but also the collective elitism through social capital acquisition and mobilisation (Zhou, 2000; Holmqvist, 2017). Holmqvist (2017) emphasises the community's influence and aura instead of purely meritocratic principles, as a good environment can modify members' behaviours. If one is able to get recognition and squeeze into such an aura community, this mutually supportive and beneficial vibe facilitates a convenient elite path with higher social prestige (Beth, 1942). This social prestige, in return, is embedded in both interpersonal and institutional trust, as I understand social capital in the community, which is trust, reciprocity, and the widely agreed social norms and shared identity (Torche and Valenzuela, 2011; Schafft and Brown, 2000; Putnam, 1995; Fukuyama, 1995). Social capital functions as the resource circulating inside the community and, therefore, links the members together. Correspondingly, communal solidarity multiplies the utilities of social capital and creates greater leverage as a consequence.

However, in some cases, social capital can be mismatched with its real value when an individual pretends to have a connection with other social members and be part of the community. This fictional social capital is still functional to support both personal and communal development, as long as the reciprocity is fulfilled within an acceptable term (even if it is delayed), and one-side invest-wise trust is not extra-overdrawn before other members discover this capital speculation. Referring to the innovation of economic capital to stimulate commerce, the bank credit system and overdraft (allowing customers to withdraw more than they have in their accounts) were first introduced by the Royal Bank of Scotland in 1728 to address a cash flow issue faced by a client, William Hog, in managing his account balances. This innovation ensured the continuous circulation of capital within the economy, which Hume ([1752]1985, p. 319) praised as being "equivalent to ready money" and "one of the most ingenious ideas that has been executed in commerce". Thus, credit and overdraft are important financial tools for understanding how individuals leverage limited resources or borrow against future income to realise personal development.

Komporozos-Athanasiou (2022) further developed the idea by introducing speculation to explore relational activities and imagine profits behind uncertainty, connecting the Zeitgeist of financialization. In maximising social relations under this trend, there are two ways of leveraging social capital: fiction and exaggeration. As Quinn (2010) explains, the imagined social capital brought about the outsiders' sense of belonging to shape their subjectivity and justify their behaviours, while such social capital *per se* is rooted in other's appraisal, and with its imaginary feature, one must make meaning and gain ethical value to ensure the social mobility (Ivana, 2017; Evens, 1999). The second type, exaggeration, embodies an overestimated value of social capital between expectation and reality. Often, this overestimation of social capital

stems from poor communication, intentional silence, or a turbulent environment (Schelling, 1980; McGoey, 2012a; Pratono and Mahmood, 2014). Therefore, an appropriate overdraft of social capital stimulates overall prosperity, whereas abuse causes uncertainty in moral hazard and a trust crisis.

According to Fukuyama (1995), the accumulation of social capital needs social virtue and mutual trust to boost overall prosperity; he categorises both China and Italy as low-trust societies which heavily depend on family instead of civil communities. This acknowledges the importance of morality along with cultivated trust to sustain the legitimacy of accumulation. Still, it fails to understand exceptional Third Italy in the Prato region, which Putnam et al. (1993) describes as high-level social capital. Moreover, migrant entrepreneurship develops more than kinship connections in the Chinese community. When Chinese migrants came to Italy and wanted to expand their business, relying solely on familial trust was not enough to support their business success and boost such prosperity. For instance, the highlight of personal agency and the belief in meritocracy show the attitude of Chinese migrants striving for their recognised social status in a new society. Step-by-step, migrants develop their social and commercial networks and are able to appropriate social capital, build influence and turn to aristocracy to sustain the attained interest. This pragmatic value orientation is embedded in ethnic entrepreneurship to keep the flexibility of resource access.

### 6.2.3 Power of Morality: Endorsement for Behavioural Legitimacy

One must not only integrate into the system in a way to expand the social capital reservoir but also manipulate (at least acquire) the power to sustain the advantage and keep this resource secure and dispensable since this social capital provides confidence and competence endorsed by collectives. To maintain that advantage and achieve mobility, migrants need to use political, economic, cultural and knowledge power for

the legitimacy of behaviour and status (Rahman Khan, 2012), while morals as another power source are often ignored or merged into a cultural dimension.

Holding morality as power plays a role in guiding and evaluating one's behaviours and cultivating social consensus and shared values. If migrants manage to share such moral sentiments and get sympathy from others, they are included in a community with disposable social capital resources. As Adam Smith (2010, p. 87) states, "truth and justice do not rejoice in being wealthy but in being believed and trusted, and those are rewards that those virtues must almost always acquire". Morality helps entrepreneurs face uncertainty with prudence and guide everyday practices while minimising risk and criticism (Knight, 2009; West, 2024). In this way, entrepreneurship contains several levels of moral considerations: from the individual level, practising entrepreneurship can be a calling to create wealth with autonomy and enchant God's glory as Weberian acknowledgement of the protestant ethics to work for duty instead of indulgence or enjoyment, whereas Schumpeter highlights innovation and leadership for necessary commercial success and social progress (Brouwer, 2002; Weber, 1930; Schumpeter, 1912). In contrast, Chinese entrepreneurs are more collective and family-oriented, and their entrepreneurial motivations derive from Confucianism and ancestor worship to glorify the family and contribute to their hometown (Zheng and Wan, 2022; Murphy, 2000). This echoes the collective level of entrepreneurial practice.

Durkheim emphasises that professional ethics lay the foundation of collective life and the agreed social norms, which Fukuyama relates to social virtue and national prosperity (Durkheim, 1957; Fukuyama, 1995). In this case, social entrepreneurship is linked to expectations about both the motive and solution to socioeconomic development, philanthropy and civil society creation, regardless of inequality and exploitation hidden behind the promised short-term necessary sacrifice (McGoey,

2012b; Sud et al., 2009; Roper and Cheney, 2005; Isenberg, 2014). Migrant entrepreneurs not only achieve their goals but also contribute to the broader society with ambition and novelty, which sheds light on the possible path of upward social mobility; meanwhile, any of their business delinquencies find legitimacy with moral support, and these misbehaviours are glorified for their greater ambitions to further leverage the resources from/ for the community.

### 6.3 To be "Diligent" Workers: Bearing Hardship as A Tonic

Chinese migrants' first leverage behaviour began with socioeconomic resources embedded in the family clans and town fellowship; many borrowed money and incurred debts to immigrate abroad, and the primary purpose for Chinese immigration and entrepreneurial practice is to improve life as quickly as possible because they were burdened with double expectations from both money lenders at home and the opportunities providers in Prato, who sometimes also helped and paid for immigration applications and needed to fill the labour shortage. For these newcomers, working in the fast fashion industry is both a limited but profitable choice in Prato, and a straightforward way to respond to the expectations is to show one's working competence and reliability, even though Chinese migrants almost sacrificed themselves at the cost of health, living and working conditions. Such kind of leverage may be like a tonic for some Chinese but seems toxic for others.

#### 6.3.1 Diligent Work Until Fatigue

Showing good qualities, such as enduring hardship, is a positive signal for gaining trust and responding to reciprocity when they overdrew social capital from the ethnic networks. As a result of piece-rate production and performance payment system, many migrants insist on an extended working shift for considerable incomes; meanwhile, their intensive working devotion and fatigue status dilute their social integration into

local society and willingness to improve their living quality. When they have nothing to prove their potential in entrepreneurship, pledging themselves and the trust from their networks for handwork shows their attitude and commitment. From this standpoint, working intensively and bearing hardship without complaint becomes a consensus of good quality to prove one's productivity, reliability and working devotion.

When migrants constantly hold long-term diligent work, that work becomes a hardship. If migrants bear that hardship, they get recognised with moral and reliable images, especially when they are hired by relatives or acquaintances. Some Chinese migrants are rather proud of being endurance and diligence in standing on their own feet through this experience, and they hold meritocracy in high regard, emphasising their endeavours over existing opportunities. The current self-overdraft and exploitation from work is for long-term entrepreneurial preparation since the market situation is good. As long as they hold that belief for being a boss in the future, then the poor dwelling and working situation is bearable. When they first came to Prato and faced orders from local fast fashion clients who were in urgent need of labour, Chinese migrants managed to win the competition and, for the very first time, earn a large amount of money from the business operation, by reducing the offer and shortening the production. Gradually, they occupied the market and hardworking became inertia without brakes. Chinese migrants challenged the fast fashion industry and pushed it into another peak of overly fast production with low costs. This working style and payment confined migrants to hardworking conditions and moral coercion for striving for regular working conditions. As a result, their commitment to the marketplace has further accelerated fast fashion.

What the Chinese migrants often fail to acknowledge is their ignorance of personal safety based on their opportunistic mindset. As long as they have production orders and

payments, the overwhelming workload and risky production are bearable. Exploitations often happen at workplaces. Chinese migrants suffered from intensive workloads and poor working conditions, but rarely did they speak out or bargain collectively. During my interview with a local trade union staff, Carla, we discussed the Chinese migrants' working conditions in Prato. She told me:

> "In these years, we have had some contacts with some Chinese workers, but very few are (union) members…Sometimes we have the impression that the problems are more the lack of a link to them instead of the fact that they maybe cannot or do not want to (join the union)."
>
> (Carla, Italian, Trade Union Staff)

For migrants from China, the trade union in Italian society was an unfamiliar or biased concept, as what they read from WeChat official accounts' news reports or the app *Huarenjie*, the migrant online community forum about unions, is mainly focused on the intentional interruptions with strikes in front of their factories and companies. Chinese migrants in the interviews described unions as either extortion senders or unpractical talkers. They prefer spending time working instead of union activities, as the payment speaks louder than the slogans. They can either bargain for higher payment when the order is urgent or leave to another employer for better-paid work, as long as the market demand is high, and no fixed full-time contract is signed. Furthermore, the bounded solidarity inside the migrant community made any strikes or collective bargaining hard when they wanted to maintain good relations and avoid conflicts.

Despite the genuine exploitation, the migrants' motives are often ignored by media coverage. The enslaved and forced work reported in the media is also suspicious since some exploitations were voluntary to pay off the debt as soon as possible, based on my fieldwork. Moreover, employers would fire incapable and low-efficient workers after a

probation of two months. Migrant entrepreneurs preferred part-time contracts for less tax. Meanwhile, workers benefited from flexible arrangements of employment among employers. As a result, locals were gradually convinced of the factual delinquency with biased perceptions, and migrants chose either to ignore the message or not to argue back. Therefore, some brought the same habit when they moved abroad and practised the business. As the book *The Chinese Never Die* mentioned:

> "The Chinese are mainly mysterious. They live in the shadows of their wholesale shops and disappear into the backrooms of restaurants and workshops. They work, they earn money, they are tough on themselves to the point of asking for nothing, but they have fearsome large numbers…Our impressions of Chinese were full of energetic worker troops or like little ants armed with boxes and vans, with expressionless faces that you cannot tell their happiness or frustration." (Oriani and Staglianò, 2008, pp. 12-13)

Bearing hardship and keeping in silence seems both tonic and toxic. In China, being silent was a survival way for self-protection and trouble avoidance when the central government did not release the private economy and took any trades as speculation and profiteering in the 1980s. The pioneering private entrepreneurs in Wenzhou were sentenced to economic crime, known as the "*Eight Big Kings*" incident (八大王事件) because the Chinese state authority was not ready for non-public economies due to ideological restrictions; meanwhile, some Wenzhounese began breaking the laws and traded light industry goods without governmental permission (Zhang et al., 2013). When Wenzhounese moved abroad, they tended to learn from these lessons and behave rather low-key.

Migrant newcomers get ethnic support in settlement and work, but it is not the ideal option as exploitation exists and support from local society is rare. Being tough in front of hardship becomes a forced but also self-hypnotic decision. Still, they overdraw

through hard work, gain access to ethnic networks and accumulate social capital, which is typical in the first generation and their entrepreneurial stories. Their reputation is recognised and amplified inside the ethnic community through their hardworking behaviours.

Over time, the new generation updated the idea of work-life balance. Sanmu, a religious Christian and entrepreneur in various industries, including textile, retail and further investments, mentioned his efforts on cultivating enterprise culture based on Bible doctrine and promoting four days off a month in his firms (compared with other companies' two days off). In some cases, the migrant entrepreneurs suffer, exploit themselves and work intensively with workers during the high seasons if they cannot solve the labour shortage. During the low seasons with no rare orders, there is almost no working shift at all, but employers still need to pay for the basic salary and all operational costs. Therefore, it is hard to identify pure exploitation with solely migrant workers overtime in certain months of the year.

### 6.3.2 Non-transferable Hardship Until Self-exploitation

Most Chinese interviewees in my research take hardship endurance as a kind of virtue, which is effectively a way of self-exploitation for future development. At the same time, Chinese migrants set a moral hierarchy to despise those who do not cherish working opportunities or depend on state welfare to be lazy in Italian society.

Sidan has a more comprehensive local social connection through her real estate business in both migrant accommodation and factories. She told me:

> "We regard Prato as a second hometown; every country has its good and bad sides. Indeed, some Italians do not like Chinese. I know many *laowai,*[32] and they were diligent

[32] *Laowai* literally means "foreigner" in Mandarin Chinese/ 老外, but here migrant interviewees use it to refer to local Italians.

and worked 24 hours in their textile factories (see Figure 25). In the 1960s, Italians (here Pratese) were very rich. The sons of these factory owners thought their fathers had money, and they quit. Gradually Chinese took over the industries, and many Italians were unhappy about the situation (understanding this as stealing their jobs). It does not actually; it is because we are diligent. If they want to work, there are always some jobs. They just do not want to do it when they become rich and lazy."

(Sidan, Chinese, Real Estate Realtor)


Figure 25 Prato. A time recorder exhibited in Textile Museum with "three shifts without interruption" working hours regulation

(Source: Photographed by the author in September 2022)

Like the second generation of Chinese migrants, many mentioned they would not let their offspring experience the hardship of intensive work, such as stepping on sewing machines; they also mentioned that their children are better off and integrated into local society, so they show no interest in working in such intensity and enduring hardship (*chiku*/ 吃苦[33]).

Confronting the significant market demand and labour shortage, Chinese entrepreneurs turned to Chinese migrant newcomers from other regions (Dongbei, Henan and other inland provinces) and non-Chinese migrant workers (mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi). An apparel company owner Changhong complained about the labour crisis when he hired non-Wenzhounese workers:

> "When we had the high production season (and needed labour), we paid ¥70,000-80,000 (around €9,000-10,000), including the labour visa application to recruit workers from China. Dongbei people did not care about your cost. They stayed for short periods; as long as they earned ¥20,000-30,000 (around €25,800-38,700), they returned to China (without caring about whether your production orders were finished)."
>
> (Changhong, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Hard work is fading due to the first generation's retirement and not transferable to their offspring and other migrant newcomers since the improved living standards and new attitudes toward work-life balance.

Furthermore, industrial relations are more challenging for hired non-Chinese workers. In addition to Chinese migrants, Prato has migrants from other ethnicities, mainly including South Asian, East European, and African (Comune di Prato, 2023). Some Chinese entrepreneurs started to hire non-Chinese migrant workers for garment

[33] *Chiku*, literally means "Eating bitterness" in Mandarin Chinese, with a well-known idiom 吃苦当吃补 (Eating bitterness is eating a tonic).

production, stocking, and logistics. However, many felt regretful and expressed their disappointment in the interviews. Wenyue, an apparel company owner, told me about the bad reputation of hiring Pakistani workers:

> "A couple of days ago, my friend, who runs a cutting company, thought hiring a Pakistani was a good decision, better than a Chinese worker. Well, now he gets extorted €10,000 by the Pakistani worker who worked over five years there…When we were busy, they said they were too sick to work, wearing headphones for video chats with their wives. When we were catching up on goods, tagging labels and cutting the thread, by the time we did a hundred pieces, they had not even finished ten…They know it is the time when you sign the formal contract with them, and you cannot fire them. Once you do, they extort you."
>
> (Wenyue, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

This is not an isolated case of Chinese factory owners wanting to manage the cost and use undocumented labour from South Asia while these migrants acted as tainted witnesses, reporting the illegal employment to acquire social protection residency permits as a springboard. Chinese entrepreneurs felt betrayed because South Asian migrants first approached them for work opportunities, and both agreed with the working and payment conditions, but migrant workers did not value the jobs (ANSA, 2021; New European Overseas Chinese Newspaper, 2021a). Other Pakistani workers expressed dissatisfaction as their co-ethnic peers broke the silent rule of the underground economy and made the job-seeking situation worse (New European Overseas Chinese Newspaper, 2019). If they know that employment in Chinese companies and factories is unbearable before getting hired, there is no need to work for Chinese employers at the very beginning; they could quit at any time unless the rent-seeking profits, such as legal status applications or compensations, are attractive.

In most cases, South Asian migrant workers organised strikes with local trade union against the Chinese employers at the very beginning, and they asked for compensation and a formal full-time contract. For local Italians and trade unions, it is crucial to raise the migrant workers' awareness of working rights, help with necessary collective bargaining, and condemn the Chinese entrepreneurs' exploitation. However, they failed to acknowledge the workers' actual working status and the intensity during off-peak seasons.

The ambivalence is visible from the designations given to South Asian migrant workers. Chinese entrepreneurs tend to call them the racial term *banhei* (half black/ 半黑) to classify their presence as a convenience, which is associated with danger and crime (Deng, 2023), while for the Chinese official media discourse, they are called *batie* (Pakistan iron brother/ 巴铁[34]) from the good Sino-Pakistani diplomatic relations (Asif et al., 2021). This discrepancy between official and private perceptions of South Asian labourers caused asymmetric moral judgement since the Chinese wanted to treat Pakistanis as friends for help and take for granted that their South Asian neighbours held the same dream of wealth and could work hard.

However, their personal experiences contrasted with the positive political propaganda on Chinese media about Pakistanis, and Pakistani employees failed to work together with Chinese employers. Hardship endurance can be toxic instead of a tonic for some migrant workers. Moreover, Wanshun, a textile manufacturer and vice-president of a local association, pointed out the ridiculous fantasy of some Chinese entrepreneurs:

[34] There are South Asian workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries, but Chinese migrants refer to the majority as Pakistani.

> "The Italian laws regulate that (it is legal for) workers (to) seek help from trade unions and entrepreneurs from commercial associations. (But) the entrepreneur associations speak for (us) enterprises; in this (strikes) situation, we can negotiate on an equal footing with the unions. It is not your personal heroism as a business representative; they (other Chinese employers) do not understand it at all…One entrepreneur said as long as we talked to General Consul Wang and let him communicate with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs that, Pakistan is our China's little brother. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should inform (the Pakistani Embassy) to stop the strikes, and things would sort out. But it is impossible."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

Hence, self-exploitation is not a suitable choice for everyone. Not everyone wants to move upwards and achieve a higher goal, in particular an entrepreneurial goal. Bearing hardship is highly praised in the first generation of Chinese migrants but gradually loses its charm among some local Italians, Chinese offspring, and non-Chinese migrants.

