

ABSTRACT

On April 13, 2007, Italy experienced a major ethnic riot by hundreds of Chinese residents in Milan. The riot was triggered by a parking ticket, which incited allegations of racial discrimination towards the Chinese and unfair treatment by the Italian police. The Chinese government even expressed concern for its Chinese cousins in Italy. It protested the alleged discrimination and demanded an investigation.

This thesis takes the Milan riot as a starting point for exploring contemporary social tensions between the Italians and Chinese. It analyzes the Chinese immigration experience, focusing not only on how and why they came to Italy, but also the reasons for their astonishing economic success. I utilize Italian, Chinese, and American media accounts and incorporate personal interviews and migration theory to demonstrate how the historical relationship between Italians and Chinese in Italy has evolved in concert with changes in Italian immigration law, debates surrounding Italian national identity and the role of immigrants in an increasingly multiethnic Italy. Based on my research, I argue that social tensions between the Italians and Chinese do not stem from racism as the media suggests, but rather from economic competition and the inability of the Italian state to regulate immigration and work.

While the media tends to portray a picture of unresolvable conflict between the Italians and Chinese, this work reveals that the second-generation

Chinese are, in fact, assimilating and integrating successfully into Italian culture. Although largely ignored in scholarship and the media, they are actually bringing the two communities closer together. Born and raised in Italy, the second-generation Chinese are in many ways, culturally more Italian than Chinese. Italians have accepted them because they seem less foreign than their parents. While they are economically successful, they also appear less threatening because they are more integrated in the Italian economy. Their experiences in the Italian higher education system and professional world alongside Italians have contributed to their successful integration. They are becoming doctors and lawyers, and even marrying native Italians. They are transforming Italy in ways that no one could have imagined just a generation ago.

**BEYOND VIA SARPI: THE CHALLENGES OF CHINESE
IMMIGRATION IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY**

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PREFACE

Often when I tell people that I study the Chinese and Italian languages and cultures, people look puzzled and say, “How on Earth are they related?” I used to laugh it off and say, “Marco Polo!” But to be honest, I struggled, as they did, to find a connection between the countries that I was very interested in.

Last year, while I was living in Bologna, Italy, I found out about the Chinese riot in Milan in April 2007. I was immediately intrigued. I thought that studying this riot and its underlying causes would be the perfect way to make use of my language skills in both Chinese and Italian and my knowledge of the two cultures. This is how I decided on this thesis topic, and when I returned to Mount Holyoke college in September, I immediately set off on analyzing the Chinese, Italian, and American media accounts of the riot.

When I discovered that many media accounts simply pointed to Italian racism as the reason for social tensions between the two communities, I was sure there was a deeper and more complicated explanation. My desire to explore the underlying causes of the riot led me on a journey to explore the larger questions of the Chinese immigration experience in Italy, Italian national identity, and the Italian-Chinese second-generation experience. In my research, I consulted Italian and American scholarly works and conducted personal interviews with Italians. I focus mainly from the 1980s to the present. In Chapter 1, I start with an analysis of the Milan riot and similar ethnic riots in Italy. In Chapter 2, I explore the

economic, political and social factors in tensions between the Italians and Chinese that have created conflict in Milan and other Italian cities. In Chapter 3, I discuss the integration and assimilation of the second-generation Chinese in Italy and how they are solving issues between the two communities.

CHAPTER I. DOUBLE PARKING: HOW A TRAFFIC TICKET LED TO AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT IN 2007 MILAN

On April 13, 2007, Italy experienced a major ethnic riot unprecedented in recent history.¹ This day was significant not only because it was a demonstration of anger and frustration by an immigrant community, but also because it was conducted by an ethnic group widely regarded as hidden and isolated from Italian society: the Chinese. The riot was a day-long demonstration by over three hundred flag-bearing Chinese residents, from Milan's Chinatown of approximately thirteen thousand, in the vicinity of Via Paolo Sarpi, a street filled with five hundred Chinese businesses and abundant commercial activity.² The protests left numerous overturned cars, about ten injured protesters, and fourteen injured policemen.³

All of this was triggered by a parking ticket. Ruowei Bu, a Chinese resident of Milan, was unloading shoes from her van to her shop when two traffic wardens fined her and confiscated her car registration, which would have prevented Ms. Bu from conducting her business. It is not clear exactly what

¹ Kington, Tom. "Italy's First Major Ethnic Riot Sparked By Parking Fine." *The Guardian* 13 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012).
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/13/italy.tomkington>>

² *Ibid.*

³ Willey, David. "Milan Police in Chinatown Clash." *BBC News* 13 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012). <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6550725.stm>>

happened next. Some witnesses say that when the wardens tried to take away her registration, Ms. Bu resisted and was struck by the wardens, while others say she initiated the violence by pushing them unprovoked. She was charged with resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer. She was then taken to a hospital for treatment of injuries caused either by the police officers or by protesters during the ensuing riot. The incident sparked outrage among the Chinese community, which claimed that the Milan city government had recently enacted new laws regarding hours of commercial unloading and parking as an excuse to fine Chinese shopkeepers in a discriminatory way. The government claimed that they were merely taking appropriate action against waiting cars and vans that were private vehicles, unlicensed to carry commercial goods.⁴

The American press has widely dubbed these laws, “pushcart laws.” The pushcart, popular with Chinese shopkeepers as a way of transporting goods, has become in Italy a symbol of successful Chinese commerce; the ban was interpreted by many as an attack on the Chinese community and its success. The city government countered this criticism by claiming that the pushcarts were hazards for the elderly and children on the sidewalk.⁵ Many Italians and city government officials downplayed the events, disregarding the racial tensions that were strongly linked to them. They stated that they did not understand why the riots resulted from “just a parking ticket.” Riccardo de Corato, the former deputy

⁴ Rosenthal, Elizabeth, and Povoledo Elisabetta. “A Pushcart War in the Streets of Milan’s Chinatown.” *New York Times* 26 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012). <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/world/europe/26iht-italy.1.5452099.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&>

⁵ *Ibid.*

mayor of Milan and member of the Berlusconi-affiliated center-right political party *Il Popolo della Libertà* (Pdl) says, “We’re not passing new laws targeting Chinese, we’re just enforcing the traffic codes.” He was “surprised that within minutes they were on the streets, with flags and megaphones.” “All for a fine, 18 people ended up in the hospital,” he adds.⁶ Former Milan mayor Letizia Moratti of the PdL states, “I find it very odd that a mundane fine should create tension between Milan and the Chinese government.”⁷ Comparing Moratti’s statement to the known facts at the time raises some questions. Ruowei Bu’s fine triggered the riots, which then sparked a discussion on the Italian police’s discriminatory actions towards the Chinese. This in turn led to a discussion of what created the ensuing tension between the Milan and Chinese government. Daniele Cologna’s interpretation of the riots, in contrast with Moratti’s and De Corato’s, is that there is a larger story of grievances behind the parking ticket. He writes, “The Chinese community, which is very industrious, has better things to do than demonstrate. It doesn’t make itself heard much, which is why the riots made waves. Protests damage their business dealings.”⁸ Cologna’s statement emphasizes the significance of the riot that politicians such as Moratti and De Corato try to downplay. The fact that the Chinese in Italy, who normally do not riot, organized such a large demonstration should actually make the politicians more concerned about their grievances.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Basic riot psychology theory can be used to argue against Moratti and De Corato's misconception that the Chinese protested only because of the parking ticket. The theory shows that riots typically result from underlying issues such as unemployment and discrimination rather than from a single incident such as a parking ticket. Regarding a particular riot as a mundane example of mindless mob mentality or criminality as Moratti and De Corato do, is a way of avoiding investigating the underlying issues that give rise to these events. Tory Higgins believes that riots typically occur when people feel "ineffective."⁹ This feeling may stem from economic difficulties such as unemployment or political issues such as racial discrimination and prejudicial treatment. Deeper and more systematic discussions about the underlying causes of the Milan riot and social conflict can better illuminate the dynamics of the situation as compared to the Italian media's discussions of law enforcement and attempted findings of blame.

Some Italian newspapers did explore patterns of Chinese-Italian social conflict in the community, but only superficially. Some newspapers published Chinese concerns about racial discrimination and unfair treatment by the police, but they failed to include a more in depth explanation of why the two communities were failing to communicate or negotiate. In an article in *La Repubblica*, Ms. Bu says, "We only want to work, live in Italy, raise our children

⁹ "The Psychology of a Rioter." *Huffington Post* 11 August 2011. Web. (Accessed 1 November 2012). <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/11/the-psychology-of-a-riotn924839.html>>

here that were born in Milan. We never did anything, we are not criminals, [and] we did not deserve this treatment.”¹⁰ Ling Xiu, a shopkeeper, states:

They fine me every day. We are here to work. We are not Mafia members, we do not kill anyone, we work and pay taxes. Tell me why the policemen fine me. I am telling you this because the police want to hurt the Chinese. In fact, the Italians can work but they try to stop us from working. And now they closed my shop, how will I feed my children and pay the rent?¹¹

Demonstrating protesters held banners stating, “We Ask For Civil Rights,” “Stop Violence Against The Chinese Community,” and “Stop Racism.” Ling Xiu’s statement that his Chinese community is made up of good people, not criminals, addresses the perceived growth of the Chinese mafia activity in Italy which is the source of a widespread stereotype that all Chinese immigrants are largely criminals.¹² This statement is quite ironic considering the Italian immigrant experience in America, where Italians complain loudly that they have often been stereotyped as Mafia members.

Surprisingly, the Chinese government in Beijing spoke up, acknowledging the significance of the protests and expressing concerns about the allegations of discrimination. Milan’s Chinese consul Limin Zhang says that the protest was “the result of the city’s zero tolerance.”¹³ He also states, “I want to know who made a mistake, I am here to understand, and to protect the legal interests of the

¹⁰ “Milano, Rivolta a Chinatown Scontri, Feriti e Auto Distrutte.” *La Repubblica* 12 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012).
<<http://www.repubblica.it/2007/04/sezioni/cronaca/milano-rivolta-cinesi/milano-rivolta-cinesi/milano-rivolta-cinesi.html>>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Kington. “Italy’s First Major Ethnic Riot Sparked By Parking Fine.”

Chinese vendors that pay taxes and are legal.”¹⁴ Zhang believed that the enforcement campaign against Chinese businesses including the ban on pushcarts, was excessive. Then-Chinese prime minister Wen Jiabao demanded a report on the riot, a sign that the affair threatened to affect Chinese-Italian political relations. The report states:

The Italian public security authorities particularly target Chinese immigrants...the Chinese residents in Milan pointed out that this treatment is only reserved to them when other immigrant communities break these rules daily in total impunity.¹⁵

The report concludes by emphasizing that the Chinese community feels unfairly targeted and harassed.

The Chinese media’s emphasis on the police’s use of physical force against the protesters may have had a role in attracting the attention and concern of the Chinese government or perhaps it was the other way around. News photos show Italian police hitting Chinese protesters with batons. While Italian and foreign newspapers reported that it was unclear who hit whom, many Chinese newspapers reported that the police assaulted the pregnant Bu while she was holding her two-year-old and three-month-old children. Many Chinese newspapers ran the headline, “Italian police beating of Chinese woman” and few newspapers wrote about the fining of Ruowei Bu or the existence of the pushcart laws. Some reported that there were nine hundred protesters, while it was widely

¹⁴ “Milano, Rivolta Chinatown Scontri, Feriti e Auto Distrutte.”