The way to be a good worker shows how migrants are institutionalised in the exploitation system. The outcome is the acknowledgement of their hard work from employers and potential support to be an entrepreneur. Chinese migrants, especially the first generation and those not from certain networks but wanted to gain resources, suffered from exploitation and tolerated unfair working conditions in silence. However, they were also institutionalised and later defended exploitation as bearing the hardship and diligence, sometimes becoming the victims of others' speculative behaviours. Overall, through hardship and endurance as overdraft, they achieve and justify the first social leap, from owing to owning.

### 6.4 To be "Pragmatic" Entrepreneurs: Innovative to Challenge The Rules

The second leverage behaviour of Chinese migrants is related to their business practices and ethics. Throughout the Prato industrial history, fast fashion development seems another "from rags to riches" tale. The profitable narratives of this industry in Prato are widely spread among the Chinese community in Italy and at home in China. But the business story is not a rose fairy tale, but rather a survival game of a jungle. When migrants arrived in Italy and began their fast fashion business, solely depending on good qualities such as hard work was not enough. Rather, they needed to figure out rules in the guest society and chose either to obey or break the rules, even though sometimes they would take the risk and bad reputation. Therefore, Chinese migrants sometimes need to be innovative in their business operations by both breaking and respecting the rules.

#### 6.4.1 Pragmatic Handling Sprit of Contract and Business Partnership

In the eyes of local Italians, the Chinese migrants are paradoxical. They respect the spirit of the contract and avoid causing trouble and inconvenience, but they challenge the regulations and take advantage of institutional loopholes. My Italian interviewee, Antonio, an Italian restaurant owner and a landlord for Chinese tenants, mentioned his renting experience:

> "Everything we did in the contract, we expect each other. That is why I have this continuity of business with them. We (my family and I) know many local people and Chinese migrants, but no Chinese have any problems with rent. The Chinese tenants say they would leave if they could not afford the rent, but some Italian tenants would stay in their flat for years without paying rent or taking care of the flat."
>
> (Antonio, Italian, Restaurant Owner/ Landlord)

Chinese migrants as tenants win a good reputation for obeying the contracts, but the inappropriate habits of many migrants have discouraged the local neighbours. For instance, there are Chinese migrants turning their rented flats into several partitioned rooms for other Chinese compatriots. This sneaky lodging system is essentially challenging the local rental regulation. Antonio disagreed with the rental housing exploitation and acknowledged that this also could be from local landlords:

> "A house, for example, was suitable for a person, but 14 persons used to live inside. You can imagine how disaster was like to keep the house in good condition. That is why there are always some Italians (landlords) taking profit from this. They used to give them (Chinese tenants) the houses for rent at higher prices but in very bad conditions. Because (the local landlords knew) the Chinese (would be silent and) really did not want to get any problem with that...it was more like a dormitory."
>
> (Antonio, Italian, Restaurant Owner/ Landlord)

Both landlords and tenants kept silent in front of this injustice. From the landlords' perspective, regardless of whether the landlords are Chinese or Italian, terrible rental conditions must be kept under the table for exploitation and profit gain. For Chinese tenants, despite lacking language skills, knowledge, and necessary social support from the local society, they need only basic living conditions even at the price of silence and endurance and without any rights to select or bargain.

Chinese migrants also mentioned that at their first business stage in Prato, there was underpayment or even refusal to pay for transactions by Italian customers who withheld completed goods. This targeted the migrants' weak social network and legal awareness and took advantage of their labour. Later, when some of them ran garment factories or apparel companies and did not dispose of textile waste on time, the local law-

enforcement officers would pick the nearest rainy day to ticket a fine.[35] My interviewee Zhixiong, a startup entrepreneur, concluded this as a resilient punishment: the Italian authority did not condemn the business to bankruptcy; rather, the fine is constant but painful enough to the business owners. The uncertainty and non-transparency from both commercial and official interactions created the pragmatic flexibility of migrant business practices and the likelihood of breaking the existing rules. Sometimes, migrants get official recognition with fewer inspections and penalties by joining local associations, or even better with government subvention to purchase equipment and upgrade their manufacture. Still, most times, they are not endorsed and have to resort to delinquency in the name of innovation. As for tagging the "Made in Italy" label on clothes made and imported from China,[36] taking cash or card payment for lower tax reporting, some migrant entrepreneurs can fully customise the clients' needs, as long as they justify themselves by obeying the clients' trade contract.

In the process, migrant entrepreneurs are victims: their factual crime is often exposed in the media and stereotyped negative image of the whole ethnic group with more frequent and harsher inspection and punishment, but they lose the opportunity to speak for their rights without proper operation and formal contracts. These are the typical fake social capital which leads to the "bad bank" situation. Haojie shared details about his textile fabric recycling business and the business fraud by the Italian partner:

> "Our (wool recycle) business was very bumpy. The value of the wool waste depended on the wool content rate. They (the Italian suppliers) sold it and promised you 99%, but later we shipped the wool waste to China and checked the actual rate was 60%, which

[35] Since the amount of fine is related to the weight of the waste and wet weather increases the weight and the cost

[36] According to my interviewee Haojie, a fabric waste recycler, sometimes if the item for sale is not tagged, then it is hard to trace the production information and creates the possibility for tax evasion.

failed the trade value. It is complicated; sometimes, the customers run away, and sometimes so do the suppliers. We did not earn much through this business."

(Haojie, Chinese, Fabric Recycler)

Hence, Chinese migrants shared their business experiences through their networks and flagged risky business partners. The consensus on client image from certain regions (including Chinese) among migrant entrepreneurs not only reduced the external risks but also enlarged the bounded solidarity inside the ethnic communities. Social capital acts as a network amplifier, ensuring faster circulation and flow of market information and intensifying either positive or negative reputation of the members and their business inside the community.

Haojie's company gradually gained a good reputation among Chinese entrepreneurs and local authorities, including the intermediary introducing business. Over time, migrant entrepreneurs knew how to protect their rights and invented the system to maintain the business. From another perspective, migrants such as Ailan mentioned the beneficial relations with some clients. Ailan runs an apparel company and shares the story of her business partners with benefits:

"Many times, the clients gave you inspiration during the communication. They would point out how to improve this dress and match other items or elements. Sometimes, they gave you a model and asked if you could make it with another material."

(Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

It is an unspoken rule for Chinese entrepreneurs not to step into other Chinese-run fast fashion companies (especially the same category items) and avoid plagiarism and internal competition with unnecessary misunderstandings. Ailan has several friends in fast fashion businesses; she usually meets them after work instead of at each other's garment companies or stays only for a short in other garment companies in case of a

necessary visit. But it is a smart way to get the latest popular items without being suspected of commercial espionage since clients can visit other fashion companies to explore the market trend and get feedback on information from the entrepreneurs who have worked for and kept good relations for a long time. The clients become the extended joining of migrants' network for information expansion, which happens when mutual trust exists and mutual benefits bonds. As for transaction safety, Ailan usually sends the invoice to unfamiliar clients and ships the items after receiving the remittance, whereas she ships the orders first to the familiar clients and keeps popular items on the season, and then makes a settlement afterwards every one to two months, sometimes with a discount when the turnover is high enough. Ailan continued to explain the credit system for cash flow circulation:

> "Sometimes, our supplier, the textile factory, allows us to owe some money, and we allow the customer to owe some. For example, I owe the factory €20,000; the customer owes me €40,000. I tell the customer to transfer €20,000 directly to the factory in my name. Then, there is an offset between me and the factory…I later received the remaining €20,000, half of which became my profit."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Migrant entrepreneurs borrow the customer relationship and credit system to leverage business information and the trade scale respectively. Regardless of interpersonal or institutional trust, both are social capital embedded in the migrants' network for the larger opportunity. Ailan mentioned that bank transfers would take 22% tax from the payment. Therefore, the Chinese were more flexible about taking both cash and card payments but preferred cash if possible, which led to solely trust-based risky transactions and possible tax evasion.

### 6.4.2 Trade-offs of Showing and Hiding Wealth

This leverage needs not only the entrepreneurs' agency for innovation but also the institutional setting. Therefore, trade-offs of self-presentation in certain contexts play a role. Putting one's wealth on or under the table reflects the trust levels inside the whole community. Migrant entrepreneurs tend to prove their success by purchasing real estate and luxurious cars, which creates the image of capable entrepreneurs who know how to make money, and their businesses look successful. For instance, Zhang Naizhong, the head of a Chinese gang whose business started from Prato logistics in fashion products, spent €80,000 hosting a luxurious wedding for his son in Rome (La Reppublica, 2018). It is efficient to express migrants' business performance or potential to current and future clients, leverage large-scale transactions and achieve higher social status as part of the elite group; however, it attracts the attention of local authorities and raises more suspicion with inspection fines, and sometimes along with thefts and robberies from others. During my fieldwork, Chinese migrants noticed that when they parked premium brand cars outside their apparel companies, the local officers probably issued a higher fine.

In spite of their hard work, some parts of the business operation are not entirely legitimate. With economic capital, Chinese migrants demonstrated their improved social status and amplified it among migrant networks, local authorities, and business partners outside Prato. The amplification brings about both opportunities and risks. Moreover, it brings nuance to those well-integrated migrants. Wanshun told me it was hard for him, as vice-president of Chinese origin in a local association, to proactively raise and criticise Chinese misbehaviours, such as dumping commercial fabric wastes without paying the disposal fees. Only when the local Italian members of the associations mentioned the phenomenon, did Wanshun start to echo the issue and join

the condemnation. It is a strategy for migrants' self-protection since criticising co-ethnic migrants as deviant does not help to increase recognition from locals rather than losing their roots in the ethnic community.

With their ethnic community and credit system, migrants are able to bring their earnings back to China and support their families. This was, firstly, their motivation and responsibility to move abroad and justification for their transnational wealth mobility since they were excluded from the local financial system at the very beginning. Gradually, when some of them planned to settle down in Prato and purchase local properties, but their wealth suffered from suspicions and threats. Sending money back home, whether using the legal or illegal way, became the persuasive option. Once they failed to use the local legal bank transfer system and get addicted to any illegal shortcuts, there would be more following this path dependency and even joining the shadow economy. Since migrants cannot separate legal from grey earnings, even illegal part, it becomes a cat-and-mouse game. Migrants tried their best to work hard and take possible loopholes to maximise their income, while local authorities updated regulations and increased penalties to hopefully reduce the need to eliminate such business delinquencies. The mistrust between both parties escalated into a vicious cycle. It did not work out as expected, as local authorities complained about the replication of the economic model. When the fine bill is high enough to shut an apparel company down, Chinese migrants refuse to pay the penalty and restart another company in the name of their family members and relatives. The social capital among migrants guaranteed the business operation in spite of external interventions, while the broad social capital in the local society was fully overdrawn without being paid off.

The penalties have spread to those migrant entrepreneurs who run honest and legal businesses since they suffer from more frequent inspections, and the mistrust from Prato

law enforcement authorities has increased. During my interviews, some migrant entrepreneurs complained about the constant bills from the tax authority, especially when they insisted that they had done the business properly and hired accountants for the books and tax reports. Wanshun explained the possible reason to me as a result of a mutual misunderstanding:

> "It is not a penalty but an unpaid tax reminder with transaction fees and interests. When the tax office asked Chinese entrepreneurs why they did not pay VAT from the invoice, they replied that their accountant told them not to pay. But in reality, the accountant did neither the books nor the tax reports and rather denied the fault. Instead, the accountant said the tax office was a mess and only came for money. I did not know how, but the Chinese bought this idea…It was not tax evasion but making up the tax from the unreported parts. The Italian employers would notice immediately that the accountant had a problem, but the Chinese had no clue and thought it was just a small fine bill, and they could pay in instalments. When they kept receiving new bills, they thought automatically that the Italian government was insatiable for more money."
>
> (Wanshun, Chinese, Textile Manufacturer)

Actually, these Chinese entrepreneurs want to respect the regulation and pay taxes according to the law; instead of hiding their revenue, they are just not familiar with tax regulations and are in an asymmetrical area of expertise. Some accounting agencies are not qualified to implement professional tax services, while others have to offer limited services when migrant entrepreneurs only plan to spend little budget on this. Riccardo is an Italian accounting company owner and has several Chinese clients in the fast fashion industry; he sometimes feels disrespected by his customers' stereotypes:

> "The difficulty with Chinese is that sometimes they believe that our job is just doing papers. 'Come on, what is going on with doing papers? It is easy.' No, it is not easy. It

takes time, you have to avoid mistakes, you need to study a lot, and you have responsibility. It is difficult to pass this message (to Chinese clients)… We still have this problem now to give value to the job that we are doing. That is why you are visiting them: if they know that you are there, they can also give you (your work) some value. But if you just provide some papers, they will try all the time to discuss the price to bargain (with the service fees)."

(Riccardo, Italian, Accounting Firm Owner)

Chinese migrants, especially the first generation with limited education, pay more attention to relations than professional work. As long as the business partners are part of their social networks and share social capital as interpersonal trust, the contribution and the credit are likely amplified. The overdraft of social capital is a two-sided sword, it can promote business and community development, but it also can lead to damage to the existing social capital. Any overdraft of social capital without being fully informed by any party, such as failing other's trust, kindness and professionalism, will ruin the foundation of this network. In the process, migrants also learned to hide their wealth and create an information gap as an innovation to ensure their interests.

It is not solely a single party's fault but rather different understandings and expectations on the part of both parties. Innovation is another moral justification for realising further social leaps and leveraging larger profits, either to survive brutal business competition or chase long-term interests.

### 6.5 To be "Ambitious" Migrant Leaders: Efficient Creation of Civil Society

The third leverage is related to the Chinese migrants and their further goals in social participation when they want to get social influence after stable entrepreneurship. When some Chinese migrants achieve economic success and accumulate connections in social networks, they pursue higher social status by highlighting their moralities of altruism.

Additionally, applying for a long-term residence permit or joining Italian citizenship to show their good integration, other behaviours such as donating to both Italian and home society, transnational investment and seeking a higher social or political position gradually become some migrants' daily practice. When their individual interests expand to a larger collective well-being, there are both controversial and acceptable practices of creating a civil society based on their understanding. For Chinese migrants, to be migrant leaders seems to be the path to improving community image and personal reputation.

### 6.5.1 The Ambition of Speaking for the Chinese

In my fieldwork, Chinese migrants, especially those who are active in commercial and religious communities, showed their ambitions to help other Chinese. When they felt they had reached a certain level of economic achievement, they started to focus on community development for Chinese migrants, sometimes for local Italians and Chinese back home.

One interviewee Maige, an apparel company owner with presidential positions in two associations, mentioned his intention of community involvement:

> "It is like the TV drama what Buddha said, if I did not go to hell (take the responsibility), who else would go? [37] I held that feeling and belief to create and run the associations…We have a referral system for membership, and any membership applicants know at least someone in our associations and the referees must know them well in return, and their participation will not have a negative influence. Everyone is in the same boat."
>
> (Maige, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

[37] The original sentence is 我不入地狱，谁入地狱.

The highlight of mutual trust in members' quality is the association's legitimacy, and with collective devotion as an endorsement, members can leverage larger social recognition and mobilisation. For instance, Maige's commercial association managed to hire a security company for patrol with fundraising from members and other apparel company owners and this association provides a third path for dealing with conflicts when it is too complicated to settle matters by law or violence. Members of the association, in particular the presidents, work as a reputational third party to balance interests and mediate conflicts, which resembles the role of elders in Chinese villages. Furthermore, other social support actions such as donations and fundraisings for poor migrants, lingual and legal consultation, communication and coordination with Prato authorities from various associations help Chinese migrants to settle down, get through the difficulties and deal with issues which are easily ignored or out of reach from local support. However, the monetary contribution reflects the hierarchy of migrants inside associations, the presidents pay the highest levels of membership fees and donate the most amount compared with other average members to show their influence. Since there are Chinese-origin city councillors from 2019, migrants find it easier to express their wishes to local authorities and one councillor, Marco Wong, joined a forum on social security with other association presidents and the Chinese consul, collected their opinions and sent feedback to local authorities. One of the forum participants, Changhong, runs an apparel company and shared his participation:

> "I reported to the Chinese consulate Prato's security issue; for example, there were around 200 robbery cases against Chinese in 2022. In this case, the consul could take the reports of crime cases as evidence and talk with the local police, gendarmerie, municipal and provincial governments (to host forums with Chinese)."
>
> (Changhong, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Changhong also mentioned that not a single report of a crime case from the Chinese received sufficient attention from the local authorities. Instead, when the report number is accumulated and there are Chinese migrant leaders, associations, and connections with local and Chinese authorities, things go smoothly and are put on the table for discussion, and migrants play a role in the civil society creation with their moral power. The efficient way to realise that ambition is to get *Zhengguihua* (formalisation/ 正规化), become part of the elite circle and manipulate the resources (Xiang, 2017). Meanwhile, this formalisation falls into scepticism when Chinese migrants are too closely associated with Chinese authorities and caused concern from local Italians. The Fuzhou Police Overseas Service Station, as an unofficial branch of the Chinese police system, aims to provide Chinese migrants with virtual civil affairs services in China, such as renewal of their Chinese driving licence during the pandemic lockdown period, since migrants from Fujian [38] are the second largest Chinese migrants after Wenzhounese from Zhejiang (Pompili, 2022). These unofficial police stations and the relevant Fujian association as the responsible united-front body gained more negative comments based on the controversial Chinese government's international image and potential intervention of the Italian civil and judicial affairs system.

This ambitious move seemed convenient and efficient to Chinese migrants and migrant community leaders could build close connections with the Chinese local government, but this speculation led to unwelcoming feedback from Western media outlets, accusing it of espionage. Such hostile suspicions have an impact on migrants' willingness to achieve higher social status in local society and to strive for the rights of other migrants in disadvantaged positions. Worse still, some migrants gave up explaining the misunderstanding when they realised their explanations had triggered

[38] Fuzhou is the capital city of Fujian province, geographically south of Zhejiang province.

more misunderstandings, and further, they showed no interest in these comments, especially if they ranked their long-term goal as not staying in Italy but returning to China, either for retirement or business development.

Overall, when migrants managed to join the elite circle as migrant leaders, they were not only taking resources but were also contributing to this circle and the mass population. Back in Wenzhou, where most Chinese migrants in Prato originate, there are government-led industrial parks with overseas Chinese investment and migrant returnees improved the infrastructure in their hometowns as a returned favour. In 2021, the former president of Prato Chinese Friendship Association, Xu Qiulin, gave a speech and summarised the work during his duty, including accompanying the Prato municipal government on an official visit to Wenzhou:

> "The Chinese people (in Prato) are not from a starving country. On the contrary, with the development of China's economy, we Chinese who run business in Italy will bring business opportunities here." (New European Overseas Chinese Newspaper, 2021b)

Migrant leaders are associated with their community involvement and play a role in the name of the organisation's core members, as it is an efficient way to expand both personal and organisational influence. When Chinese government officials from China or Chinese migrant associations from other countries want to visit Prato for market research and investment promotion, migrant leaders are the primary contact persons to arrange the tours and match-making business events, which partly complements the business function of the overseas Chinese embassy and consulate. The same applies when the migrants in Prato wish to explore business opportunities elsewhere and create a connection with their hometown; they contact members in this expanded network. It is a self-fulfilment and community contribution morally, but also a rational way to "cash out" the political and social resources with their business achievement and influential

position in guest society. Therefore, Chinese migrants are glad to practice philanthropy not just inside the migrant community but widely in both guest and home society.

During the pandemic, Chinese migrants organised the collect purchase of masks in Italy and shipped them to China when the first outbreak happened in their hometown. Later, they imported the China-produced masks and distributed them to local neighbourhoods with respiratory devices donated at hospitals. Their philanthropic efforts reflect a two-way valve of information and resource allocation. Meanwhile, they strived for the justification of their business regarding abuse of high-end "Made in Italy" fashion products and narratives of "stealing local's jobs", in which they claim the fast fashion with its affordable price helps the segmented consumer market and hire Italians with proper working conditions to support the local economy with their social entrepreneurship. Again, there are other dubious suspicions about migrants' political donations and complicity when the Chinese migrants are formalised by the local Italian system. No matter what migrants' contributions are, economically or socially, their practices during their upward mobility path have inevitably attracted critique. In the end, there is always a moral dilemma for Chinese migrants trying to achieve their ambitious goals.

### 6.5.2 Impatient Justice: "Chinese Mafia" and "Godfathers"

Chinese migrants prefer to bring fortune back home and show off their economic achievements in Prato, such as renovating their houses and purchasing and wearing luxurious products, since their wealth is not always safe in Italy and more valuable in China due to the currency exchange rate. Some migrant returnees have economic achievements and are glad to raise influence through philanthropy (Murphy, 2000), while others want to justify their immigration decision and, therefore, present a decent

image for their family and friends. However, organised crime led by Chinese migrants demonstrates a deviant elite path of upward social mobility.

In Prato, the Chinese mafia and organised crime exist and are connected to illegal immigration, labour exploitation, prostitution and drug trade, targeting mainly the Chinese community, but also further cooperation with local Italian mafia regarding waste export, money laundering and counterfeit trade (Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, 2023; Borrometi, 2017; Altomonte and Lo Re, 2023), which according to Becucci (2011), are embodied in the family-based structure and follow purely contractual relations. These organised crime practices for Italian investigators are the niche market exploitation in central and northern Italy since the local mafia has taken the South (Dinmore, 2010). When I discussed Chinese gangs with my interviewees, Zhixiong, a migrant entrepreneur, shared his opinion:

> "Italy is a country with very deep family ties, plus Italy is known for its mafia culture and other cultures which leads to its bureaucracy. The reason why Chinese get well adapted here is because Chinese and Italians deeply share some values."
>
> (Zhixiong, Chinese, Start-up Entrepreneur)

Organised crime is related to power abuse or power vacuum from local public authorities when the central government has limited influence (Schwuchow, 2023); in this case, the demand for having society rulers and holding justice is urgent. By practising organised crime and allying with local mafia facilities, some Chinese migrants realised that economic success comes at the price of the co-ethnics in the community, injustice work and trades, informal rules against the local legal system and the community's reputation as a whole.

It seems these migrant entrepreneurs and crime organisation leaders have integrated into local society and taken an upward social lead, but it is a social capital recognised

solely by deviant groups themselves, neither by the migrant community nor local society. The harm of overdrawing the collective social capital persists in the local society, as these migrant entrepreneurs have faked the social capital and forced the rest of the community to follow and use it.

Migrant-led crime organisations became active when the Chinese presence in Prato was out of the local authorities' reach. Chinese migrants in my fieldwork mentioned their bad experience with local security and their ignored demand for justice. As they became impatient for justice, shortcuts such as the Chinese mafia acquiesced and using violence to curb violence showed a reasonable and supported solution among Chinese migrants. Ailan compared her living experience in Sicily and Prato and felt disappointed about the Italian police in Prato:

> "I felt the safety on Sicily Island; sometimes we kept the house door open, with very few thefts and robberies… (in Prato), we have patrols every night, but the security mainly depends on Italian policemen. If they caught the thieves, the thieves were locked up for one night and released the next morning. It is an indulgence. If I were the thief, I would be sure to go stealing (due to low punishment). In the worst case, the thief was caught but had a free stay overnight with heating and food. If the thief did not get caught, he was even luckier (to occupy the properties)."
>
> (Ailan, Chinese, Apparel Company Owner)

Chinese migrants do not understand why their legal rights were not protected by the official justice system functions but they witness their peers being robbed and attacked with impunity by other ethnic migrant groups (Il Tirreno, 2013; Verelli, 2022; La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno, 2012). Therefore, lynching and punishing the deviant groups won the support of the Chinese migrants and, in this case, the Chinese mafia, who implemented immediate and efficient "justice". The gangster members, especially

the leader, gained acquiescence to its existence and provided "godfather-style" favour when the local authority could not fulfil the justice demand. Both the beneficiaries and victims impatiently hold a code of silence in front of the slow justice to keep their interests or minimise risks as long as they are bound to this social network. That also explains why South Asian migrant workers in Chinese factories tend to be rebellious and speak out about the exploitation they suffer since they are not included in the network. Conversely, once the Chinese mafia, such as "*Cervo Bianco*" (White Deer Society/ 白鹿会[39]), gained its legitimacy and the empowerment to carry out this impatient justice, it brought about the uncertainty of abuse of racial discrimination against other ethnic communities and exploitation such as protection fees charged inside the Chinese community. Over time, some Chinese gangsters started to whitewash their image by undertaking social welfare activities, such as social support services during the pandemic. Nonetheless, their presence was denied due to factual damage to local society.

For those Chinese migrants who want to strive for a further social leap and show their ambitious influence, they can either be formalised by the existing networks (sometimes incorporating their own networks into the formal ones) or develop their own networks independently without official recognition and support, pulling in more participation. In the name of practising justice and achieving higher social status as migrant leaders, their moral justification is essentially the pursuit of efficiency. In the creation of a civil society based on the migrants' understanding, some Chinese migrants succeeded in evolving into migrant leaders to both boost and maintain their advantages.

[39] The members of Cervo Bianco are mainly from Wenzhou, China, and the city has an ancient name called "white deer city".

### 6.6 Conditional Elite Formation: Social Capital Overdraft

Following the three stages of the social leap, Chinese migrants managed to gain resources from the community, either migrant, local or back in China. Compared with their previous status, elite formation implies not an absolute premium social class of migrants but rather a relatively subjective perception of social capital acquisition and overdraft. With moral power's endorsement, social capital for migrant entrepreneurs is the catalyst to boost their entrepreneurship and upward social mobility in both positive and negative ways. In the first stage, migrants overdrew themselves and their social capital back home to gain the trust of the migrant community in Prato, in which moral power such as diligence and hardship endurance is leveraged for their illegal work status so they can rationalise intense work as a way to shorten the "repayment period" (through self-exploitation) and prepare for the next stage of entrepreneurship. In the second stage, migrants overdrew the social capital from their recognised migrant community. They expanded the business community with their own code of trust, especially in dealing with local Italian society. Pragmatism and innovation function as the moral power here to justify their business delinquencies and overcome the information gap, where they learned to create an information gap (through hiding wealth) to maximise social capital accumulation and keep the "cash flow" healthy for further investment. In the third stage, migrants overdrew social capital from both joined and created communities in Prato to invest in personal influence and collective image through transnationalism. The moral power embodies ambition and efficiency to promote civil society development and justify social deviance (through organised crime), in which migrants cash out the non-economic "bonus" to perpetuate their gained trust and privileged positions. The first two stages are common for most Chinese entrepreneurs in Prato. In contrast, the last stage is relatively attractive for those who

are ambitious enough to lead the migrant community and/or integrate into the local community. As a result, migrants achieved their entrepreneurial objectives and ascending social mobility since they managed to use morality and guarantee their social capital overdraft and acquisition.

There are two considerations of overdraft regarding elite formation: the duality of social capital and the risks of moral power.

**Duality of Social Capital**

The embodiments of social capital in my fieldwork contain interpersonal trust and institutional trust. The transition boundary between both embodiments is blurred and fluid, similar to the wave-particle duality. Migrant entrepreneurs began with personal connections and later obtained formalisation to expand business opportunities; during this process, migrants gained legitimacy from the outside and potential social capital as resources to enrich their networks. However, they also attract others into their network, from the formal contract relationship gradually into personal trust for deep and long-term cooperation with self-attained justification. Both trends coincide, and migrants hoard the social capital to amplify their vertical social mobility with the organisational endorsement by joining or creating one.

The presentation of the duality is based on the expected reciprocity, that is, an overdraft with repayment of social capital. If social capital per se is invalid, inflated, or concealed, then it affects the outcome of the presentation and, eventually, the social crisis as a “dishonoured cheque”.

**Risks of Moral Power**

In addition to the quality of social capital, moral power takes possible risks and runs out of control when migrants abuse moral justification. Morality initially assists social capital overdraft to legitimise its functionality; it is the means instead of the end. Moral

abduction occurs when the action is wrong, and the result is improper. For instance, the Chinese mafia conducted organised crime and attacked non-Chinese migrants in the name of protecting Chinese migrants. It seems to be a justification for the mafia members, but it is a moral abduction for Chinese migrants to carry out a lynching. This may cause cognitive dissonance and social disorder in the longer term. Furthermore, there are cultural and geographical differences between moral standards. This relativity explains why Chinese migrants sometimes gain legitimacy inside the migrant community but receive negative feedback from local society. Last but not least, migrants' determination to stay silent has an impact on morality's function. If migrants do not express their motivation for doing certain behaviours, it is hard to build effective communication and justification through moral power.

### 6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored migrants' vertical social mobility in local society using the framework of elite formation. For non-elites, leveraging social capital from the community becomes a feasible trajectory, and moral power ensures the process. I followed the three stages of migrants' social leaps and listed key moral considerations to support their behaviours and gain legitimacy. In each stage, the multiplicative social capital amplifies to realise ethnic entrepreneurship and elite formation. Both ethnic entrepreneurship and elite formation imply constant prosperity as long as this moral-based overdraft system functions. However, it leaves the potential perils to speculation, trust inflation and social anomie if migrants keep too optimistic about expanding the social capital utility and leveraging blindly in the new society. In order to become elites, Chinese migrants choose risky investments for maximal profit, which echoes the nature of entrepreneurship in terms of embracing and navigating uncertainty.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

"Prato, where everything comes to an end: glory, honour, pity, and the vanity of the world."

- Curzio Malaparte, Prato-born Italian writer[40]

This research focuses on Chinese migrant entrepreneurship and their overseas business practices in the manufacturing industry and reconsiders how social capital as organisational resources advances migrants' business interests. It makes new contributions to research in economic sociology, sociology of migration and community studies.

Theoretically, I started from a meso-level to bridge entrepreneurial subjectivity with the local communal environment in the destination country, both spatially and temporally, to understand migrant entrepreneurship. In this way, my research analysis avoids the single-sided approaches on either macro-institutional constraints or micro-individual agencies; rather, a changing nuance of transition meso zone to understand migrants' practices inside the embedded society. In the dynamics of migrant communities and intra-communities with local and home society, I developed further the fluctuation of social capital to understand this transition and calibrate the uncertainty. My research tries to invoke the importance of ethnic entrepreneurship and social capital through community dynamics as measurement and thinking about how current literature explanations build resilience and cope with uncertainty.

Empirically, I chose the Chinese immigration and fashion production in Prato, Italy, which differs from most migrant-run niche service industries such as catering, retailing

[40] The quote refers to the important role of textile waste recycling in Prato since all fabrics around the world will be sent here. The quote is available on the Prato municipal website and the exhibition display from Museo di Palazzo Pretorio, Prato

or hair and nail salons in other enclaves. The Chinese migrant-run business in Prato has uniqueness: it is part of the Italian mainstream fashion and garment manufacturing while being located in a small industrial city instead of a well-known metropolitan area as a new variation of globalisation. Furthermore, my research extends the timeline of the Pratese industrial district and migrant presence from the 1990s up to the post-Covid era, which supplements and updates the current literature until 2018, after which globalisation became even more complex due to the pandemic, geopolitical issues, energy crisis, and industrial transition challenges.

Therefore, the novelty of this research fills the temporal-spatial gap in understanding Chinese migrants' presence in a comprehensive context from past to present, from the home society to guest society, creating the dialogues among previous researchers who focused on Chinese migrants in Prato or in a wider Global North migrant entrepreneurship mapping. As a multilingual researcher who shares the same place of origin as most of the Chinese migrants in Prato, my role is to enrich the explanations behind migrants' daily interactions for both Chinese and Western scholars – empirically and methodologically – and consider inspirations for both Chinese and Italian policymakers.

In order to conclude this dissertation, I first review the empirical findings about the Chinese presence in Prato to portray a mixed socioeconomic complexity and how migrants cope with uncertainty. In the second part, I highlight the migrants' attitude and strategy of community involvement and how this strategy advanced organisational resources for business during periods of deep uncertainty. Next, I focus on social capital fluctuation in terms of concepts and how it echoes its functionality to be a suitable organisational resource for uncertainty maintenance. Lastly, how is everything embedded in time, and how time relates to uncertainty and transition.

### 7.1 Chinese Migrant Entrepreneurship: Living with Uncertainty

The Chinese presence in Prato initiated the immigration flow and their pursuit of entrepreneurial practices. Most Chinese migrants in Italy are from Wenzhou, a region facing political and financial uncertainty throughout the economic reform era in China. The strict non-public economy development regulation from the Chinese central government spawned an underground private economy boom in Wenzhou and cultivated their entrepreneurship. When the border opened, Wenzhounese soon moved both domestically and globally to connect to larger opportunities.

Their entrepreneurial atmosphere at home is also reflected in migrants' business practices in Prato, as Chapter 3 concluded their ethnic entrepreneurship as a structural coupling based on temporal embeddedness. Since Prato was suffering economic recession and labour shortage in the 1990s, the Chinese influx and their economic aspirations energised the local economy. The similar "Third Italy" small- and medium-sized family businesses in textile and garment production, together with brokers, precarious self-employment and subcontracting systems, produce an ideal coupling and imagined entrepreneurial practice for Chinese migrants from Wenzhou. Their previous living experience under uncertainty made them quickly adapt to Prato, and during the migration, they arrived at the second strategy: making use of co-ethnic communities. Especially when Chinese migrants are marginalised by local segregation or local resources are limited to advancing their ambitions, the ethnic communities offer necessary social support and ethnic entrepreneurship cultivation.

Together with the first strategy, Chinese migrants targeted the downstream fast fashion industry by making use of the cost and efficiency advantages from the ethnic community and built the completed industrial chain in Prato. As the industrial siphoning in Prato and industrial transition in other European cities, Chinese migrants, particularly

those from Wenzhou with garment industry experiences, moved from Paris and other big cities to Prato to further boost this fast fashion development.

More importantly, embedded in the industrial legacy of Prato, large upstream material and labour supply from their homeland China, and the newly formed European market through diasporic co-ethnic wholesale networks, the economic miracle of Pratese fast fashion took place in the 2000s. Ethnic entrepreneurship in this context demonstrates a gradual evolution that builds on local strengths and vacancies, which previous research approaches on either institutional disadvantage or migrants' cultural agency cannot explain or account for. This temporal-embedded evolution promises Chinese migrants that current workers can be future entrepreneurs and further coordinative development with local society.

Both strategies help Chinese migrants overcome uncertainty and minimise risk. Conversely, uncertainty itself maintains the prosperity of simultaneous Chinese presence and business operations when migrants master living with uncertainty. Hence, Chinese presence in Prato is a complexity of various compositions with migrant socio-economic backgrounds, business operations, and degrees of local integration. The presence is, in essence, inborn uncertainty or nurtured ambiguity to hedge the external uncertainty; for instance, nobody knows the exact business scale and population of Chinese migrants in Prato due to the grey economy and high-degree demographic mobility. Moreover, Chinese migrants managed to find ways to navigate uncertainty and some uncertainties are artificial, such as the overdue approval procedure of a legal residential permit or profitable underground stitching workshops.

Moreover, as some migrants are marginalised from local society with limited access to local resources, or they are integrated but unsatisfied with local supply for promoting business, turning back to the ethnic advantage and turning the uncertainty itself into an

advantage becomes a practical way and shows the grassroots autonomy, as long as the official law enforcement is not strictly implemented. The same logic applies to current fast fashion production; as long as it counts as part of "made in Italy" fashion production and the businesses are not eliminated, this uncertainty will become migrants' status quo, which, in a way, makes Chinese migrants navigators of uncertainty. When their living status improves, taking risks and exploring uncertainty becomes the enjoyment for entrepreneurship, in particular ethnic entrepreneurship. From a forced survival choice to a proactive strategy, ethnic entrepreneurship can be a positive way of creating uncertainty and a gold rush. Hence, migrant entrepreneurs, as the outsiders of guest society, are not the original uncertainty creators but survivors who evolved from the uncertainty, in which their adaptations intensify the existing uncertainty or possibly create further uncertainty.

Meanwhile, by creating, maintaining and navigating uncertainty, migrant entrepreneurs maximise their strengths. When the strengths are large enough, locals gradually join, and profit from the uncertainty instead of resisting it, and even some locals become defenders of this uncertainty, which prevents it from vanishing. It ranges from the social and economic participation in migrant-led industrial community ecology for local citizens to regional and industrial complicit collaborations in municipal government and business associations and to national and even transnational diplomatic and political presence and negotiation. As do Chinese migrants, locals see the opportunities behind the uncertainty, and this persuades them to join the uncertainty co-production, both the promising and the dark parts, which Prato wants most after the uncertain recession, in other words, the uncertainty-embedded opportunity. Furthermore, locals find that migrants are the perfect scapegoats if uncertainty is blamed.

For Chinese migrants, their entrepreneurial subjectivity toward uncertainty accompanies them along their global journey: They were used to living with uncertainty in China, sometimes even forced to maintain the uncertainty. Once they know the rules and environment, they start to create uncertainty embedded in the local context, proactively maintain uncertainty for opportunity, and attract others to enjoy the dance with uncertainty. Even though many of them are aware of being potential scapegoats, exit strategies always work and returning to China can be their backup plans. Before the last plan, migrant entrepreneurs have agency to navigate the uncertainty in Italy and explore community involvement and social capital cultivation.

### 7.2 Community Involvement: Flowing around Equivocality and Suspension

Through fast fashion production, Chinese migrants realised their entrepreneurial dream and promoted urban rejuvenation in Prato. Such bottom-up organisations also re-brought the Third Italy model with international incorporation into researchers' eyes and disproved the overturned Fordism solution under stratified global value chain production. Flexible community-based production has its solution against global recession and uncertainty. Not all kinds of achievement are reachable without community involvement since migrant entrepreneurship happens in the community, where uncertainty is rooted and created. Community is the embedded framework for the migrant-interacted uncertainty.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I summarised Chinese migrants' interactions by exploring the communities they are involved with. Unlike organisations or networks with a focus on objective structure, community is the transition space between informal individualism and formal institutionalism, which empowers and mobilises individuals to construct their envisaged institutions with various possibilities, including the trials and errors of uncertainty making. These communities function as both the shelter and

incubator for uncertainty since migrants can rely on and manipulate. The communities construct a quasi-society in parallel with local society, which leads to an equivocal illusion that migrants need social integration in local society. Conversely, they are still suspended on a certain surface level. However, it does not mean the Chinese do not want to integrate but rather seek alternative options to realise their entrepreneurship. Chinese migrants started with their own migrant community (see Chapter 3) while keeping connections with the local community, as the migrant population cannot be fully integrated socially, and the migrants prefer to maximise their ethnic advantages amongst themselves.