¹⁵ Salom, Paolo. “Pechino Avvisa: ‘Vogliamo Sapere’.” *Corriere della Sera* 13 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012).
<http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2007/04_Aprile/13/premiercinascontrimilano.shtml>

reported in the Italian and American media that there were around three hundred. In an interview with *Wenweipo* newspaper, Ms. Bu's father says that the police threatened to take her car away for two months, which would have severely hurt her business.¹⁶ By reporting only the Chinese perspective of the riots, and ignoring the Italian one, Chinese newspapers stirred up anger and concern, perhaps somewhat cynically, for one of the largest Chinese diaspora communities in Italy.

The Chinese media was not alone in dissenting from the mainstream Italian media's treatment of these events. Within Italy there were newspapers that covered the incident in different ways. Gaoheng Zhang writes that while *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera* show sympathy for the Chinese community's struggles, it is not a surprise that the anti-immigrant right-wing Italian newspapers such as *Il Giornale* and the Northern League's *La Padania* heavily emphasize alleged Chinese violence -- sometimes in very crass language.¹⁷ The author of one article in *Il Giornale* describes how an Italian man who shouted that it was right to beat the Chinese, "was attacked and knocked down", and "was saved from lynching [sic] by the police forces."¹⁸ He also claims that Ms. Bu assaulted the traffic wardens, although that is in dispute. He cites right-wing politicians who call for stronger legal restrictions on immigrant businesses and further tightening

¹⁶ "Milan, Nearly a Thousand Chinese Protest Against Police Assault of Pregnant Woman." *Wenweipo Newspaper* 14 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012). <<http://paper.wenweipo.com/2007/04/14/YO0704140001.htm>>

¹⁷ Zhang, Gaoheng. "The Protest in Milan's Chinatown and the Chinese Immigrants in Italy in the Media." *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* 1.1 (2007-2009): 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

of immigration laws.¹⁹ By saying that Ms. Bu pushed her children towards the traffic wardens to attract the attention of other Chinese people, the author implies that the protest was in some way provoked and downplays the legitimate role played by discrimination and prejudice against the Chinese.

Just as some Italian newspapers have been accused of being too “Eurocentric” or “Italocentric” in their coverage, some Chinese language publications within Italy, like the Chinese newspapers in China, were ethnocentric in their coverage of the riots. An article in *QiaoBao* cited by Zhang, contains “emotionally charged Chinese idioms and expressions [that were] aimed to arouse sentiments of nationalism and justice in the Chinese readers”, such as Mao Zedong’s statement, “We will not attack unless we are attacked; if we are attacked, we will certainly counterattack.”²⁰ The article may have had a role in encouraging anger in the Chinese community by portraying Ms. Bu as a victim of violence, even though whether her injuries were caused by the Italian police or in some other way in the chaos of the protests has never been established.

Significantly, contemporary immigrant protests by other communities, such as those of the African migrant workers in Calabria, were handled in an entirely different way from the Milan incident. In 2008, African immigrants rioted in Calabria after several African immigrants were shot by Italian teenagers

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Zhang, 29.

conducting, as Roberto Saviano says, “target practice.”²¹ The riots were a result of the culmination of frustration about the Calabrian mafia’s control of agricultural migrant labor and its rampant abuse and even murder of immigrants. There was chaos for days. Cars were burned and store windows were smashed. Local Italian residents organized groups to hunt down and shoot Africans. It is not clear whether the government arranged for Africans who feared for their safety to leave the town or if it forcibly confined them to immigrant detention centers. According to Former Interior Minister and leader of the right-wing and anti-immigrant party *Lega Nord* or Northern League, Roberto Maroni, immigrants who did not have residence permits or political asylum were immediately deported.²² Only three days later, the government began demolishing the camps where the migrants lived, as if to put the entire matter behind it.

While the Italian government may have been able to deport Africans because their countries lack the geopolitical influence to pressure the Italian state to treat them better or resolve the issues with the agricultural industry and Mafia, it certainly could not deport the hundreds of Chinese residents that participated in the riot. This is because China now has the political power to pressure the Milan government to resolve issues between the communities. It also has the power to

²¹ Burleigh, Nina. “African Immigrants in Italy: Slave Labor for the Mafia.” *Time Magazine* 15 January 2010. Web. (Accessed 15 October 2012).
<<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1953619,00.html>>

²² Donadio, Rachel. “Race Riots Grip Italian Town, and Mafia is expected.” *The New York Times* 10 January 2010. Web. (Accessed 15 October 2012).
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/world/europe/11italy.html>>

Maroni voted for the 2002 Bossi-Fini law that allowed for immediate deportation of irregular immigrants. <<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2002/09/feature/it0209103f.htm>>

use its critical economic and political relationship with Italy to threaten ramifications for Italy's treatment of Chinese immigrants. Dong Jinyi's statement clearly demonstrates China's particular strength in this situation. He states:

If the [government of Milan] adopts several laws only to expel the Chinese or to limit their [commercial] activities, there would be a problem...for the Italian government that currently welcomes Chinese investments and our businesses that want to come to Italy...if the problem will not be resolved in an adequate way there will surely be negative consequences.²³

It is a good question whether the Chinese government was intervening in the interest of Chinese migrants, or rather in the interest of economic relations between Italy and China, i.e. its own economic self-interest. By threatening to take away Chinese investments that support the Italian economy, Dong Jinyi's motive is clear: to pressure the Italian government to solve Chinese-Italian issues to save an economic relationship that is new, delicate, and also highly important for both countries' economies. When asked if the police were more severe in enforcing these laws against the Chinese than other immigrant groups, Dong replies, "Yes, many feel more discriminated against in respect to other immigrant groups."²⁴ In light of the difference in government action between the Chinese protest of 2007 and the African one of 2010, the question arises: would the Italian government have deported Chinese immigrants for attacking police officers and overturning cars?

²³ Salvia, Lorenzo. "Non Tentino di Cacciarci Altrimenti Rivedremo i Nostri Investimenti in Italia." *Corriere della Sera* 15 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012). <http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2007/04_Aprile/15/salvia_intervistaambasciatorecineseviasarpi.shtml>

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Whether the African riots were more violent and therefore required more government action than the Chinese incident is debatable. The only clear difference is that the African immigrants allegedly threw rocks at Italians and smashed shop windows. However, if we look at the Italian protests against Berlusconi in December 2010, their behavior was arguably much worse than that of the Africans. After a Parliamentary vote for the renewal of Berlusconi's government, intense riots broke throughout Rome. Tens of thousands of protesters, largely students, set up flaming barricades, attacked police, smashed shop windows, set off homemade bombs and burned cars and police vehicles. Ninety people, including fifty police, were injured.²⁵ While the 2007 Milan Chinese protest triggered a heated debate about the Chinese community, the Italian protests were met with a sense of acceptance and understanding by the Italian media and communities. The protests in Rome were portrayed in the press as an explosion of frustration that was inevitable and accepted as the understandable outcome of popular anger toward the Berlusconi government because of the many ways it had disappointed the Italian people -- over the economy, lack of jobs, and neglect of Aquila's post-earthquake aftermath.

In examining similar immigrant protests in Italy and of protests by Italians, patterns emerge in the dynamics of protests and in the action taken by the government and police. All the protests examined in this chapter, whether by

²⁵ Hooper, John. "Riots Break Out in Rome After Silvio Berlusconi Survives Confidence Votes." *The Guardian* 14 December 2010. Web. (Accessed 5 October 2012).
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/14/riots-rome-silvio-berlusconi-confidence-votes>>

Africans, Italians or Chinese, demonstrate that ethnic groups may unite in protest when they feel the government has really wronged them. A noticeable difference between the government responses is that while many of the Italian protesters of both the 2001 and 2010 riots were released from prison shortly after, the African protesters were deported, and the Chinese shopkeepers on Via Sarpi were evicted and forced to relocate their businesses. Four days after the riot, Limin Zhang and Letizia Moratti met and discussed various solutions to the problems in the community. They almost immediately started considering the possibility of transferring the wholesale Chinese businesses on Via Sarpi to another neighborhood outside of Milan's center.²⁶ It is surprising that Zhang would consider such a move, given that immediately after the riot, he was quoted as saying that the protest was a result of "[Milan's] zero tolerance."²⁷

A few days after his meeting with Moratti, Zhang confirmed his support for de-localization of the wholesale businesses on Via Sarpi as long as there was a "suitable solution that also considers the commercial interests [of the Chinese]."²⁸ Instead of exploring the issues of his previous allegation of Milan's "zero tolerance", the solution he offered to prevent future similar incidents was to "calm

²⁶ "Via Sarpi. Il Sindaco Moratti Incontra il Console Cinese: Tre Settimane per Trovare una Soluzione Condivisa da Residenti e Commercianti." *Comune di Milano* 17 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 1 November 2012).
<<http://www.comune.milano.it/dseserver/webcity/comunicati.nsf/weball/4C008F14B276CD77C12572C0006223ED>>

²⁷ Kington. "Italy's First Major Ethnic Riot Sparked By Parking Fine."

²⁸ Monestioli, Teresa. "Chinatown, da Settembre Tutti a Piedi." *La Repubblica* 13 May 2008. Web. (Accessed 15 November 2012).
<<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/05/13/chinatown-da-settembre-tutti-piedi.html?ref=search>>

our people.”²⁹ The plans for the transfer of four hundred businesses to Arese, a town located about seven miles from Milan’s center, went ahead until October 2007 when Zhang disavowed the project, citing that the area of transfer was not adequate. He stated that it was too small, expensive, and too many Chinese business owners were against it. A disagreement ensued between Zhang and De Corato about the size of the land and further postponed the project.³⁰ A month later, the transfer remained delayed and Italian residents were displeased.

Pierfranco Lionetto, of the Via Sarpi residents committee *ViviSarpi*, states:

Since June, another four to five stores were taken over by Chinese. [We Italians and Chinese] used to be equal, now they have 85 stores and Italians have 75...[the Chinese] load and unload at every hour, without respecting the schedule, including Saturday and Sunday...there is no more control.³¹

A protest was organized by Italian residents, who held signs with the following slogan, referring to the Arese transfer project: “Mayor Moratti, maintain the pacts!” Hu Xiaobing, an owner of a food import business in the community says, “They don’t want [us Chinese] in Arese and the Milan and Lombardy governments have not offered an alternative area for transfer.”³² By early December, the Milan government decided to begin a gradual transfer of four

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Dazzi, Zita. “Sarpi, il Console Cinese Dice No al Trasloco dei Negozi ad Arese.” *La Repubblica* 11 October 2007. Web. (Accessed 15 November 2012).
<<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/10/11/sarpi-il-console-cinese-dice-no-al.html?ref=search>>