In Chapter 4, Chinese migrants spared efforts to prove their presence legitimacy by incorporating local- and global-recognised fashion production. Hence, there is the possibility of the merging of the migrant and local communities for large collective identity shaping, with pioneering roles to promote social cohesion and explore new possibilities. Viewing the migrant community as a whole, I raise the importance of interactions among different communities to demonstrate the possibility of community convergence.

In Chapter 5, I explored the inward evolution of migrant-involved communities beyond the migrant-local and Sino-Italian dichotomy. I argued here that an "acquired scheduling strategy" is the core factor for community involvement combination since Chinese migrants allocate their daily life and demand in different communities by applying "decentralisation" and "fuzzification" strategies in a dynamic process. Chinese migrants used their agency to create a refined internal community system and break the ethnic and geographical boundary between themselves and locals; furthermore, they had the freedom not to be involved in or shape any communities.

Chapter 6 is about the outward exploration of community development and how Chinese migrants guaranteed their interests through community investment and reproduction. I investigated Chinese migrants' upward social mobility and their moral justification for this mobility after they settled and became rooted in a certain community, especially since they could make communities or become "community leaders" to make collective bargaining. The communities behind them helped them to leverage social resources both in and outside Italy; the communities, in return, can also be strategically upgraded, expanded, and included for boosting better opportunities, as these communities realised the key characteristics of entrepreneurship and identified uncertainty boundaries. All the explorations are not just about displaying the capacity to realise upward mobility, but the possibility – the possibility of how bottom-up grassroots vitality constructs and uses communities to further secure business ambition.

Comparatively, my research also resonates with and extends Xiang's book *Transcending Boundaries* on domestic migrant entrepreneurship, garment production and community creation (*Zhejiangcun* in Beijing) inside China with the same migrant origin (Xiang, 2004). Seeing the migrants as seeds and the destination as the soil, the Chinese presence in Prato is another overseas "horticultural experiment" to reflect social capital cultivation, community creation and environmental intervention. Chapter 4 shows the "seed's survival and adaptation" to match local ecology, Chapter 5 concerns the "plant's growth differentiation" and "internal organ evolution stimulation", and Chapter 6 is about the evolution for the next "bourgeoning and fruiting phase" and ecological transformation. When the root of *Zhejiangcun* was torn down in the 1990s, and Wenzhounese migrants were forced to leave Beijing due to the urbanisation and formalisation trend, Prato held a tolerate attitude and displayed another picture of the Chinese immigration and relations in between, from parasitism to symbiosis, although

Prato took hostile actions in the 2000s. In general, Prato authorities regard Chinese migrants as another source for its rebirth and urban recovery. It demonstrates that the involved communities play an important role in shaping migrants' presence and their identity, and coping with uncertainty needs to exist in a certain community framework.

In my dissertation, the community shapes migrants' fluid identity as migrants chose different ways of community involvement. This subjectivity embodies two aspects: a fluid community during the transition, and a fluid willingness by migrants to be involved. The fluid community resembles what is found in Anna Tsing's book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, where she discovered the same mushrooms flowing through different communities are given different identities and meanings, such as a freedom symbol in Oregon forests and a premium commodity at Japanese dining tables (Tsing, 2015) and the latter echoes Eric Han's research *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown*, that settled Chinese migrants proactively chose to identify as "sons of Yokohama" instead of Chinese or Japanese to avoid national conflicts at wartime and show their community belonging at a meso level (Han, 2014). In fact, from the interviewees' feedback, many mentioned a burnout feeling that previous researchers kept interviewing them on social integration and implied this as an inevitable trend. My research found a degree of pride in separateness, as well as affection for local Italians who interacted with Chinese on their own terms, such as those who recognized Wanshun's efforts to improve tolerance for rice-cooking in controlled methods. Mutual respect is a theme sometimes missing from earlier social integration literatures.

**7.3 Social Capital: Fluctuation with Time**

Throughout my thesis, I argued that the changeable environment influences the communities and the individuals' willingness to engage in community involvement, and the corresponding organisational resources emerge. Social capital as an organisational

resource is the nutrient for ethnic entrepreneurship, and its formation depends on the involved communities embedded in temporality. Conversely, with social capital, Chinese migrants acquired strategies to cope with uncertainty; uncertainty is an outcome of social capital. Therefore, social capital needs a dynamic understanding to review its definition, source, and function, which I term the "fluctuation of social capital".

The fluctuation of social capital aims to challenge the existing literature about the analysis levels (collective and individual), classification (strong ties and weak ties), ownership degree (excessive trust and exclusion) and possible dysfunctionality in a fluid and uncertain context. In my dissertation, I argue that social capital has fluctuation, which is a reaction of embedded context with personal agency and the evolutionary possibilities of inter-play, intra-play, and extra-play of social capital combinations. For instance, how social capital from the migrant community (ethnic entrepreneurship) interacts with social capital in local society (social cohesion); how social capital varies with individual differences (social multi-polarisation) among migrants; and how social capital expands its function and accelerates migrants' upward social mobility with valid guarantees (moral justification).

The fluctuation expressions are not only conceptual and compositional but also calculational. Due to the vast definition standards and criteria, seeing social capital as a toolkit is practical to construct its meanings, which I summarised in Chapter 4 as a collective identity based on inter-generational and transboundary social relations over time. Social capital owns the first calculation possibility with accumulation, in which both migrants and locals can reach a consensus, build a larger community identity, and share the organisational resources, trust and norms. Next, in Chapter 5, I started with another perspective to describe social capital as a complied *Guanxi* combination of involvement under limited time. With this, social capital shows the second calculation

possibility: distribution, in which migrants express internal heterogeneity and personalised community planning. Social capital is shaped for organisational resource allocation. In Chapter 6, social capital is the leverage token for individual and community development with timing expectations. It contains both the bounded interpersonal and institutional trust with the third calculation: multiplication. However, this calculation needs to consider both the duality switch of social capital and the quality of social capital during the leverage and investment since it is necessary to avoid invalid, inflated, or concealed social capital crises with moral endorsement. All the fluctuation forms do not solely belong to migrants themselves but also to local participation, including the proactive interactions from the local Pratese, with their complicit co-production of social capital.

Time plays a role as volume to fill social capital and guide it into different usages and resources because all fluctuation forms need time involvement. The formulation and evolution of social capital take time to accumulate, schedule, and anchor the right point. Social capital is a temporally embedded organisational resource, shaped for calibration, and expressed as an hourglass (accumulative social capital), a timetable (distributive social capital), and a catalyst (multiplicative social capital) to cope with uncertainty.

Uncertainty is a nature of variation along with social capital and the process; therefore, fluctuation emerges from this process. For Chinese migrants, owning and manipulating social capital represents their competence in dealing with uncertainty. They reduce risk through sufficient and appropriate use of social capital. Meanwhile, cultivating risk and risk awareness enables migrants to reap greater benefits and withstand greater risks. The community is the safe bubble for social capital fluctuation, practising and ensuring manageable uncertainty.

### 7.4 Fashioning the Future: Calibration of Uncertainty in Sync

Uncertainty is an inherent feature of the future. It is not simply a void to be filled or a barrier to be overcome, but socially embedded condition of economic action. In economic sociology, this has often been primarily theorised through actors' perception and anticipatory agency. Two influential approaches, namely fictional expectation (Beckert, 2016) and speculation (Komporozos-Athanasiou, 2022), offer distinct insights into how actors imagine, manage and leverage uncertainty. While both capture key dynamics of Chinese migrant entrepreneurship in Prato's fast fashion sector, they also leave a conceptual gap, which I address the notion of calibration.

Beckert (2016) theorises that economic actors construct fictional expectations, narratives about imagined futures, to reduce uncertainty and guide decision-making. These narratives are not illusions but socially grounded projections based on the observed trajectories of others. In the case of Chinese migrants in Prato, such expectations emerged early on, making the future actionable by offering seemingly replicable paths forward. Many migrants began as workers in Italian-run textile firms or Chinese-led fast fashion workshops. Through observing entrepreneurial practices in Prato, they formed their own future visions. Upon returning to Wenzhou, some successful migrants, who transformed "from owing to owning", became living evidence of upward mobility, fuelling imaginaries across villages. These expectations travelled across "time zones", enabling future-oriented decisions grounded in the temporality of others' present.

However, fictional expectations alone cannot explain what followed. As migration and industrial activity intensified, Prato experienced a phase of rapid, uncoordinated growth. This "bubbling" expansion reintroduced derivative uncertainty, not through external shock but as a byproduct of holistic dynamics. Rather than stabilising action,

this phase created a recursive cycle of overproduction, volatility, and intra-community competition. While Beckert (2016) agrees with Schumpeter's "creative destruction" that helps to describe this process, this lens underestimates the derivative uncertainty that emerged from migrants' own risk-taking practices.

Komporozos-Athanasiou (2022) offers a complementary view by embracing uncertainty as a productive friction. In his account, speculation not a merely high-risk investment, but a relational practice that generates social cohesion through shared exposure to uncertainty. This resonates with the Prato's later development after Chinese presence. Migrants began to take speculative risks not only on the market, but also against each other. Overproduction, resources stretching, unstable market demand and precarious labour became the norm. Speculation emerged as a mode of survival and mutual dependency, a coercive solidarity that kept the system afloat.

Yet, speculation does not always precede community. In Prato, many migrants also built on pre-existing networks of kinship, regional ties and shared living-working spaces work before surfing risks. Moreover, some migrants used their temporal advantage, such as arriving earlier, owning business, or mastering local knowledge, to manufacture or maintain uncertainty within the community itself. By withholding knowledge and monopolising resources, they speculate on newer migrants, reinforcing asymmetric dependence. In this way, uncertainty was not only endured or resolved, but actively shaped and exploited.

In my research context, this uncertainty operates on three interconnected levels: *contextual*, as migrants adjust and navigate unstable environment across China and Italy; *functional*, as they mainly operate within fragmented, unpredicted and time-pressured fast fashion industry; and *conceptual*, as their entrepreneurial identities and social networks continuously evolve in uncertain relational and temporal fields. When these

layers of uncertainty align through practice, they produce a synchronised zone of certainty – "an eye within the storm" – where entrepreneurial possibilities emerge.

This brings about the core conceptual contribution: Calibration. Calibration is a situated, meso-level process through which actors manage uncertainty by adjusting practices, perceptions, and expectations in real time. If fictional expectations help stabilise practice through socially grounded imaginaries, and speculation embrace the risk through relational leaps into unknowns, calibration enables actors to stay in sync with volatility. It neither overcommits to imagined futures nor abandons foresights altogether. Rathan than unfolding a linear sequence from speculation to community formation, calibration operates in between, allowing actors to navigate uncertainty through synchronised adjustment. These three logics coexist and constitute the spectrum of uncertainty navigation, in which calibration unfolds across three dimensions:

First, it begins with an embodied encounters with uncertainty. Migrants do not plan at a distance or speculate blindly; they calibrate within embodied environments, where uncertainty is perceived, estimated, and negotiated by themselves. Chinese migrants from Wenzhou are emblematic: despite the city's marginal position in China's official economy, its residents have developed a culture of grassroots entrepreneurship, small-scale industrial expertise, and diasporic networking. These capacities, formed under uncertainty, were recalibrated to suit the industrial terrain of Prato. Crucially, this calibration is neither a pure replication of "Wenzhou Model" nor revival of "Third Italy". Rather, it is a situated resonance between home-based tactics and the historical uncertainties of Prato's industrial district, which has long oscillated between crisis and reinvention (Ceccagno, 2017). Migrants become "time travellers", aligning the temporality of prior uncertainty with the rhythms of a new capitalist terrain.

Second, calibration is relational and continuous. Fast fashion, by its nature, requires constant market responses to orders, regulations, labour availability, and peer behaviours. Migrant entrepreneurs recalibrate not only to external changes but to decisions made by others in their communities. These adjustments are not isolated but interdependent, forming a dense ecology of adaptation. Migrant's strategy of velocity, such as rapid production, flexible scaling, and just-in-time delivery, represents calibration in action. Importantly, fast fashion endures not in spite of uncertainty, but because it aligns with the market demands of the mass class. For many from the Global South and peripheral regions of the Global North, entering fast fashion offers a feasible, replicable path to entrepreneurship. This viability, alongside continuous calibration, sustains the system. Fast fashion remains durable not merely in spite of uncertainty, but because calibration synchronises migrants with this system defined by constant motion.

Third, calibration is not just reactive, but potentially transformative. Migrants do not simply adjust to uncertainty; they also intervene in the system that produce it. By reorganising production chains, repurposing community involvement, and innovating new social capital fluctuations, they reshape the institutional context of fashion production. This extends Deka's (2023) understanding of "grassroots resilience" in the bazaar economy. In Prato, migrant-led industrial clusters occupy a hybrid space between formality and informality, flexibility and constraint, local embeddedness and transnational mobility. Within this system, social capital functions as both the means and the outcome of calibration.

As uncertainty makes ethnic entrepreneurship models become unstable, Chinese migrants developed new forms of fluctuating social capital. These reactivations enabled communities to operate amid uncertainty, even as they conversely generated new forms uncertainty. However, such fluctuation often resonates with the broader environment,

producing what I term synchronised certainty – a stable zone within an unstable context. This reconfigured social capital, in turn, reshapes collective identities and relational infrastructure: their everyday practices, obligations, and affective ties through which community is maintained. In this way, calibration enables not only adaptation but transformative synchronisation, allowing migrants to adjust their social ecosystems in tandem with shifting economic conditions.

Through calibration, this dissertation integrates contextual, functional, and conceptual layers of uncertainty into a dynamic framework of meso-level transformation. Migrants' ability to navigate uncertainty is not simply a matter of resilience, but of tactical coordination across temporal regimes, institutional constraints, and embedded networks. The organisational resource of social capital, rooted in both home and host societies, functions not only as a safe net, but a medium of recalibration through fluctuation. Fast fashion, in turn, provides a volatile yet fertile field for such practices, where uncertainty is both endured and leveraged. Calibration allows them to locate certainty within uncertainty, to move in synchrony with volatility, and to sustain entrepreneurial possibility within constraint.

However, calibration has a dark side. The very attunement that enables migrants to succeed within uncertainty can also lock them into it. Over time, this recursive production of ambiguity give rise to what I understand as the "cocoon effect": a condition in which migrant entrepreneurs thrive within a constrained system, but struggle to exit it or ascend to higher-value sectors. In this sense, they capacity to calibrate, which is to fashion the future within uncertainty, carries both emancipatory and entangling potentials.

**Future Research Possibilities**

Although my dissertation examined Chinese presence and migrant entrepreneurship with a meso-based perspective and highlighted the future-based temporal embeddedness for social capital fluctuation, community evolution, and uncertainty navigation, there are still some important research gaps that need further investigation.

Apart from the possibilities of calculating social capital fluctuations, I shall discuss the possibility of subtractive social capital since the involved migrant population and community are shrinking. For instance, an increasing number of Chinese migrants retired from the industry and returned to China for retirement. Their offspring prefers other businesses, and fast fashion suffers constant labour shortages and industrial upgrading demand, consequences of economic recession due to pandemics, energy crises and geopolitical issues.

Other perspectives, such as cross-ethnic relations between Chinese and non-Chinese migrants in Prato, cross-spatial mobility for Chinese immigration among European countries, and inter-generational, familial, and transnational influences on migrant entrepreneurship are coming explorations to extend the understanding of Chinese entrepreneurs' subjectivity and supplement a large context and community.

Last but not least, industrial development is another investigation highlight regarding fast fashion production and the "sandwich" situation for Chinese-run fast fashion in Prato against high-end luxurious fashion based on design and premium branding value, and ultra-fast-fashion-led complete supply chain and algorithm. This leaves open the question of whether the current Chinese migrant entrepreneurs will continue fast fashion in Prato or will move and replicate the production in another region, and whether other ethnicities such as Pakistani migrants in Prato will follow the vacancy chain and become the new entrepreneurial generation.

In short, this dissertation offers a taste of entrepreneurial subjectivity in the meso-level of migrant entrepreneurship study. There is potential to explore various topics and theories to enrich economic sociology and develop uncertainty and temporality understandings.

**Bibliography**


Adam, B. (2003) 'Reflexive Modernization Temporalized', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 20(2), pp. 59-78.

Adams, J. (2007) *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe (The Wilder House series in Politics, History, and Culture)*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Adhikari, P., Dhakal Adhikari, S., Arun, S. and Arun, T. (2023) 'Gurkha Warriors as Entrepreneurs in Britain: A Social Anchoring Lens on Martial Heritage and Migrant Enterprises', *Work, Employment and Society,* 37(5), pp. 1359-1376.

Adler, P. S. and Kwon, S.-W. (2002) 'Social capital: Prospects for a new concept', *Academy of Management Rview,* 27(1), pp. 17-40.

Afgeh, S. S. (2016) *The little town of Prato has been taken over by Chinese stuff. I had a look around*: People's Economy. Available at: https://www.ecnmy.org/engage/prato-chinese-stuff-look-around/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Afonso, A. and Devitt, C. (2016) 'Comparative Political Economy and International Migration', *Socio-Economic Review,* 14(3), pp. 591-613.

Al Jazeera English (2007) *Italy's 'Made in China' Label*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFVzjLqZj7g (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Aldrich, H. E. and Waldinger, R. (1990) 'Ethnicity and entrepreneurship', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 16(1), pp. 111-135.

Allievi, S. (2014) 'Immigration, religious diversity and recognition of differences: The Italian way to multiculturalism', *Identities,* 21(6), pp. 724-737.

Aloisi, S. (2013) *Insight: Italy's Chinese garment workshops boom as workers suffer*: Reuters. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-sweatshop-insight-idUSBRE9BS04D20131229 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Altomonte, F. and Lo Re, G. (2023) *Le gang cinesi fanno (ancora) più ricca la 'ndrangheta. Corrieri con milioni di euro nascosti in auto in Calabria*: Gazzetta del SudOnline. Available at: https://calabria.gazzettadelsud.it/articoli/cronaca/2023/06/18/le-gang-cinesi-fanno-ancora-piu-ricca-la-ndrangheta-corrieri-con-milioni-di-euro-nascosti-in-auto-in-calabria-33c2b936-130e-4e61-bc62-c7ea126c8c61/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Ambascita d'Italia Pechino (2024) *在意非长期居留中国/意大利公民的中国驾照使用办法 [Use of Chinese Driver's Licence for Non-Long-Staying Chinese/Italian Citizens in Italy]*. Available at: https://ambpechino.esteri.it/zh/servizi-consolari-e-visti/servizi-per-il-cittadino-straniero/patente-cinese-uso-in-italia-da-parte-di-cittadini-cinesi-o-italiani-non-residenti-in-italia/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Amin, A. (2017) 'Industrial Districts', in E. Sheppard & T. Barnes (eds.) *A Companion to Economic Geography.* Blackwell Publishing Ltd., pp. 149-168.

Andall, J. (2007) 'Industrial Districts and Migrant Labour in Italy', *British Journal of Industrial Relations,* 45(2), pp. 285-308.

Anderson, B. (2016) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised Edition edn. London: Verso.

ANSA (2021) *Migrants obtain stay permit after being exploited at clothing company in Italy*. Available at: https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/32482/migrants-obtain-stay-permit-after-being-exploited-at-clothing-company-in-italy (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Antolín, J. B. (2007) 'Chinese Entrepreneurship in Spain: the Seeds of Chinatown', in E. Spaan, F. Hillmann & T. van Naerssen (eds.) *Asian Migrants and European Labour Markets: Patterns and Processes of Immigrant Labour Market Insertion in Europe.* London: Routledge, pp. 305-328.

Aronczyk, M. (2013) *Branding the Nation: The Global Business Of National Identity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Arrow, K. J. (1974) *The Limits of Organization.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Asif, M., Ali, M., M'Begniga, A., Guoqing, Z., Yang, L. and Hashim, M. (2021) 'China-Pakistan economic corridor: analytical overview on socio-cultural romance between China and Pakistan', *Randwick International of Social Science Journal,* 2(4), pp. 492-508.

Aspers, P. and Godart, F. (2013) 'Sociology of fashion: Order and change', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 39(1), pp. 171-192.

Asquith, L. (2019) 'Bourdieu and Social Capital', *Rebuilding Lives After Genocide: Migration, Adaptation and Acculturation.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 27-45.

Ayios, A., Jeurissen, R., Manning, P. and Spence, L. J. (2014) 'Social Capital: A Review from An Ethics Perspective', *Business Ethics: A European Review,* 23(1), pp. 108-124.

Bagnasco, A. (1977) *Tre Italie: la problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Baker, G., Gibbons, R. S. and Murphy, K. M. (1997) *Implicit Contracts and the Theory of the Firm*, Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research working paper.

Baldassar, L., Johanson, G., McAuliffe, N. and Bressan, M. (2015a) *Chinese Migration to Europe: Prato, Italy, and Beyond.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Baldassar, L., Johanson, G., McAuliffe, N. and Bressan, M. (2015b) 'Chinese Migration to the New Europe: The Case of Prato', in L. Baldassar, G. Johanson, N. McAuliffe & M. Bressan (eds.) *Chinese Migration to Europe: Prato, Italy, and Beyond.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 1-25.

Balducci, S., Lanzani, A., Tamini, L. and Cologna, D. (2006) *Milan's "Chinatown": An Example of Functional Readaptation of Space by A Migrant Minority in A Low-segregation Context*, Dortmund: International symposium «Europe and China. Which Future conference paper.

Bao, X. (2004) 'Sweatshops in Sunset Park: A variation of the late-twentieth-century Chinese garment shops in New York City', in D. Bender & R. Greenwald (eds.) *Sweatshop USA.* Routledge, pp. 117-139.

Barabantseva, E. (2016) 'Seeing beyond An 'Ethnic Enclave': The Time/Space of Manchester Chinatown', *Identities,* 23(1), pp. 99-115.

Barbour, R. (2022) 'Theoretical Sampling', in P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug & R.A. Williams (eds.) *SAGE Research Methods Foundations.* London.

Basham, K. (2020) *From Rags to Riches: How a small town in Italy is turning textile waste into new clothing*: Plastic Expert. Available at: https://www.plasticexpert.co.uk/from-rags-to-riches-the-italians-transforming-the-textile-industry/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity.* Cambridge, UK, Malden, MA: Polity Press.

BBC (2001) *中国移民的欧洲梦：温州人成功的秘诀 [The European Dream of Chinese Immigrants: The Secret of Wenzhou People's Success]*. Available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/news/newsid_1447000/14470841.stm (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
BBC (2013) *Italy Prato fire kills seven in Chinese-owned factory*. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-25180500 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Becattini, G. (1990) 'The Marshallian Industrial District as A Socioeconomic Notion', in F. Pyke, G. Becattini & W. Sengenberger (eds.) *Industrial Districts and Inter-firm Cooperation in Italy.* Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies.
Becattini, G. (1991) 'Italian Industrial Districts: Problems and Perspectives', *International Studies of Management and Organization,* 21, pp. 83-90.
Becattini, G. (2001) *The Caterpillar and The Butterfly: An Exemplary Case of Development in The Italy of The Industrial Districts.* Translated by R. Absalom. Firenze: Felice Le Monnier.
Becattini, G. (2003) *From Industrial Districts to Local Development: An Itinerary of Research.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Beck, U. and Ritter, M. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: SAGE Publications.
Beckers, P. and Blumberg, B. F. (2013) 'Immigrant entrepreneurship on the move: a longitudinal analysis of first- and second-generation immigrant entrepreneurship in the Netherlands', *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development,* 25(7-8), pp. 654-691.
Beckert, J. (2016) *Imagined Futures: Fictional Expectations and Capitalist Dynamics.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Beckert, S. (2015) *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism.* Penguin Books.
Becucci, S. (2011) 'La criminalità cinese in Italia. Network transnazionali versus gruppo mafioso', *Quaderni di sociologia,* (57), pp. 43-65.
Becucci, S. (2017) 'Ethnography of The Fast Fashion Community: Chinese Entrepreneurs in Prato', in S. Guercini, G. Dei Ottati, L. Baldassar & G. Johanson (eds.) *Native and Immigrant Entrepreneurship: Lessons for Local Liabilities in Globalization from the Prato Case Study.* Cham: Springer, pp. 79-96.
Belfanti, C. M. (2015) 'Renaissance and 'Made in Italy': Marketing Italian Fashion through History (1949–1952)', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* 20(1), pp. 53-66.
Bernardini, G. (2024) *Elezioni a Prato, la neo 18enne di origine cinese Moggi candidata per Cenni, la mediatrice culturale Yang per Bugetti. Ma la questione cinese è scomparsa*: Corriere Fiorentino. Available at: https://corrierefiorentino.corriere.it/notizie/24_maggio_16/elezioni-a-prato-la-neo-18enne-italo-cinese-moggi-candidata-per-cenni-la-mediatrice-culturale-yang-per-bugetti-ma-la-questione-cinese-e-scomparsa-1da4f416-dfad-44ad-9291-3f7c70d9fxlk.shtml (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Bernburg, J. G. (2019) 'Labeling Theory', in M.D. Krohn, N. Hendrix, G. Penly Hall & A.J. Lizotte (eds.) *Handbook on Crime and Deviance.* Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 179-196.
Bertoli, G. and Resciniti, R. (2013) 'Introduction', in G. Bertoli & R. Resciniti (eds.) *International Marketing and The Country of Origin Effect: The Global Impact of 'Made in Italy'.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Besky, S. (2013) *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-trade Tea Plantations in India.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Beth, M. W. (1942) 'The Elite and The Elites', *American Journal of Sociology,* 47(5), pp. 746-755.
Bhardwaj, V. and Fairhurst, A. (2010) 'Fast fashion: response to changes in the fashion industry', *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research,* 20(1), pp. 165-173.
Bian, Y. (2001) 'Guanxi Capital and Social Eating in Chinese Cities', in N. Lin, K.S. Cook & R.S. Burt (eds.) *Social Capital: Theory and Research.* New York: Routledge.
Biggeri, M., Braito, L., Caloffi, A. and Zhou, H. (2022) 'Chinese Entrepreneurs and Workers at The Crossroad: The Role of Social Networks in Ethnic Industrial Clusters in Italy', *International Journal of Manpower,* 43(9), pp. 1-18.
Blanchard, M. and Castagnone, E. (2015) 'Becoming Laoban [Boss]: Questioning the Peculiarity of Professional Trajectories and Strategies of Chinese Migrant Entrepreneurs', in L. Baldassar, G. Johanson, N. McAuliffe & M. Bressan (eds.) *Chinese Migration to Europe: Prato, Italy, and Beyond.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 269-286.
Blundy, A. (2017) *View from Italy: The People's Republic of Prato*: Prospect. Available at: https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/opinions/44077/view-from-italy-the-peoples-republic-of-prato (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Borrometi, P. (2017) *La mafia cinese e la camorra alleate nel traffico di rifiuti*: Agenzia Italia. Available at: https://www.agi.it/cronaca/news/2017-04-26/mafia_cina_camorra_traffico_rifiuti_prato_hong_kong-1717204/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Botelho, T. L., Gulati, R. and Sorenson, O. (2024) 'The Sociology of Entrepreneurship Revisited', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 50, pp. 341-364.
Boudon, R. (1998) 'Limitations of Rational Choice Theory', *American Journal of Sociology,* 104(3), pp. 817-828.
Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The Forms of Capital', in J.G. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education.* London: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258.
Bourdieu, P. (1998) *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in The Field of Power.* Translated by Lauretta, C.C. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (2002) 'Social Capital and Community Governance', *The Economic Journal,* 112(483), pp. F419-F436.
Bracci, F. (2015) 'The 'Chinese Deviant': Building the Perfect Enemy in a Local Arena', in L. Baldassar, G. Johanson, N. McAuliffe & M. Bressan (eds.) *Chinese Migration to Europe: Prato, Italy, and Beyond.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 83-100.
Bracci, F. (2016) *Oltre il distretto: Prato e l'immigrazione cinese.* Aracne.
Brass, D. J., Butterfield, K. D. and Skaggs, B. C. (1998) 'Relationships and Unethical Behavior: A Social Network Perspective', *Academy of Management Review,* 23(1), pp. 14-31.
Bressan, M. and Radini, M. (2009) 'Diversity and Segregation in Prato', in G. Johanson, R. Smyth & R. French (eds.) *Living Outside The Walls: The Chinese in Prato.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 130-148.
Bressan, M. and Tosi Cambini, S. (2009) 'The "Macrolotto 0" as A Zone of Transition: Cultural Diversity and Public Spaces', in G. Johanson, R. Smyth & R. French (eds.) *Living Outside The Walls: The Chinese in Prato.* Cambridge Scholar Publishing, pp. 149-160.

Breton, R. (1964) 'Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and The Personal Relations of Immigrants', *American Journal of Sociology,* 70(2), pp. 193-205.
Brewer, M. K. (2019) 'Slow Fashion in A Fast Fashion World: Promoting Sustainability and Responsibility', *Laws,* 8(4), pp. 24.
Brouwer, M. T. (2002) 'Weber, Schumpeter and Knight on Entrepreneurship and Economic Development', *Journal of Evolutionary Economics,* 12, pp. 83-105.
Brown, D. R. (1997) 'Sustainability Is Not About Money!: The Case of The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry', *Development in Practice*, pp. 185-189.
Burt, R. S. (1995) *Structural Holes: Social Structure of Competition: The Social Structure of Competition.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Calhoun-Brown, A. (1996) 'African American churches and political mobilization: The psychological impact of organizational resources', *The Journal of Politics,* 58(4), pp. 935-953.
Camera di Commercio di Pistoia-Prato (2023) *Movimprese I° Trim. 2023*. Available at: https://www.ptpo.camcom.it/doc/studi/demografia/demografia/2023/231movi.ods (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Cao, N. (2008) 'Boss Christians: The Business of Religion in The "Wenzhou Model" of Christian Revival', *The China Journal,* (59), pp. 63-87.
Cao, N. (2010) *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Cao, Y. (2012a) '海外华人商会与华人经济转型初探——以海外温州商会为例 [A Preliminary Study on Overseas Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Chinese Economic Transformation - An Example of Overseas Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce]', *Special Zone Economy,* (03), pp. 279-281.
Cao, Y. (2012b) '浅析海外华人商会与华人融入主流社会——以海外温州商会为例 [An Analysis of Overseas Chinese Chambers of Commerce and the Integration of Chinese into Mainstream Society: The Case of Overseas Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce]', *Frontiers,* (14), pp. 95-96.
Cappelli, L., D'ascenzo, F., Ruggieri, R., Rossetti, F. and Scalingi, A. (2019) 'The Attitude of Consumers towards "Made in Italy" Products. An Empirical Analysis among Italian Customers', *Management & Marketing. Challenges for the Knowledge Society,* 14(1), pp. 31-47.
Carroll, G. R. and Khessina, O. M. (2005) 'The Ecology of Entrepreneurship', in S.A. Alvarez, R. Agarwal & O. Sorenson (eds.) *Handbook of Entrepreneurship Research: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* Boston, MA: Springer US, pp. 167-200.
Castells, M. (2000) *The Rise of The Network Society.* 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Oxford.
Ceccagno, A. (2003a) 'Le migrazioni dalla Cina verso l'Italia e l'Europa nell'epoca della globalizzazione', *Migranti a Prato: il distretto tessile multietnico*, pp. 25-68.
Ceccagno, A. (2003b) *Migranti a Prato: Il distretto tessile multietnico.* Milan: Franco Angeli.
Ceccagno, A. (2003c) 'New Chinese Migrants in Italy', *International Migration,* 41(3), pp. 187-213.
Ceccagno, A. (2007a) 'The Chinese in Italy at A Crossroads: The Economic Crisis', in Thunø, M. (ed.) *Beyond Chinatown: New Chinese migration and the global expansion of China.* Copenhagen: NIAS Press, pp. 115-136.

Ceccagno, A. (2007b) 'Compressing Personal Time: Ethnicity and Gender within A Chinese Niche in Italy', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 33(4), pp. 635-654.
Ceccagno, A. (2012) 'The Hidden Crisis: The Prato Industrial District and The Once Thriving Chinese Garment Industry', *Revue européenne des migrations internationales,* 4, pp. 43-65.
Ceccagno, A. (2015) 'The Mobile Emplacement: Chinese Migrants in Italian Industrial Districts', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 41(7), pp. 1111-1130.
Ceccagno, A. (2017) *City Making and Global Labor Regimes: Chinese Immigrants and Italy's Fast Fashion Industry.* Springer International Publishing.
Ceccagno, A. and Salvati, A. (2020) *The Chinese 'grid reaction' in Italy*: University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS). Available at: https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/article/the-chinese-grid-reaction-in-prato-italy (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Cederberg, M. and Villares-Varela, M. (2019) 'Ethnic Entrepreneurship and The Question of Agency: The Role of Different Forms of Capital, and The Relevance of Social Class', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 45(1), pp. 115-132.
Chang, A. (2012) '20th Century Chinese Migration to Italy: The Chinese Diaspora Presence within European International Migration', *History Compass,* 10(2), pp. 179-190.
Chen, C. (2011) 'Made in Italy (by the Chinese): Economic Restructuring and The Politics of Migration', *Inter Asia Papers,* (20), pp. 1-34.
Chen, C. (2015) 'Made in Italy (by the Chinese): Migration and The Rebirth of Textiles and Apparel', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* 20(1), pp. 111-126.
Chen, E. (2021) *一份文件见证了全国首个异地商会的诞生 [A document witnesses the birth of the first national allopatric chamber of commerce]*. Wenzhou City Newspaper. Available at: http://news.66wz.com/system/2021/11/23/105419899.shtml (Accessed: 19.11.2022).
Cheng, E. W. (2019) 'United Front Work and Mechanisms of Countermobilization in Hong Kong', *The China Journal,* 83, pp. 1-33.
China Daily (2022) *意大利为什么有个"小温州"？ | Made in Italy by the Chinese [Why there is a "Little Wenzhou" in Italy | Made in Italy by the Chinese]*. Available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sXPjaF2BUyTObWqmDBlphQ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Choi, H. (2010) 'Religious Institutions and Ethnic Entrepreneurship: The Korean Ethnic Church as A Small Business Incubator', *Economic Development Quarterly,* 24(4), pp. 372-383.
Chu, N. (2020) 'The Paradoxes of Creativity in Guangzhou, China's Wholesale Market for Fast Fashion', in T. Silvio & L.H. Chumley (eds.) *Labour, Policy, and Ideology in East Asian Creative Industries.* Routledge, pp. 104-118.
Chuang, Y.-H. and Trémon, A.-C. (2013) 'Chapter Seven Problematizing "Chinatowns": Conflicts and Narratives Surrounding Chinese Quarters in and around Paris', in B.P. Wong & C. Tan (eds.) *Chinatowns Around The World: Gilded Ghetto, Ethnopolis, and Cultural Diaspora.* Brill, pp. 187-214.
Chung, H. F. L., Yen, D. A. and Wang, C. L. (2020) 'The Contingent Effect of Social Networking Ties on Asian Immigrant Enterprises' Innovation', *Industrial Marketing Management,* 88, pp. 414-425.

CNBC International (2022) *Why China's Shein is beating ASOS, H&M and Zara at fast fashion*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XCKnN6o19k&ab_channel=CNBCInternational (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Cohen, M. D., March, J. G. and Olsen, J. P. (1972) 'A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice', *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 17(1), pp. 1-25.

Coleman, J. S. (1988) 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', *American Journal of Sociology,* 94, pp. 95-120.

Cologna, D. (2005) 'Chinese Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Italy: Strengths and Weaknesses of An Ethnic Enclave Economy', in E. Spaan, F. Hillmann & T. van Naerssen (eds.) *Asian Migrants and European Labour Markets: Patterns and Processes of Immigrant Labour Market Insertion in Europe.* London: Routledge.

Comune di Prato (2023) *Tab. 2.4 - Comune di Prato: Stranieri immigrati dall'Estero nel 2023 per continente di immigrazione*. Available at: https://statistica.comune.prato.it/statistica/movimento-demografico/iscrizioni-e-cancellazioni/stranieri/immigrati/immi-stranieri-da-estero-per-continente-immi/media16486.php (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Comune di Prato (2024) *Report popolazione cinese al 31 dicembre - Anno 2024*. Available at: https://statistica.comune.prato.it/it/statistica/popolazione-anagrafica-31-dicembre-/stranieri/pagina1859.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Costanigro, M., Scozzafava, G. and Casini, L. (2017) *Vertical Differentiation, Perceptions Restructuring, and Wine Choices: The Case of The Gran Selezione in Chianti Wines*: American Association of Wine Economists working paper 211).

Crofton, S. and Dopico, L. (2007) 'Zara-Inditex and The Growth of Fast Fashion', *Essays in Economic & Business History,* 25, pp. 41-54.

Crow, G. (2014) 'The sociology of community', *The palgrave handbook of sociology in Britain.* Springer, pp. 374-395.

Curtis, D. and McKenzie, P. (2002) *Employability Skills for Australian Industry: Literature Review and Framework Development.*, Melbourne: BCA/ACCI. Available at: http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/40939 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

David, A., Schäfer, S. and Terstriep, J. (2021) *Characteristics of Migrant Entrepreneurs: Asset in Times of Crisis*, Gelsenkirchen: Institut Arbeit und Technik (IAT).

Day, G. (2006) *Community and Everyday Life.* Routledge.

De Luca, D. (2004) 'Networks of The Chinese Community in Milan', *Revue européenne des migrations internationales,* 20(3), pp. 29-48.