³¹ Rossi, Stefano. “Ora i Cinesi Hanno Più Negozi di Noi, E di Arese Non Parla Più Nessuno.” *La Repubblica* 27 November 2007. Web. (Accessed 15 November 2012).
<<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/11/27/ora-cinesi-hanno-piu-negozi-di-noi.html?ref=search>>

³² *Ibid.*

hundred Chinese businesses to Arese or another area, allegedly to allow for Via Sarpi to become a “limited traffic zone.”³³ Making Via Sarpi a “limited traffic zone” seems to be a way to cover up an ugly attempt by the Milan government to solve the Chinese-Italian community issues the easy way – by sending the Chinese away. Over a year later, in May 2008, the government confirmed that by September Via Sarpi would become a pedestrian-only zone and Limin Zhang assured that the Chinese would leave by the end of the year.³⁴

Some of the issues raised by this incident have no clear answers. This is especially true of the local and international aftermath. For example, why exactly does the Milan government believe relocating the Chinese will address the underlying causes of the 2007 riot? Another question for which we have no good answer is why exactly did Limin Zhang seem to change his position and tacitly collaborate with the Milan government in this eviction? An important pattern that we see in Italy’s handling of immigrants is the tendency to send immigrants away when there is conflict, instead of dialoguing between the communities and making efforts to help them live together in one community. Although the Chinese shopkeepers were relocated and not deported like the Africans, they were still forced out of their homes and constrained to set up their businesses relatively far from their previous locations.

³³ Carra Ilaria and Vanni Franco. “Il Comune: Patti con i Cinesi per Risolvere il Caso Sarpi.” *La Repubblica* 2 December 2007. Web. (Accessed 15 November 2012).

<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/12/02/il-comune-patti-con-cinesi-per-risolvere.html?ref=search>

³⁴ Monestiroli. “Chinatown, da Settembre Tutti a Piedi.”

The 2007 Milan riot was about much more than a parking ticket. It reflected an accumulation of anger and frustration by the Chinese community against the larger community. The ticket itself may well have been an expression of prejudicial or hostile attitudes on the part of the Milan municipal government. Although the media tends to offer simple explanations for tensions between the Italians and Chinese such as Italian racism or cultural misunderstandings, I will show how certain deep and underlying issues between the Italians and Chinese in several different Italian cities are the actual causes of the riot. The Chinese, Italian, and American media accounts offer only a glimpse to the vastly different perspectives on tensions and the general lack of dialogue between the two groups. In Chapter 2, I will explore the Italian and Chinese perspectives on certain economic, political and social dynamics that have caused tensions between the two groups in Milan, Prato, and Florence. I will present some background on the history of Chinese immigration in Italy and explore some of the larger issues of Chinese immigration in Italy such as work, integration, and Italian immigration law from the 1980s to the present to show how tensions have strengthened or eased with time.

CHAPTER 2. THE UNDERLYING SOCIAL TENSIONS BETWEEN THE ITALIAN AND CHINESE COMMUNITIES

In the 1970s, Italy began a dramatic reversal. Once a country of emigration, it has become an immigration or “receiving” country. Before the 1970s, millions of Italians had immigrated all over the world: to North America, South America and Australia, and to European countries such as France, Germany and Switzerland.³⁵ In the last few decades, it has experienced immigration from the other side as a receiver, but not with ease. Initially, immigrants were welcomed with the expectation that they would work and later return to their native countries. Temporary guest-worker visas were enacted to encourage immigration to satisfy unskilled labor needs, caused by Italy’s low birth rate and many Italians’ unwillingness to do grueling and low-paying work. Italian lax immigration laws in the 1980s and 1990s helped to encourage the settlement of immigrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. However, the Italian government and communities have been surprised by the large number of immigrants that have established their lives in Italy, and do not plan to return to their countries of origin. The unexpected permanent settlement of these

³⁵ King, Russell. “Recent Immigration to Italy: Character, Causes and Consequences.” *GeoJournal* Vol 30. Issue 3 (1993): 283.

immigrants and the great demographic diversity it has brought to Italy have been difficult for many Italians to accept.

The Chinese immigrant community in Italy is one that has seen rapid growth over the past thirty years. Although the Chinese immigrant community has been regarded by Italians as isolated and inward looking, in recent years conflict between the two groups has risen and the Chinese have started to speak out about perceived discrimination and their resentments towards the Italian community and state. While the American media and some scholars point to racism as the predominant reason for social tensions between the Chinese and Italians, as witnessed in the aftermath of the Milan riot, I argue that social hostility towards the Chinese is mainly generated by inter-ethnic economic competition, which is caused by demographic shifts. Hostility has also risen because of cultural conflicts in diverse communities with native Italians and immigrants. This hostility is also caused by demographic shifts. Tensions were exacerbated by the inability of the state to control immigration and to enforce work conditions over the last thirty years. These factors provoke fear and hostility that is sometimes expressed in racist language. The examples of social tensions in this chapter are mostly from Milan, because the 2007 riot happened there, and Prato, a center of labor conflict because it is there that large numbers of Chinese garment industry workers have taken the place of more expensive native Italian workers. Milan and Prato are two cities with the largest Chinese communities in Italy. I will begin with a brief

survey of the history of the Chinese in Italy to show their immigration patterns over the past hundred years.

Why did the Chinese come to Italy?