Dei Ottati, G. (1993) 'Metamorfosi e nascita di un'industria localizzata: La nascita del distretto industriale pratese', in R. Leonardi & Y.R. Nanetti (eds.) *Lo sviluppo regionale nell'economia europea integrata. Il caso toscano.* Marsilio, Venezia: Giunta Regionale Toscana.

Dei Ottati, G. (2003) 'The Governance of Transactions in The Industrial District: The 'Community Market'', in G. Becattini, M. Bellandi, G. Dei Ottati & F. Sforzi (eds.) *From Industrial Districts to Local Development. An Itinerary of Research.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Dei Ottati, G. (2009a) 'An industrial district facing the challenges of globalization: Prato today', *European Planning Studies,* 17(12), pp. 1817-1835.

Dei Ottati, G. (2009b) 'Italian Industrial Districts and The Dual Chinese Challenge', in G. Johanson, R. Smyth & R. French (eds.) *Living Outside the Walls: The Chinese in Prato.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 26-41.
Dei Ottati, G. (2014) 'A Transnational Fast Fashion Industrial District: An Analysis of The Chinese Businesses in Prato', *Cambridge Journal of Economics,* 38(5), pp. 1247-1274.
Dei Ottati, G. and Cologna, D. B. (2015) 'The Chinese in Prato and The Current Outlook on The Chinese-Italian Experience', in L. Baldassar, G. Johanson, N. McAuliffe & M. Bressan (eds.) *Chinese Migration to Europe: Prato, Italy, and Beyond.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 29-48.
Deka, M. (2023) *Traders and tinkers: Bazaars in the global economy.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Deng, G. T. (2023) 'I cinesi among others: The Contested Racial Perceptions among Chinese Migrants in Italy', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 50(14), pp. 1-19.
Deng, G. T. (2024) *Chinese Espresso: Contested Race and Convivial Space in Contemporary Italy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Deng, G. T. and Xiao, A. H. (2016) 'Aspiring to Motility: Chinese Petty Entrepreneurs in Italy', in V. Pedone & I. Sagiyama (eds.) *Transcending Borders.* Firenze University Press.
Deng, T. (2020) 'Chinese Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Italy's Coffee Bars: Demographic Transformation and Historical Contingency', *International Migration,* 58(3), pp. 87-100.
Denison, T., Arunachalam, D. and Johanson, G. (2009) 'The Chinese Community in Prato', in G. Johanson, R. Smyth & R. French (eds.) *Living Outside The Walls : The Chinese in Prato.* Cambridge Scholars Publisher, pp. 2-25.
Denzin, N. K. (2015) 'Triangulation', in G. Ritzer (ed.) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology.*
Deterding, N. M. and Waters, M. C. (2018) 'Flexible Coding of In-depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach', *Sociological Methods & Research,* 50(2), pp. 708-739.
Dheer, R. J. (2018) 'Entrepreneurship by Immigrants: A Review of Existing Literature and Directions for Future Research', *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal,* 14, pp. 555-614.
DiMaggio, P. J. and Powell, W. W. (1983) 'The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields', *American Sociological Review,* 48(2), pp. 147-160.
Dinmore, G. (2010) *Chinese gangs exploit niche left by Mafia*: Financial times. Available at: https://www-ft-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/content/a8cb4784-82de-11df-b7ad-00144feabdc0 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (2023) *Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla attività svolta e risultati conseguiti dalla DIREZIONE INVESTIGATIVA ANTIMAFIA Gennaio - Giugno 2023*. Available at: https://direzioneinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Rel-Sem-I-2023.pdf (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Doeringer, P. and Crean, S. (2006) 'Can Fast Fashion Save The US Apparel Industry?', *Socio-Economic Review,* 4(3), pp. 353-377.
Donadio, R. (2010) *Chinese Remake the 'Made in Italy' Fashion Label*: The New York Times. Available at:

https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/13/world/europe/13prato.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Doner, R. F. and Schneider, B. R. (2000) 'Business Associations and Economic Development: Why Some Associations Contribute More Than Others', *Business and Politics,* 2(3), pp. 261-288.
Durkheim, E. (1957) *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals.* Routledge.
Durkheim, E. (1965[1915]) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* New York: The Free Press.
Durkheim, E. m., Lukes, S. and Halls, W. D. (2013) *The division of labour in society.* Second edition edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Dyer, L. M. and Ross, C. A. (2007) 'Ethnic Business Owners and Their Advisors: The Effects of Common Ethnicity', in L. Dana (ed.) *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship. A Co-evolutionary View on Resource Management.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 117-131.
Economist (2022) *Emigrants from a small corner of China are making an outsize mark abroad*. Available at: https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2022/12/20/emigrants-from-a-small-corner-of-china-are-making-an-outsize-mark-abroad (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
El Banna, A., Papadopoulos, N., Murphy, S. A., Rod, M. and Rojas-Méndez, J. I. (2018) 'Ethnic Identity, Consumer Ethnocentrism, and Purchase Intentions among Bi-cultural Ethnic Consumers: "Divided Loyalties" or "Dual Allegiance"?', *Journal of Business Research,* 82, pp. 310-319.
Elias, N. (1978[1939]) *The Civilizing Process.* New York: Urizen Books New York.
Etzioni, A. (1995) *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda.* London: Fontana.
European Union (2013) *Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code (recast)*. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R0952&qid=1700896810465 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
European Union (2015) *Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2446 ANNEX 22-01*. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2015/2446/annex/10/adopted (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
European Union (2019) *Regulation (EU) 2019/1157 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on strengthening the security of identity cards of Union citizens and of residence documents issued to Union citizens and their family members exercising their right of free movement (Text with EEA relevance.)*. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2019/1157/oj (Accessed: 30.1.2025).
Evans, C. and Vaccari, A. (2020) *Time in Fashion: Industrial, Antilinear and Uchronic Temporalities.* Bloomsbury Visual Arts.
Evens, T. M. S. (1999) 'Bourdieu and the Logic of Practice: Is All Giving Indian-Giving or is "Generalized Materialism" Not Enough?', *Sociological Theory,* 17(1), pp. 3-31.
Fei, X. (1992[1947]) *From The Soil: The Foundation of Chinese Society.* Translated by G.G. Hamilton & W. Zheng. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Fei, X. (2004) *志在富民: 从沿海到边区的考察 [Aiming to enrich the people: a survey from the coast to the border area].* Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House.
Fels, D. and Hamilton, G. G. (2013) *The Social Sources of Migration and Enterprise: Italian Peasants and Chinese Migrants in Prato*, CARIM-East RR 2013/46, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute.
Feng, J. (2010) '商会的性质与治理:近期文献的研究进展 [The Nature and Governance of Chambers of Commerce: Recent Research Developments in the Literature]', *Inquiry into Economic Issues,* (08), pp. 120-125.
Fewsmith, J. (2005) 'Chambers of Commerce in Wenzhou Show Potential and Limits of 'Civil Society' in China', *China Leadership Monitor,* 16(1), pp. 1-9.
Field, J. (2016) *Social Capital.* 3 edn. London: Routledge.
Fiorentino, G. (2024) *La Cina si prende Prato: spariti i cognomi italiani*: Il Giornale. Available at: https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronaca-locale/nessun-cognome-italiano-undici-pi-diffusi-record-prato-2268774.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Fischer, C. S. (2005) 'Bowling Alone: What's The Score?', *Soc. Networks,* 27(2), pp. 155-167.
Flick, U. (2019) 'Triangulation', in P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug & R.A. Williams (eds.) *SAGE Research Methods Foundations.* London.
Flora, J. L. (1998) 'Social capital and communities of place 1', *Rural sociology,* 63(4), pp. 481-506.
Fondazione PIN (2015a) *女老板茉莉 —— 企业良好行为规范 （第三集）[Boss Molly - Corporate Code of Conduct (Episode 3)]*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwKly89rd4M (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Fondazione PIN (2015b) *女老板茉莉 —— 企业良好行为规范 （第一集）[Boss Molly - Corporate Code of Conduct (Episode 1)]*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoNwoRuES9w (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Foucault, M. (2008) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979.* Palgrave Macmillan.
Francone, P. (2019) *Prato, due consiglieri cinesi eletti con il Pd: non era mai accaduto prima*: il Giornale. Available at: https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/prato-due-consiglieri-cinesi-eletti-pd-non-era-mai-accaduto-1709366.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Frankenberg, R. (1966) *Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Freeman, J. H. and Audia, P. G. (2006) 'Community ecology and the sociology of organizations', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 32(1), pp. 145-169.
Friedman, S., Laurison, D. and Miles, A. (2015) 'Breaking the 'Class' Ceiling? Social Mobility into Britain's Elite Occupations', *The Sociological Review,* 63(2), pp. 259-289.
Fukuyama, F. (1995) *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity.* New York: Free Press New York.
Galaskiewicz, J. (1979) 'The structure of community organizational networks', *Social Forces,* 57(4), pp. 1346-1364.
Galbraith, C., Rodriguez, C. and Stiles, C. (2007) 'Ethnic Economies, Social Capital and The Economic Theory of Clubs', in L. Dana (ed.) *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship: A Co-evolutionary View on Resource Management.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 16-29.

Garud, R., Schildt, H. A. and Lant, T. K. (2014) 'Entrepreneurial Storytelling, Future Expectations, and The Paradox of Legitimacy', *Organization Science,* 25(5), pp. 1479-1492.
Gereffi, G. (1999) 'International Trade and Industrial Upgrading in The Apparel Commodity Chain', *Journal of International Economics,* 48(1), pp. 37-70.
Giddens, A. (1990) *The consequences of modernity.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell, Oxford, UK
Giovannoni, G. (2019) '"Never Again with Florence": Prato Identity between Subalternity and Local Pride', in S. Caramaschi, S. Marconcini & L. Marinaro (eds.) *Exploring Identities. Perspectives from a cross-disciplinary dialogue: QU3#21.* Quodlibet, pp. 15-22.
Glick Schiller, N. and Caglar, A. (2015) *Locating Migration: Rescaling Cities and Migrants.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Glinka, B., Glińska-Neweś, A. and Zakrzewska-Bielawska, A. (2023) 'A Resource Interaction Perspective on Resource Use and Development in Migrant Entrepreneur Networks', *Journal of Business Research,* 159, pp. 113740.
Global Times (2023) *What the congratulations Boeing and Airbus sent to the C919 reflect: Global Times editorial*. Available at: https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202305/1291527.shtml (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
GMT (no date) *What is Greenwich Mean Time?* Available at: https://greenwichmeantime.com/what-is-gmt/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company.
Goodman, P. S. and Bubola, E. (2019) *The Chinese Roots of Italy's Far-Right Rage*: New York Times. Available at: https://cn.nytimes.com/business/20191206/italy-china-far-right/dual/ (Accessed: 4.11.2024).
Goodrick, D. (2019) 'Comparative Case Studies', in P. Atkinson, S.D., A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug, & R.A. Williams (ed.) *SAGE Research Methods Foundations.* London.
Goswami, M. and Daultani, Y. (2022) 'Make-in-India and Industry 4.0: Technology Readiness of Select Firms, Barriers and Socio-technical Implications', *The TQM Journal,* 34(6), pp. 1485-1505.
Govier, C. (2022) *On-demand apparel production during your busiest season*: lfrnews. Available at: https://www.largeformatreview.com/blog/on-demand-apparel-production-during-your-busiest-season (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Granovetter, M. (1992) 'Economic Institutions as Social Constructions: A Framework for Analysis', *Acta Sociologica,* 35(1), pp. 3-11.
Granovetter, M. (2000) 'The Economic Sociology of Firms and Entrepreneurs', in R. Swedberg (ed.) *Entrepreneurship: The Social Science View.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Granovetter, M. (2005) 'The Impact of Social Structure on Economic Outcomes', *Journal of Economic Perspectives,* 19(1), pp. 33-50.
Granovetter, M. S. (1973) 'The Strength of Weak Ties', *American Journal of Sociology,* 78(6), pp. 1360-1380.
Gras, E. and Craveri, M. (1967) *Ritratti di Città: Prato*. Ritratti di città. Italy: Rai Teche. Available at: https://www.teche.rai.it/1967/02/ritratti-di-citta-prato/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Greta, M. and Lewandowski, K. (2010) 'The Textile and Apparel Industry in Italy: Current State and Challenges to Further Growth', *Fibres & Textiles in Eastern Europe,* 18(6), pp. 20-25.
Guercini, S., Milanesi, M. and Dei Ottati, G. (2017) 'Paths of Evolution for The Chinese Migrant Entrepreneurship: A Multiple Case Analysis in Italy', *Journal of International Entrepreneurship,* 15(3), pp. 266-294.
Gundle, S. (2002) 'Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy', *Journal of Cold War Studies,* 4(3), pp. 95-118.
Ha, J., Grodal, S. and Zuckerman Sivan, E. W. (2023) 'On the Inauthenticity of First Movers and Authenticity of Second Movers: How Demand Is Shaped by Legitimation Work', in Di Stefano, G. & Wezel, F.C. (eds.) *Organization Theory Meets Strategy. Advances in Strategic Management*: Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 91-114.
Han, E. C. (2014) *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown: Yokohama, 1894-1972.* Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press.
Harima, A. (2022) 'Theorizing Disembedding and Re-embedding: Resource Mobilization in Refugee Entrepreneurship', *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development,* 34(3-4), pp. 269-293.
Hassard, J. (1990) 'Introduction: The Sociological Study of Time', in J. Hassard (ed.) *The Sociology of Time.* Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-20.
Head, D. (1988) 'Advertising Slogans and the 'Made-in' Concept', *International Journal of Advertising,* 7(3), pp. 237-252.
Heilbrunn, S. (2005) 'The Impact of Organizational Change on Entrepreneurship in Community Settings', *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development,* 12(3), pp. 422-436.
Hertog, S. (2022) 'Segmented Market Economies in The Arab World: The Political Economy of Insider–outsider Divisions', *Socio-Economic Review,* 20(3), pp. 1211-1247.
Holmqvist, M. (2017) *Leader Communities: the Consecration of Elites in Djursholm.* New York: Columbia University Press.
Hong, X. and Bi, X.-c. (2018) 'Impact and Integration—Protestantism and Reconstruction of Wenzhou's Geographical Space', *Cambridge Journal of China Studies,* 13(1), pp. 45-58.
Hoppe, A. D. (2023) 'Coordinating Transnational Futurework in Fashion Design', *Socio-Economic Review,* 21(1), pp. 243-265.
Hsu, D. H. (2007) 'Experienced Entrepreneurial Founders, Organizational Capital, and Venture Capital Funding', *Research Policy,* 36(5), pp. 722-741.
Hua, X. (2021) '"空间与进阶：意大利华人的场域拓展与上向流动." [Space and Upward Mobility:Chinese Migrants' Field Expansion and Social Mobility in Italy]', *Overseas Chinese History Studies,* 04, pp. 50-61.
Igwe, P. A., Newbery, R., Amoncar, N., White, G. R. and Madichie, N. O. (2020) 'Keeping It in The Family: Exploring Igbo Ethnic Entrepreneurial Behaviour in Nigeria', *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research,* 26(1), pp. 34-53.
Il Tirreno (2013) *Prato, rapine contro i cinesi, condannati cinque albanesi*. Available at: https://www.iltirreno.it/prato/cronaca/2013/11/19/news/rapine-contro-i-cinesi-condannati-cinque-albanesi-1.8141081 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Il Tirreno (2023) *Prato, indumenti senza l'indicazione del produttore: sequestrato oltre 1 milione di capi nei pronto moda – Video*. Available at: https://www.iltirreno.it/prato/cronaca/2023/04/13/news/indumenti-senza-l-

indicazione-del-produttore-altro-maxi-sequestro-nei-pronto-moda-cinesi-di-prato-1.100281981 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Isenberg, D. (2014) *Entrepreneurship Always Leads to Inequality*. Harvard Business Review. Available at: https://hbr.org/2014/03/entrepreneurship-always-leads-to-inequality (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Italian Trade Agency (no date) *Did you know IT?* Available at: https://www.ice.it/en/invest/did-you-know-it#:~:text=Italy%20is%20industrious&text=With%20a%20GDP%20of%20over,of%202.71%25%20of%20worldwide%20market. (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Ivana, G.-I. (2017) 'Fake It Till You Make It: Imagined Social Capital', *The Sociological Review,* 65(1), pp. 52-66.
Johanson, G., Smyth, R. and French, R. (2009) *Living Outside The Walls: The Chinese in Prato.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
Johnston, R. and Lawrence, P. R. (1991) 'Beyond Vertical Integration–The Rise of The Value-adding Partnership', in G. Thompson, J. Frances, R. Levacic & J. Mitchell (eds.) *Markets, Hierarchies and Networks: The Coordination of Social Life.* SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 193-202.
Kalberg, S. (1980) 'Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for The Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History', *American Journal of Sociology,* 85(5), pp. 1145-1179.
Kasipar, C., Van Tien, M., Lim, S., Phuong, P., Huy, P., Schnarr, A. and Bünning, F. (2009) *Linking Vocational Training with the Enterprises-Asian Perspectives*, InWEnt in cooperation with UNESCO-UNEVOC.
Khan, S. (2015) '"Otherness" of Ethnic Enclave Attractions in Multicultural Cities: A Study of Chinatown and Little India', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism (APJIHT),* 4, pp. 1-14.
Kim, H.-Y. (2018) 'Effects of Social Capital on Collective Action for Community Development', *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal,* 46(6), pp. 1011-1028.
Kim, J.-O., Traore, M. and Warfield, C. (2006) 'The Textile and Apparel Industry in Developing Countries', *Textile Progress,* 38(3), pp. 1-64.
Kinetz, E. (2014) *Fire exposes illegal Chinese factories in Italy*: AP. Available at: https://apnews.com/article/25e61880c1fe4d819fd0223ffceb5746 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Kloosterman, R., Van Der Leun, J. and Rath, J. (1999) 'Mixed Embeddedness: (In)formal Economic Activities and Immigrant Businesses in the Netherlands', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 23(2), pp. 252-266.
Knight, F. H. (2009) *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit.* Signalman Publishing.
Komporozos-Athanasiou, A. (2022) *Speculative Communities: Living with Uncertainty in a Financialized World.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Kou, J. (2020) *City of entrepreneurs: Wenzhou, centre of China's private economy*: People's Daily Online. Available at: http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1028/c90000-9773971.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Kovacic, M. (2018) 'The Making of National Robot History in Japan: Monozukuri, Enculturation and Cultural Lineage of Robots', *Critical Asian Studies,* 50(4), pp. 572-590.
Krause, E. (2018) *Tight Knit Global Families and the Social Life of Fast Fashion.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Krause, E. L. and Bressan, M. (2017) 'Via Gramsci: Hegemony and Wars of Position in The Streets of Prato', *International Gramsci Journal,* 2(3), pp. 31-66.

Krause, E. L. and Li, Y. (2022) 'Out of place: everyday forms of marginalization, racism, and resistance among Chinese migrants in Italy', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 48(9), pp. 2037-2055.
Kwon, S.-W., Heflin, C. and Ruef, M. (2013) 'Community Social Capital and Entrepreneurship', *American Sociological Review,* 78(6), pp. 980-1008.
La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno (2012) *Tuscan youth gang preyed on the elderly, Chinese residents*. Available at: https://www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/english/419250/tuscan-youth-gang-preyed-on-the-elderly-chinese-residents.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
La Nazione (2023) *Prato, la Finanza sequestra un milione e 300mila articoli di pronto moda*. Available at: https://www.lanazione.it/prato/cronaca/prato-la-finanza-sequestra-un-milione-e-300mila-articoli-di-pronto-moda-qzpiwmil (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
La Reppublica (2018) *Il boss della mafia cinese fra gli inchini nel Macrolotto e un matrimonio extralusso per il figlio*. Available at: https://firenze.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/01/18/news/il_boss_della_mafia_cinese_fra_gli_inchini_nel_macrolotto_e_un_matrimonio_extralusso_per_il_figlio-186762547/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Lachmann, R. (2000) *Capitalists in Spite of Themselves: Elite Conflict and Economic Transitions in Early Modern Europe.* New York: Oxford University Press.
Lachmann, R. (2003) 'Elite Self-interest and Economic Decline in Early Modern Europe', *American Sociological Review,* 68(3), pp. 346-372.
Lamanna, F., Lenormand, M., Salas-Olmedo, M. H., Romanillos, G., Gonçalves, B. and Ramasco, J. J. (2018) 'Immigrant Community Integration in World Cities', *PloS one,* 13(3), pp. e0191612.
Lamont, M. l. (2009) *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Lan, T. (2014) *Made in Italy, by Chinese: How Chinese Migration Changed The Apparel Production Networks in Prato.* Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Graduate School.
Lan, T. (2015) 'Industrial District and the Multiplication of Labour: The Chinese Apparel Industry in Prato, Italy', *Antipode,* 47(1), pp. 158-178.
Lan, T. (2016) 'Politics of Visibility in The Chinese Community in Prato, Itally', in V. Pedone & I, S. (eds.) *Transcending Borders.* Firenze University Press, pp. 27-46.
Lan, T. and Zhu, S. (2014) 'Chinese Apparel Value Chains in Europe: Low-end Fast Fashion, Regionalization, and Transnational Entrepreneurship in Prato, Italy', *Eurasian Geography and Economics,* 55(2), pp. 156-174.
Lardara, M. (2014) *Prato, toglieteci tutto ma non il "cuociriso": la richiesta degli imprenditori cinesi*: Il Tirreno. Available at: https://www.iltirreno.it/prato/cronaca/2014/10/14/news/toglieteci-tutto-ma-non-il-cuociriso-la-richiesta-degli-imprenditori-cinesi-1.10115948 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Laumann, E. O., Galaskiewicz, J. and Marsden, P. V. (1978) 'Community structure as interorganizational linkages', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 4, pp. 455-484.
Lee, E. S. (1966) 'A Theory of Migration', *Demography,* 3, pp. 47-57.
Lem, W. (2010) 'Mobilization and Disengagement: Chinese Migrant Entrepreneurs in Urban France', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 33(1), pp. 92-107.
Lévesque, M. and Stephan, U. (2020) 'It's Time We Talk About Time in Entrepreneurship', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice,* 44(2), pp. 163-184.

Li, L. (2013a) 'The Path to Made-in-China: How This Was Done and Future Prospects', *International Journal of Production Economics,* 146(1), pp. 4-13.
Li, L. (2018) 'China's Manufacturing Locus in 2025: With a Comparison of "Made-in-China 2025" and "Industry 4.0"', *Technological forecasting and social change,* 135, pp. 66-74.
Li, M. (1999a) '"To Get Rich Quickly in Europe!" – Reflections on migration motivation in Wenzhou', in H. Mallee & F.N. Pieke (eds.) *Internal and International Migration Chinese Perspectives.* 1st ed. London: Routledge.
Li, M. (1999b) *'We Need Two Worlds': Chinese Immigrant Associations in A Western Society.* Amsterdam University Press.
Li, M. (2013b) '欧洲华人商城经济研究 [The economic model of Chinese shopping centres in Europe]', *Journal of World Peoples Studies,* No.97(03), pp. 53-60.
Li, M. (2017) 'New Chinese Immigrants in Spain: The Migration Process, Demographic Characteristics and Adaptation Strategies', in M. Zhou (ed.) *Contemporary Chinese Diasporas.* Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 285-307.
Li, P. S. (2004) 'Social Capital and Economic Outcomes for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities', *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale,* 5, pp. 171-190.
Light, I. H. (1972) *Ethnic Enterprise in America Business and Welfare among Chinese, Japanese, and Blacks.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
Lin, M. and Zhou, M. (2005) 'Community Ttransformation and The Formation of Ethnic Capital: Immigrant Chinese Communities in The United States', *Journal of Chinese Overseas,* 1(2), pp. 260-284.
Lin, N. (2001) *Social Capital. A theory of Social Structure and Action.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lin, S. and Li, Z. (2019) 'City Profile: Wenzhou-A Model City of Transitional China', *Cities,* 95, pp. 1-9.
Linden, A. R. (2016) 'An Analysis of The Fast Fashion Industry', *Senior Projects Fall,* 30. Available at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_f2016/30
Littler, J. (2017) *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility.* Routledge.
Liu, A. P. (1992a) 'The" Wenzhou Model" of Development and China's Modernization', *Asian Survey,* 32(8), pp. 696-711.
Liu, M. and Olivos, F. (2019) 'Co-ethnic Exploitation among Chinese within An Ethnic Economy', *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal,* 28(4), pp. 415-439.
Liu, Y.-L. (1992b) 'Reform from Below: The Private Economy and Local Politics in The Rural Industrialization of Wenzhou', *The China Quarterly,* 130, pp. 293-316.
Lorenzoni, G. and Ornati, O. A. (1988) 'Constellations of Firms and New Ventures', *Journal of Business Venturing,* 3(1), pp. 41-57.
Lounsbury, M. (2001) 'Institutional Sources of Practice Variation: Staffing College and University Recycling Programs', *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 46(1), pp. 29-56.
Luhmann, N. (1998) *Observations on Modernity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Lutteroth, J. (2012) *Made in Germany: Vom Stigma zum Qualitätssiegel*. Spiegel. Available at: https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/made-in-germany-vom-stigma-zum-qualitaetssiegel-a-947688.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Lyons, T. S., Alter, T. R., Audretsch, D. and Augustine, D. (2012) 'Entrepreneurship and Community: The Next Frontier of Entrepreneurship Inquiry', *Entrepreneurship Research Journal,* 2(1), pp. 1-24.

Ma Mung, E. (2000) *La diaspora chinoise: géographie d'une migration.* Éditions Ophrys.
Ma Mung, E. (2015) 'Migrants of Chinese Origin in France: Economic and Social Intégration', in L. Baldassar, G. Johanson, N. McAuliffe & M. Bressan (eds.) *Chinese Migration to Europe: Prato, Italy, and Beyond.* Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 49-64.
Maffesoli, M. (1996) *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society.* London: SAGE.
Mann, M. (2012) *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to Ad 1760.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Marjerison, R. K. and Yang, S. (2022) 'Dialects, Motivation, and English Proficiency: Empirical Evidence from China', *Frontiers in Psychology,* 13, pp. 999345.
Marshall, A. (1919) *Industry and Trade.* London: Macmillan.
Martinez-Damia, S., Marzana, D., Paloma, V. and Marta, E. (2024) 'The mediating role of migrant community-based organizations: Challenges and coping strategies', *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations,* 35(1), pp. 85-96.
Mason, J. (2011) 'Facet Methodology: The Case for an Inventive Research Orientation', *Methodological Innovations Online,* 6(3), pp. 75-92.
Matarazzo, M. (2013) 'Country of Origin Effect: Research Evolution, Basic Constructs and Firm Implication', in G. Bertoli & R. Resciniti (eds.) *International Marketing and The Country of Origin Effect: The Global Impact of 'Made in Italy'.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
McCaffrey, S. J. (2013) 'Tacit-rich Districts and Globalization: Changes in The Italian Textile and Apparel Production System', *Socio-Economic Review,* 11(4), pp. 657-685.
McGoey, L. (2012a) 'The Logic of Strategic Ignorance', *The British Journal of Sociology,* 63(3), pp. 533-576.
McGoey, L. (2012b) 'Philanthrocapitalism and its Critics', *Poetics,* 40(2), pp. 185-199.
McRobbie, A., Strutt, D. and Bandinelli, C. (2023) *Fashion as Creative Economy: Microenterprises in London, Berlin and Milan.* Cambridge: Polity.
Micelli, S. and Sacchetti, V. (2014) 'Made in Italy: A Decade of Change', *The Journal of Modern Craft,* 7(1), pp. 81-88.
Ministero delle Imprese e del Made in Italy *Official home page*. Available at: https://www.mimit.gov.it/it/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Moret, J. (2016) 'Cross-border mobility, transnationality and ethnicity as resources: European Somalis' post-migration mobility practices', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 42(9), pp. 1455-1472.
Morgan, H. M., Sui, S. and Malhotra, S. (2021) 'No Place Like Home: The Effect of Exporting to The Country of Origin on The Financial Performance of Immigrant-owned SMEs', *Journal of International Business Studies,* 52, pp. 504-524.
Mori, G. (1988) *Il Tempo Dell'industria 1815-1943. Prato: storia di una città*: La Monnier.
Murphy, R. (2000) 'Return Migration, Entrepreneurship and Local State Corporatism in Rural China: The Experience of Two Counties in South Jiangxi', *Journal of Contemporary China,* 9(24), pp. 231-247.
Museo di Tessuto (no date) *Display board at Prato Textile Museum*. Available at: https://www.museodeltessuto.it/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Nahapiet, J. and Ghoshal, S. (1998) 'Social Capital, Intellectual Capital, and the Organizational Advantage', *The Academy of Management Review,* 23(2), pp. 242-266.
Nesi, E. (2011) *Storia della Mia Gente.* Bompiani.
NetEase Media (2019) *揭秘：在欧洲的温州人有多少?他们是如何去欧洲的? [Revealed: how many Wenzhou people in Europe? How do they go to Europe?]*. Available at: https://www.163.com/news/article/ESHM5IGF000189PS.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Neufield, M. (1961) *Italy: School for Awakening Countries: The Italian Labour Movement in Its Political, Social and Economic Setting from 1800 to 1960.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
New European Overseas Chinese Newspaper (2019) *巴基斯坦人骂自己人：谁愿意雇告发过老板的人？[Pakistanis scold their own people: who wants to hire someone who has denounced their boss?]*. Available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/o1NnwmOwxPGj8rk0nL9HSQ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
New European Overseas Chinese Newspaper (2021a) *靠出卖老板得到的居留，心安吗？[Do you have peace of mind when you get your residency by betraying your boss?]*. Available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/BI-IwBwTNQlrfQZ8-q2M0g (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
New European Overseas Chinese Newspaper (2021b) *普拉托华人华侨联谊会成功换届，黄晓龙荣任第十三届会长 [Prato Chinese Overseas Friendship Association Successfully Changed, Huang Xiaolong Honoured as the Thirteenth President]*. Available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QNSCecboXFvawzreXIQFng (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Nieto, G. (2003) 'The Chinese in Spain', *International Migration,* 41(3), pp. 215-237.
Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T. and Gwilt, A. (2020) 'The Environmental Price of Fast Fashion', *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment,* 1(4), pp. 189-200.
Nisbet, R. A. (1967) *The Sociological Tradition.* London: Heinemann.
Noor, K. B. M. (2008) 'Case Study: A Strategic Research Methodology', *American Journal of Applied Sciences,* 5(11), pp. 1602-1604.
Obermiller, C. and Spangenberg, E. (1989) 'Exploring the Effects of Country of Origin Labels: An Information Processing Framework', *Advances in Consumer Research,* 16(1), pp. 454.
Oriani, R. and Staglianò, R. (2008) *I cinesi non muoiono mai.* Milan: Chiarelettere.
Orlandi, G. (2022) *Italy to investigate 'unofficial Chinese police stations'*: euronews. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2022/12/23/italy-to-investigate-unofficial-chinese-police-stations (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Padgett, J. F. (2010) 'Open Elite? Social Mobility, Marriage, and Family in Florence, 1282–1494', *Renaissance Quarterly,* 63(2), pp. 357-411.
Panorama (2018) *In gita col boss*. Available at: https://www.panorama.it/magazine/gita-col-boss (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Papadopoulos, N. (2013) 'Foreword: 'Italy' and 'Made-in Research': A marriage Made in Heaven?', in G. Bertoli & R. Resciniti (eds.) *International Marketing and The Country of Origin Effect: The Global Impact of 'Made in Italy'.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Pareto, V., Bongiorno, A., Livingston, A. and Rogers, J. H. (1935) *The Mind and Society* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
Parris, K. (1993) 'Local Initiative and National Reform: The Wenzhou Model of Development', *The China Quarterly,* (134), pp. 242-263.
Paulicelli, E. (2014) 'Fashion: The Cultural Economy of Made in Italy', *Fashion Practice,* 6(2), pp. 155-174.
Pescosolido, B. and Smith, E. (2021) 'From Nan Lin, "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital"', in B. Pescosolido, B.L. Perry, E.B. Smith & M.L. Small (eds.) *Personal Networks: Classic Readings and New Directions in Egocentric Analysis. Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences*: Cambridge University Press, pp. 489-503.
Pianigiani, G. (2018) *Police Bust a Chinese Mafia in the Country That Invented the Term*: The New York Times. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/18/world/europe/italy-chinese-mafia.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Pieraccini, S. (2008) *L'assedio cinese : il distretto parallelo del pronto moda di Prato.* Milano: Il sole-24 ore.
Pilgrim, M. and Meier, R. (1995) *National Chambers of Commerce: A Primer on The Organization and Role of Chamber Systems.* Citeseer.
Pinchera, V. and Rinallo, D. (2017) 'The Emergence of Italy as A Fashion Country: Nation Branding and Collective Meaning Creation at Florence's Fashion Shows (1951–1965)', *Business History,* 62(1), pp. 151-178.
Pink, S. and Morgan, J. (2013) 'Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing', *Symbolic Interaction,* 36(3), pp. 351-361.
Poder, T. G. (2011) 'What is Really Social Capital? A Critical Review', *The American Sociologist,* 42(4), pp. 341-367.
Polanyi, K. (2024) *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time.* Penguin Classics.
Pompili, G. (2022) *Chinese policemen in Italy: from joint patrol to a virtual police station*: Il Foglio. Available at: https://www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2022/09/05/news/chinese-policemen-in-italy-from-joint-patrol-to-a-virtual-police-station-4390907/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Portes, A. (1998) 'Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 24(1), pp. 1-24.
Portes, A. (2014) 'Downsides of Social Capital', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences,* 111(52), pp. 18407-18408.
Portes, A. and Rivas, A. (2011) 'The Adaptation of Migrant Children', *The Future of Children,* 21(1), pp. 219-246.
Portes, A. and Sensenbrenner, J. (1993) 'Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on The Social Determinants of Economic Action', *American Journal of Sociology,* 98(6), pp. 1320-1350.
Povoledo, E. (2013) *Deadly Factory Fire Bares Racial Tensions in Italy*. New York Times. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/08/world/europe/deadly-factory-fire-bares-racial-tensions-in-italy.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
PratoMigranti (2022a) *Italian Citizenship*. Available at: https://www.pratomigranti.it/en/documenti/cittadinanza/pagina39.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

PratoMigranti (2022b) *Residence Permit Conversion*. Available at: https://www.pratomigranti.it/en/documenti/permesso-soggiorno/conversione/pagina29.html (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Pratono, A. H. and Mahmood, R. (2014) 'Social Capital and Firm Performance: Moderating Effect of Environmental Turbulence', *Asian Social Science,* 10(19).
Putnam, R. D. (1995) 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy,* 6(1), pp. 65-78.
Putnam, R. D. (1996) 'The Strange Disappearance of Civic America', *Policy: A Journal of Public Policy and Ideas,* 12(1), pp. 3–15.
Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R. and Nanetti, Y. R. (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Qian, X. (2016) *三十多年前的"万元户"啥概念 [What was the concept of a 'household with 10,000 yuan in savings' more than 30 years ago?]*: People's Weekly. Available at: http://paper.people.com.cn/rmzk/html/2016-01/01/content_1645527.htm (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Quinn, J. (2010) *Learning Communities and Imagined Social Capital: Learning to Belong.* Bloomsbury Publishing.
Rahman Khan, S. (2012) 'The Sociology of Elites', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 38, pp. 361-377.
Rajan, R. (2015) 'Make in India, Largely for India', *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations,* 50(3), pp. 361-372.
Rath, J. (2003) 'Undressing The Garment Industry. Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Seven Cities', *International Migration Review,* 36(4), pp. 253-285.
Reckwitz, A. and Pakis, V. A. (2020) *The Society of Singularities.* Cambridge: Polity.
Reeves, A. S. and Friedman, S. (2024) *Born to Rule: The Making and Remaking of The British Elite.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Reinach, S. S. (2005) 'China and Italy: Fast Fashion versus Prêt à Porter. Towards a New Culture of Fashion', *Fashion Theory,* 9(1), pp. 43-56.
Roberts, H. (2020) *How Italy's 'Little China' dodged the coronavirus*: Politico. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/how-italys-little-china-dodged-the-coronavirus/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Rocamora, A. (2013) 'New Fashion Times: Fashion and Digital Media', in S. Black, A. de la Haye, J. Entwistle, R. Root, A. Rocamora & H. Thomas (eds.) *The Handbook of Fashion Studies.* Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 61-77.
Rodrigues, I. (2018) 'Migration and Social Aspirations: Chinese Cosmopolitanism in Wenzhou Region (China)', *Urban Science,* 2(2, 32), pp. 1-16.
Rofel, L. and Yanagisako, S. J. (2019) *Fabricating Transnational Capitalism: A Collaborative Ethnography of Italian-Chinese Global Fashion.* Duke University Press.
Rong, D. (1986) '意大利普拉托纺织业中小企业群成功的奥妙 (The mystery of the success of the SME cluster in the textile industry in Prato, Italy)', *Business Management Journal,* 11, pp. 73-75.
Roper, J. and Cheney, G. (2005) 'The Meanings of Social Entrepreneurship Today', *Corporate Governance: The international journal of business in society,* 5(3), pp. 95-104.
Ross, A. (2004) 'Made in Italy: The Trouble with Craft Capitalism', *Antipode,* 36(2), pp. 209-216.