The first significant influx of Chinese immigrants to Italy started in the late 1800s and continued through the 1930s.³⁶ These immigrants were primarily from Zhejiang province on the southeastern coast of China. Historically, the southeastern coast of China has been a source of emigration, which was made more convenient with the development of shipping ports and maritime commerce in the area.³⁷ Zhejiang province in particular has a deep-rooted tradition of external migration, originating with the creation in 1876 of the Wenzhou Treaty Port, which serviced international steamship lines.³⁸ As Daniele Cologna points out, the growing silk tie business in Italy brought Chinese from France and Holland in the 1920s in pursuit of economic opportunity, but in the 1930s, Chinese began to immigrate to Italy directly from China. China's domestic political and economic instability in the 1920s and 1930s also led many Chinese to emigrate. When the Republican government collapsed after Yuan Shikai's death in 1916, widespread chaos broke out. China entered the Warlord Period, during which local military strongmen ruled much of the country. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, China was engaged in a civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. The war was suspended because of the Japanese invasion of

³⁶ Cologna, Daniele. *Asia a Milano*. Milano: Editrice Abitare Segesta S.p.A. Milano, 2003, 50.

³⁷ Kuhn, Philip. *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 335.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

1937. When the Japanese left in 1945 at the end of World War II, the civil war resumed. It ended in 1949 with the Communist victory.

After World War II, the Chinese resumed immigration to Italy and found employment in the Italian leather industry. During these years, family members and friends joined relatives who had already settled in Italy, many setting up small businesses.³⁹ The long history of immigration to Italy since the late 1800s resulted in a “long buildup of knowledge, overseas connections, family habitues and social expectations,” which facilitated immigration to Italy from certain Chinese regions.⁴⁰ Immigration ceased for about thirty years during the Mao Zedong era, when rigid economic and social controls were put in place, but in 1979 the Deng Xiaoping government, with its “Reform and Opening Up” policy, reopened China to emigration. Millions of Chinese took advantage of the new policy to emigrate to Asia, Europe and North America.⁴¹

A combination of factors, including the well-established migratory network of the Zhejiang people, Italy’s lax immigration laws in the 1980s and 1990s, certain Italian industries’ appetite for inexpensive unskilled labor, and the Zhejiang people’s business skills and familiarity with the garment industry attracted many Chinese to Italy and contributed to their economic viability. During the 1980s, many immigrants reunited with family members who had settled in Italy long before and had started businesses for which they could

³⁹ Cologna. *Asia a Milano*, 50.

⁴⁰ Kuhn, 335.

⁴¹ Xi, Cheng. “The ‘Distinctiveness’ of the Overseas Chinese as Perceived in the People’s Republic of China.” *Beyond Chinatown: New Chinese Migration and the Global Expansion of China*. Ed. Thuno, Mette. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007, 49-67.

sponsor them as employees. Italy's immigration laws, which allowed legal residents to sponsor family members for reunification and non-family members as employees, helped establish a large network of Zhejiang people who helped family, neighbors and friends join them. Family connections certainly helped newcomers get a head start on working and starting businesses, but the Wenzhounese tradition of private commerce and garment production also contributed. The Wenzhounese are well known in China for being aggressive entrepreneurs and exemplars of "bootstrap capitalism."⁴² Their tradition of working and living as a family in small shops dovetailed with the small family business model of the Italian economy, especially in the clothing industry, one of Italy's largest.

Demographic Shifts

Italy's demographic shifts have played a large role in creating economic competition and cultural tensions from the 1980s to the present. The native Italian birth rate has been dropping since the 1960s, and by the 1980s Italy found itself without the large, young and unskilled workforce it needed in order to compete with high-volume production and lower prices abroad. Italian laws were then created to facilitate foreign immigration to fill the labor gap. From this point of view, the Wenzhounese arrived at just the right time. However, the rapidly expanding Chinese communities have continued to create economic competition and cultural tensions between the Italians and Chinese even today. Italy's birth

⁴² Kuhn, 336.

rate is currently the lowest in Europe⁴³ at 1.4 children.⁴⁴ The fact that many native Italians have children that are unwilling to continue the family business has created an economic void that the Chinese have filled. This has created some resentment among native Italians. The transition from overwhelmingly Italian neighborhoods to Chinese ones over the last three decades has also been too quick for many, and is a commonly expressed source of resentment. In 1980, there were only 2,000 Chinese; in 1996, 30,000; in 2000, 60,000; and in 2012, 277,570.⁴⁵ Today, the total number of Chinese persons, with the addition of illegal immigrants, is estimated to be much higher.⁴⁶ The rapidly expanding Chinese communities have created cultural tensions between the Italians and Chinese. Because I argue that economic competition is the largest source of tension between the two groups, I will first discuss this and will later discuss the cultural tensions caused by demographic shifts.

⁴³ "Italy Profile." *BBC News* 26 February 2013. Web. (Accessed 3 March 2013).
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17433142>>

⁴⁴ "Total Fertility Rate." *The World Factbook*. N.d. Web. (Accessed 10 March 2013).
<<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2127.html>>

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 19. For 2012 statistics, see "Caritas e Migrantes Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 22 Rapporto 2012." *Caritas Italiana* N.d. Web. (Accessed 26 February 2013).
<http://www.caritasitaliana.it/caritasitaliana/allegati/2908/Dossier_immigrazione2012_sc_heda_sintesi.pdf>

⁴⁶ Twenty-five years ago in Milan, there were only Italian names on the list of the thirty most common last names. Today, there are four foreign names on the list; ranking second is the Chinese name Hu "Fra i Cognomi Più Diffusi a Milano il Cinese Hu Scalza 'Sciur' Brambilla." *La Repubblica* 15 April 2012. (Accessed 1 February 2013).
<<http://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/04/15/news/fraicognomipiudiffusiamilanoilcinesehuscalzasciurbrambilla-33351789/>>