Ruan, J. (2017) *Guanxi, Social Capital and School Choice in China.* Palgrave Macmillan.
Ruef, M., Aldrich, H. E. and Carter, N. M. (2003) 'The Structure of Founding Teams: Homophily, Strong Ties, and Isolation among U.S. Entrepreneurs', *American Sociological Review,* 68(2), pp. 195-222.
Ruef, M. and Lounsbury, M. (2007) 'Introduction: The Sociology of Entrepreneurship', in M. Ruef & M. Lounsbury (eds.) *The Sociology of Entrepreneurship. Research in the Sociology of Organizations*: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 1-29.
Ryan, L. (2018) 'Differentiated Embedding: Polish Migrants in London Negotiating Belonging Over Time', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 44(2), pp. 233-251.
Sala, I. M. (2024) *One of Italy's first city councillors of Chinese descent, Marco Wong helped shepherd immigrants through trying times*: South China Morning Post. Available at: https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3275661/one-italys-first-city-councillors-chinese-descent-marco-wong-helped-shepherd-immigrants-through (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Samila, S. and Sorenson, O. (2017) 'Community and Capital in Entrepreneurship and Economic Growth', *American Sociological Review,* 82(4), pp. 770-795.
Santini, C., Rabino, S. and Zanni, L. (2011) 'Chinese Immigrants Socio-economic Enclave in An Italian Industrial District: The Case of Prato', *World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development,* 7(1), pp. 30-51.
Sarpong, D., Ofosu, G., Botchie, D. and Meissner, D. (2024) 'A Phoenix Rising? The Regeneration of The Ghana Garment and Textile Industry', *Socio-Economic Review,* 22(1), pp. 81-105.
Savage, M. and Warde, A. (1993) *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity.* London: MacMillan.
Savi, L. (2023) *A New History of "Made in Italy": Fashion and Textiles in Post-War Italy.* Bloomsbury Publishing.
Schafft, K. A. and Brown, D. L. (2000) 'Social Capital and Grassroots Development: The Case of Roma Self-governance in Hungary', *Social problems,* 47(2), pp. 201-219.
Schelling, T. C. (1980) *The Strategy of Conflict: with A New Preface by The Author.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Schrover, M. and Vermeulen, F. (2005) 'Immigrant Organisations', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 31(5), pp. 823-832.
Schumpeter, J. (1912) *Theorie der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung.* Duncker & Humbolt.
Schutz, A. (1973) *The Structures of The Life-world.* Northwestern University Press.
Schwuchow, S. C. (2023) 'Organized Crime as A Link Between Inequality and Corruption', *European Journal of Law and Economics,* 55(3), pp. 469-509.
Scrinzi, F. (2016) 'Migrations and The Restructuring of The Welfare State in Italy: Change and Continuity in The Domestic Work Sector', in H. Lutz (ed.) *Migration and Domestic Work.* Routledge, pp. 29-42.
Sellerberg, A.-M. and Aspers, P. (2015) 'Fashion, sociology of', *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition.* Elsevier, pp. 835-839.
Selvatici, A. (2016) *Il sistema Prato : il distretto industriale illegale dei cinesi e degli italiani.* Bologna: Pendragon.
Shen, X. (2023) *A Comparative Study of Social Integration between "Zhejiangcun" in Beijing and The Chinese-run Textile Industry in Prato.* Master Dissertation,

Ghent University [Online] Available at: https://libstore.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/003/135/926/RUG01-003135926_2023_0001_AC.pdf (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Signorini, L. F. (1994) 'The Price of Prato, or Measuring The Industrial District Effect', *Papers in Regional Science,* 73(4), pp. 369-392.
Simmel, G. (1950) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.* Free Press.
Simon, H. A. (2000) 'Bounded Rationality in Social Science: Today and Tomorrow', *Mind & Society,* 1, pp. 25-39.
Smith, A. (2010) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* Penguin.
Son, J. (2020) *Social Capital. Key concepts*: Polity.
Sorokin, P. A. (2019) 'Social and Cultural Mobility', in D. Grusky (ed.) *Social Stratification, Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective, Second Edition.* Routledge, pp. 303-308.
Sorokin, P. A. and Merton, R. K. (1937) 'Social Time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis', *American Journal of Sociology,* 42(5), pp. 615-629.
Srivastava, R. (2019) 'Impact of "Make in India" in Indian Economy', *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development,* 3(4), pp. 429-432.
Stavros, C. and Westberg, K. (2009) 'Using Triangulation and Multiple Case Studies to Advance Relationship Marketing Theory', *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal,* 12(3), pp. 307-320.
Šubrt, J. (2021) *The Sociology of Time: A Critical Overview.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Sud, M., VanSandt, C. V. and Baugous, A. M. (2009) 'Social Entrepreneurship: The Role of Institutions', *Journal of Business Ethics,* 85, pp. 201-216.
Sull, D. and Turconi, S. (2008) 'Fast Fashion Lessons', *Business Strategy Review,* 19(2), pp. 4-11.
Swidler, A. (1986) 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review,* 51(2), pp. 273-286.
Thornton, P. H. (1999) 'The Sociology of Entrepreneurship', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 25(1), pp. 19-46.
Tilly, C. (1998) *Durable Inequality.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
Toccafondi, D. (2009) 'Prato's Textile District and Chinese Ethnic Businesses', in G. Johanson, R. Smyth & R. French (eds.) *Living outside The walls: The Chinese in Prato.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 75-95.
Tomba, L. (2014) 'Exporting The "Wenzhou Model" to Beijing and Florence: Suggestions for A Comparative Perspective on Labour and Economic Organization in Two Migrant Communities', in H. Mallee & F.N. Pieke (eds.) *Internal and International Migration.* Routledge, pp. 280-294.
Tönnies, F. and Loomis, C. P. (2002) *Community and Society = Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft.* Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications.
Topper, K. (2001) 'Not So Trifling Nuances: Pierre Bourdieu, Symbolic Violence, and the Perversions of Democracy', *Constellations,* 8(1), pp. 30-56.
Torche, F. and Valenzuela, E. (2011) 'Trust and Reciprocity: A Theoretical Distinction of The Sources of Social Capital', *European Journal of Social Theory,* 14(2), pp. 181-198.
Tsai, F.-S. (2018) 'Knowledge Heterogeneity, Social Capital, and Organizational Innovation', *Journal of Organizational Change Management,* 31(2), pp. 304-322.

Tsing, A. L. (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
UK Parliament (1887) *Merchandise Marks Act 1887*. Available at: https://archive.org/details/merchandisemark00payngoog/page/n3/mode/2up?view=theater (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Unione Industriale Pratese (2012) *Le Confezioni a Prato [The Manufacturing in Prato]*. Prato: Unione Industriale Pratese.
Unione Industriale Pratese (no date) *Evolution of the Prato textile district*. Available at: http://www.ui.prato.it/unionedigitale/v2/english/presentazionedistrettoinglese.pdf (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Van Gelderen, M. (2007) 'Country of Origin as A Source of Business Opportunities', *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business,* 4(4), pp. 419-430.
Vannucchi, C. E. (2015) *Piccola storia di Prato.* Pistoia: Gli Ori.
Veblen, T. (2017) *The Theory of The Leisure Class.* Routledge.
Verelli, A. (2022) *Prato: rapine a imprenditori cinesi, 6 indagati*: Polizia di Stato. Available at: https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/prato-rapine-a-imprenditori-cinesi-6-indagati (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Verlegh, P. W. J. and Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M. (1999) 'A Review and Meta-analysis of Country-of-origin Research', *Journal of Economic Psychology,* 20(5), pp. 521-546.
Vieira, T. (2023) 'Platform Couriers' Self‐exploitation: The Case Study of Glovo', *New Technology, Work and Employment,* 38(3), pp. 493-512.
Volery, T. (2007) 'Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A Theoretical Framework', in L. Dana (ed.) *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship.* Edward Elgar Pubshling, pp. 30-41.
Volodzko, D. (2015) *The Boss Christians of Wenzhou*: The Diplomat. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2015/03/the-boss-christians-of-wenzhou/#:~:text=Around%2011%20percent%20of%20people,two%20facts%20are%20not%20unrelated. (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2016) 'The Chicago School and Ecology: A Reappraisal for The Digital Era', *American Behavioral Scientist,* 60(1), pp. 8-23.
Wajcman, J. (2015) *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Walcott, S. M. (2007) 'Wenzhou and the Third Italy: Entrepreneurial Model Regions', *Journal of Asia-Pacific Business,* 8(3), pp. 23-35.
Wandersman, A., Valois, R., Ochs, L., de la Cruz, D. S., Adkins, E. and Goodman, R. M. (1996) 'Toward A Social Ecology of Community Coalitions', *American Journal of Health Promotion,* 10(4), pp. 299-307.
Wang, C. (2000) '流动中的社会网络: 温州人在巴黎和北京的行动方式 [Social networks on the move: how Wenzhou people move around in Paris and Beijing]', *Sociological Studies,* (3), pp. 109-123.
Wang, C. (2010) '华侨华人社团的"拟村落化"现象——荷兰华侨华人社团案例调查和研究[The Village-Simulation Phenomena and the Overseas Chinese Associations: A Case Study on the Ethnic Chinese Associations in the Netherlands]', *Overseas Chinese History Studies,* (03), pp. 1-12.
Wang, C. and Beja, J.-P. (1999) '温州人在巴黎:一种独特的社会融入模式 [Wenzhou people in Paris: a unique model of social integration]', *China Social Science,* (06), pp. 106-119.

Wang, H. and Miao, L. (2019) *China's Domestic and International Migration Development.* Springer.
Wang, J. (2024) *温州的荣耀与失落 | 城市商业系列 [Glory and loss in Wenzhou | Urban Business Series]*. Available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2EFy2sdUZ-dW-eS9QK2l5A (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Weber, M. (1930) *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism.* New York: Scribner/Simon & Schuster.
Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology.* Berkeley, California: University of California press.
Wei, X., Jiao, Y. and Growe, G. (2019) 'Language Skills and Migrant Entrepreneurship: Evidence from China', *Small Business Economics,* 53, pp. 981-999.
Wei, Y. D., Li, W. and Wang, C. (2007) 'Restructuring Industrial Districts, Scaling up Regional Development: A Study of the Wenzhou Model, China', *Economic Geography,* 83(4), pp. 421-444.
Weibel-Orlando, J. (2012) 'The Utility Of Employing Integrated Research Analysis Paradigms: A Case Study Of The Textile Industry In Prato, Italy', *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development,* 41(1), pp. 1-42.
Wenzhou Municipal Government (2023) *People motivated by Wenzhou entrepreneurs' pioneering spirit*. Available at: http://www.ezhejiang.gov.cn/wenzhou/2023-03/14/c_869563.htm (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Wenzhou United Front Department (2024) *温州：汇聚统战之力，唱好“强城行动”集结号 [Wenzhou: convergence of united front forces, sing ‘strong city action’ rallying call]*. Available at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Ts-RhQ2jLFsJa4ajZDSOPA (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Werbner, P. (2001) 'Metaphors of Spatiality and Networks in The Plural City: A Critique of The Ethnic Enclave Economy Debate', *Sociology,* 35(3), pp. 671-693.
West, K. R. (2024) 'Prudent Entrepreneurship in Theory of Moral Sentiments', *Business Ethics Quarterly,* 34(1), pp. 139-162.
Wilson, E. (2003) *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity.* Rutgers University Press.
Wittel, A. (2001) 'Toward a Network Sociality', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 18(6), pp. 51-76.
Wladyka, D. and Morén-Alegret, R. (2015) 'Chinese Immigrants in The Sagrada Familia Neighbourhood of Barcelona, Spain: Their Socio-economic Viability and Identity', in I.R. Robyn & G. Fei (eds.) *Handbook of Chinese Migration.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Wong, B. (1987) 'The Role of Ethnicity in Enclave Enterprises: A Study of the Chinese Garment Factories in New York City', *Human Organization,* 46(2), pp. 120-130.
Wrong, D. H. (1961) 'The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology', *American Sociological Review*, pp. 183-193.
Wu, J. (2006) '商会的定位及其自身治理 [The positioning of the Chamber and its own governance]', *Journal of China Revolution,* (10), pp. 29-32.
Xiang, B. (2004) *Transcending Boundaries: Zhejiangcun: The Story of A Migrant Village in Beijing.* Brill.
Xiang, B. (2017) '正規化的糾結: 北京 [浙江村] 和中國社會二十年來的變化 [The Tangle of Regularisation: Beijing [Zhejiang Village] and Twenty Years of Social Change in China]', *Twenty-first Century,* (159), pp. 81-97.

Xiao, F. and Liu, Y. (2005) *意大利普拉托华人移民的喜与忧 [The joys and sorrows of Chinese immigrants in Prato, Italy]*. Nouvelles d ' Europe: Chinaqw. Available at: https://www.chinaqw.com/news/2005/1212/68/8834.shtml (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Xiao, M. (2011) *温州移民在普拉托扎根的故事 [The story of Wenzhou immigrants taking root in Prato]*: RFI. Available at: https://www.rfi.fr/cn/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD/20110707-%E6%B8%A9%E5%B7%9E%E7%A7%BB%E6%B0%91%E5%9C%A8%E6%99%AE%E6%8B%89%E6%89%98%E6%89%8E%E6%A0%B9%E7%9A%84%E6%95%85%E4%BA%8B (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Xinhua (2020) *Spotlight: Chinese community in Italian city maintains "zero COVID-19 infection" record*: XinhuaNet. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/20/c_138992373.htm (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Yang, K. (2021) '双重边缘的自我加压：意大利普拉托华人华侨抗疫经历 [Self-pressure on the double edges: the experience of the Chinese diaspora fighting against the epidemic in Prato, Italy]', *Beijing Cultural Review,* (02), pp. 130-137.

Yang, P. Q. (2012a) 'From Sojourning to Settlement to Transnationalism: Transformations of The Chinese Immigrant Community in America', in C. Tan (ed.) *Routledge handbook of the Chinese diaspora.* Routledge, pp. 122-140.

Yang, Q. (2012b) *The Development of Entrepreneurship in China: The Influence of Institutions on Entrepreneurship.* LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.

Yang, Y. (2015) *温州模式 30 年|"温州模式"是怎么横空出示的？[Wenzhou Model 30 years | How did the "Wenzhou Model" emerge?]*: The Papers. Available at: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1329781 (Accessed: 28.2.2025).

Yin, R. K. (2017) *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Yoshimi, S. (1999) 'Made in Japan': The Cultural Politics of Home Electrification in Postwar Japan', *Media, Culture & Society,* 21(2), pp. 149-171.

You, T. and Zhou, M. (2019) 'Simultaneous Embeddedness in Immigrant Entrepreneurship: Global Forces behind Chinese-owned Nail Salons in New York City', *American Behavioral Scientist,* 63(2), pp. 166-185.

Zainol, F. A., Wan Daud, W. N., Abdullah, Z. and Yaacob, M. R. (2014) 'Social Entrepreneurship via Corporate Waqf: A Case of Islamic Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in Malaysia', *Global Journal of Commerce & Management Perspective,* 3(5), pp. 50-53.

Zerubavel, E. (1976) 'Timetables and Scheduling: On the Social Organization of Time*', *Sociological Inquiry,* 46(2), pp. 87-94.

Zerubavel, E. (1979) *Patterns of Time in Hospital Life: A Sociological Perspective*: Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zerubavel, E. (1982) 'The Standardization of Time: A Sociohistorical Perspective', *American Journal of Sociology,* 88(1), pp. 1-23.

Zhai, X. (2009) '是"关系"，还是社会资本 [Guanxi or Social Capital?]', *Journal of Sociology(in Chinese Version),* 29(1), pp. 109-121.

Zhang, Q., Liu, M. and Shih, V. (2013) 'Guerrilla Capitalism: Revolutionary Legacy, Political Cleavage, and the Preservation of the Private Economy in Zhejiang', *Journal of East Asian Studies,* 13(3), pp. 379-407.

Zhang, S. and Su, X. (2009) 'Made in China at A Crossroads: A Recourse-based View', *Journal of Public Affairs,* 9(4), pp. 313-322.
Zhang, T., Seet, P.-S., Redmond, J., Sharafizad, J. and Tan, W.-L. (2021) 'Chinese Immigrant Entrepreneurs', in L. Dana (ed.) *World Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurship.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Zhang, Y. and Zhang, M. (2016) 'Can Overseas Migrants Develop Sustained Entrepreneurship? Multiple Case Studies of Wenzhou Migrants in Italy', *The Journal of Chinese Sociology,* 3(1), pp. 1-23.
Zhang, Y., Zhang, M. and Li, M. (2016) '对海外移民创业网络嵌入路径的重新审视——从“走出去”到“走进去”[A re-examination of the embedded pathways of migrant entrepreneurial networks abroad - from ‘going out’ to ‘coming in’]', *Studies in Science of Science,* 34(12), pp. 1838-1846.
Zhao, J. 'The Competitiveness of Chinese Textile and Apparel Industry in Global Value Chain', *2010 International Conference on Internet Technology and Applications*: IEEE, 1-4.
Zhao, X. (2018) 'Chinese Entrepreneurship in Prato, Italy', in F. Billé & S. Urbansky (eds.) *Yellow Perils. China Narratives in the Contemporary World.* University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 84-107.
Zheng, V. and Wan, P.-s. (2022) 'Chinese Culture and Banyan-tree Style Family Businesses: The Enterprising Family of Lo Ying-shek in Hong Kong', *Business History,* 64(4), pp. 633-654.
Zhou, H. and Zhu, P. (2014) '为何非精英群体能在海外成功创业?--基于对佛罗伦萨温商的实证研究 [Why do non-elite groups succeed in overseas entrepreneurship? --Based on an Empirical Study of Warm Businessmen in Florence]', *Administrative World,* 2, pp. 68-76.
Zhou, M. (1992) *Chinatown: the Socioeconomic Potential of An Urban Enclave.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Zhou, M. (2004) 'Revisiting Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Convergencies, Controversies, and Conceptual Advancements', *International Migration Review,* 38(3), pp. 1040-1074.
Zhou, M. and Lee, R. (2013) 'Transnationalism and Community Building: Chinese Immigrant Organizations in The United States', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 647(1), pp. 22-49.
Zhou, M. and Lee, R. (2015) 'Traversing Ancestral and New Homelands: Chinese Immigrant Transnational Organizations in The United States', in A. Portes & P. Fernández-Kelly (eds.) *The State and The Grassroots: Immigrant Transnational Organizations in Four Continents.* Berghahn Books, pp. 27-50.
Zhou, Y. (2000) 'Social Capital and Power: Entrepreneurial Elite and The State in Contemporary China', *Policy Sciences,* 33(3), pp. 323-340.
Zhu, H. (2007) 'Self-Balancing of New Immigrants in Social Ecology: On the Development of the Flushing Community', *Chinese Studies in History,* 41(2), pp. 8-14.
Zhuang, G. (2020) '21 世纪前期海外华侨华人社团发展的特点评析 [A review of the characteristics of the development of overseas Chinese communities in the early 21st century]', *Southeast Asian Affairs,* (01), pp. 55-64.
Zona, D. (2023) *Teresa Moda, 10 anni dopo: le due titolari condannate sono ancora in Cina. Il console generale cinese: “La comunicazione tra dipartimenti giudiziari può risolvere il problema”*: TVPrato.it. Available at: https://www.tvprato.it/2023/12/teresa-moda-10-anni-dopo-le-due-titolari-

condannate-sono-ancora-in-cina-il-console-generale-cinese-la-comunicazione-tra-dipartimenti-giudiziari-puo-risolvere-il-problema/ (Accessed: 28.2.2025).
Zorbaugh, H. W. (1929) *The Gold Coast and the Slum.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.