Inter-ethnic Economic Competition

Economic competition, arising from the growth and success of Chinese businesses, has been a major source of resentment for Italians in Milan and Prato especially during the economic crisis of the last six years. More recently, Italians have suffered through harsh austerity measures, such as a higher retirement age and increased taxes, proposed by Mario Monti's government as a way to combat the debt crisis that Silvio Berlusconi left.⁴⁷ The Chinese community has become a convenient scapegoat for economic hardship.⁴⁸ Besides working in the garment industry, the Chinese have opened coffee shops, restaurants and other conspicuous small businesses. They are widely seen as having "stolen" jobs and businesses from Italians. This is a major issue in the Via Sarpi area of Milan, where hundreds of predominantly Italian businesses have dwindled to only twenty. In 2012, Chinese businesses there were estimated at five hundred.⁴⁹

In reality, the Chinese did not steal Italian businesses in Milan; they merely filled an economic void by buying out Italian owners and businesses that were in decline and likely would have closed in their absence. In 1997, Chinese businessmen from Zhejiang started reopening shops that had closed, and local

⁴⁷ Migliaccio, Alessandra. "Monti Pledges Raft of Tax Cuts After a Year of Increasing Levies." *Bloomberg* 28 January 2013. Web. (Accessed 22 April 2013).

<<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-01-28/monti-pledges-raft-of-tax-cuts-after-a-year-of-increasing-levies.html>>

For more on current economic crisis, see: N.a. "Italy Jobless Rate Jumps to Record High of 11.7 Percent in January." *CNBC*. 1 March 2013. Web. (Accessed 22 April 2013).

<<http://www.cnbc.com/id/100510658>>

⁴⁸ Marco Romagnoli, Mayor of Prato, says, "Many Italians Blame [the Chinese] For Their Economic Problems." Goldsmith, Rosie. "Italy Struggles With Chinese Migrants." *BBC News* 2 August 2007. Web. (Accessed 30 September 2012).

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6926181.stm>>

⁴⁹ Kuruvilla, Gabriella. *Milano, Fin Qui Tutto Bene*. Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 2012.

Italian landlords were thrilled. An artisan of Milan recalls, “The landlords were happy because the artisans were starting to get old and there was no one that wanted to buy the business.”⁵⁰ Many Italian shop owners had to close their businesses because they wanted to retire and their children did not want to take over. Many shopkeepers were also happy to accept the large sums of money that the Chinese were willing to pay. Remo Vaccaro, president of the Association of Free Shopkeepers of Via Sarpi says:

People talk a lot about a ‘Chinese invasion’, but ninety percent of the artisans that sold their shops to the wholesalers would have closed shop anyway, simply because certain trades are not earning enough and the children of the artisans had no intention of taking over their fathers’ shops.⁵¹

While some Italians accuse the Chinese of “stealing” their businesses to explain the decline in Italian economic activity, the Chinese have a different explanation. Many Chinese attribute Via Sarpi’s loss of Italian character to the Italians’ laziness and unwillingness to start or operate their own businesses. Marco Wang, a Chinese textile factory owner and businessman’s statement highlights this stereotype:

A lot of Italians are complaining that we Chinese are taking their jobs. But if the Chinese people could speak publicly, they would say the Italians just don’t have the will to do anything. When Chinese people see a business opportunity, they get together and take advantage of it, very quickly.⁵²

⁵⁰ Oriani, Raffaele and Riccardo Staglianò. *I Cinesi Non Muoiono Mai*. Milano: Chiarelettere, 2008, 81.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Burleigh, Nina. “Italian Jobs, Chinese Illegals.” *Business Week*. 3 November 2011. (Accessed 1 February 2013). <<http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/italian-jobs-chinese-illegals-11032011.html#p3>>

Ignorance about what really happened in the 1990s and stereotypes stemming from a general lack of inter-ethnic dialogue have led to an “us against them” dynamic that may well lead to further open conflict along the lines of the 2007 riot.

Increased economic competition in one of Italy’s largest industries, fashion, is another source of resentment that is contributing to social tensions in Milan and especially in Prato, the locus of much clothing production. Italians accuse the Chinese of killing their small, family-run businesses with cheap labor and materials of the *pronto moda* style.⁵³ Many Italian businesses have had to close because they could no longer compete. Chinese factories produce clothes as cheaply as possible to satisfy a global market that is willing to spend increasingly less on clothing. The Chinese employees are sometimes paid as little as two euros an hour, and twenty dresses can be produced for only 150 euros wholesale.⁵⁴ This kind of competition has taken its toll on Italian businesses. In Prato, one-tenth of established companies have closed and one in ten Italian workers has lost his job.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the Chinese in Prato contend that they saved an industry that was in decline before they came. In the 1990s, textile production was increasingly outsourced and Italian companies were failing to keep up with high

⁵³ The *pronto-moda* industry produces low-quality clothes that imitate the latest fashions, catering to a young and trendy market.

⁵⁴ Goldsmith. “Italy Struggles With Chinese Migrants.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

foreign production or price competition.⁵⁶ Italy's low birth rate pushed labor costs upward. In addition, young Italians were not willing to do the unskilled manufacturing labor that previous generations did. Chinese immigrants provided a large workforce that was willing to do grueling unskilled labor of a sort that they had experienced back home in Wenzhou.

According to Antonella Ceccagno, Prato's declining textile businesses were saved by the employment of Chinese immigrants to produce garments and knitwear in Prato.⁵⁷ Many of Prato's established companies transitioned from textile-producing to designing and cutting, the next vertical step in clothing manufacture. The improvement in quality of garments produced in Chinese workshops for Italian firms and their versatility attracted big fashion design houses such as Armani, Gucci and Versace. In 2000, Chinese entrepreneurs started expanding their businesses from manufacturing clothes for Italians to cutting, designing and selling their own *pronto moda* clothing, severing their relationship with the Italian firms. Their independence from Italian firms has certainly hurt Italian businesses, but the vast network of buyers from around the world⁵⁸ has also expanded the industry in Prato.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ceccagno, Antonella. "Compressing Personal Time: Ethnicity and Gender within a Chinese Niche in Italy." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. Vol 33. Issue 4 (2007): 637.

⁵⁷ Ceccagno, "Compressing Personal Time: Ethnicity and Gender within a Chinese Niche in Italy," 640.

⁵⁸ Mr. Li Zhang, who owns a clothing company in Prato, exports clothes to 30 countries. He sells to wholesalers that sell to Zara, Mango, Top Shop and Guess. See: Donadio, Rachel. "Chinese Remake the 'Made in Italy' Fashion Label." *New York Times*. 12 September 2010. Web. (Accessed 5 October 2012).

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/13/world/europe/13prato.html?pagewanted=all>>

⁵⁹ Ceccagno, "Compressing Personal Time: Ethnicity and Gender within a Chinese Niche in Italy," 640.

While I agree with Ceccagno that the employment of Chinese immigrants saved the garment industry in Prato, I disagree with Ceccagno's argument that the immigrant employees' willingness to be exploited is a main factor in the Chinese success over Italian success in the garment businesses.⁶⁰ Ceccagno's argument plays into a disturbing Italian stereotype that the Chinese are in some way "less human" than Italians, and would do anything for the sake of economic success.⁶¹ I argue that Chinese success is owed to their familiarity with business and garment production, their timely arrival to fill Italy's unskilled labor gap, and the desperate poverty that inured them to working long hours to earn a living.

The widespread dehumanization of Chinese people in Italy is a direct result of the misconception that they work so hard because they are in some way "inhuman" or want to make as much money as possible to the exclusion of all other aspects of life.⁶² It is also a byproduct of Chinese economic success, the industries that they typically work in, and their being labeled as particularly "foreign" or "other", because of their non-European appearance and unfamiliar language and culture. Dehumanization is a common theme of the social hostility that is expressed in the mainstream media. It is significant because it can readily justify discrimination and prejudice. A twenty-four-year-old Italian student that I interviewed notes, "The Chinese people here work so much because they are used

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 647.

⁶¹ *Ibid*. Ceccagno writes, "Both [employer and employee] perceive this organization of work as the best and quickest route to success. Workers are willing to work long hours...because they aspire to be an employer themselves."

⁶² Interviewee #1, Personal Interview, South Hadley, Massachusetts USA, September 17, 2013.

to it. They always seem so robotic, like machines.”⁶³ This is far from the only example of Italians comparing Chinese to robots or machines, but it is somewhat surprising to hear it from a young person who grew up near the Chinese community in Milan.

It is true that there are many Chinese immigrants who work long hours in factories and sweatshops. However, they do so not out of a quirk of their nature, but rather out of desperate poverty. It is often the case, especially in the textile factories in Italy, that the Chinese are forced to work long hours to pay back smugglers for the cost of an illegal passage. For those without family connections, the cost can be quite high. For a passage worth twenty thousand euros, an immigrant might have to work grueling hours in a factory every day for a whole year without pay.⁶⁴ As recently as 2001, the cost was even higher. The minimum cost of entering Italy for some could have been three years of washing dishes in a restaurant without pay.⁶⁵

While Italian laws govern safety in the workplace, maximum hours of work and minimum wage, such laws are often ignored in practice.⁶⁶ This is particularly true in businesses that employ illegal immigrants, for obvious reasons. Some Italians rarely see Chinese people engaging in social activities and are ignorant about why the Chinese have no choice but to work long hours. This is

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Oriani and Staglianò, 23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Wilkinson, Tracy. “Slaving in the lap of luxury.” *LA Times*. 20 February 2008. Web. (Accessed 5 October 2012). <<http://articles.latimes.com/2008/feb/20/world/fg-madeinitaly20>>

a significant factor in explaining the persistent comparison of Chinese immigrants to machines.

According to Roberto Saviano, author of *Gomorra*, high-end Italian designer brands play a part in the brutal conditions under which some Chinese immigrants work. Fashion companies hold “auctions” among textile factories, or in other words, they hire the factory that is willing to make the most clothes in the shortest amount of time and for the lowest cost. As a result of this system, the work is notoriously demanding.⁶⁷ Employees in these factories typically work in the afternoon and continue through the night until 3 or 4 a.m. Then they sleep from 7 a.m to 3 p.m,⁶⁸ leaving little time for efforts to adapt to life in Italy.⁶⁹

The intense economic competition between the Chinese and Italians that we see in Prato is significant because Chinese ascendancy in the fashion industry, one of Italy’s major sources of national pride, has the potential to exacerbate existing anti-Chinese sentiment in Prato. Although the Italian-Chinese economic competition in Milan is obviously different than the one in Prato because of the different regional industries, the competition in Prato certainly has the potential to trigger social conflict and even a riot similar to the one in Milan.

⁶⁷ Saviano, Roberto. *Gomorra*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, 28.

⁶⁸ Chen, 19.

⁶⁹ For more on abuse and exploitation in Chinese factories in Italy, see: Gasperetti, Marco. “Il Cinese Yan Rompe L’omertà: Sfruttato dai Miei Connazionali.” *Corriere della Sera* 13 March 2008. (Accessed 6 May 2013). http://www.corriere.it/cronache/13_marzo_08/cinese-omerta_ef493e72-87c8-11e2-ab53-591d55218f48.shtml and Di Vico, Dario. “Prato, Ecco il Laboratorio degli Schiavi Cinesi.” *Corriere della Sera* 22 February 2012. (Accessed 6 May 2013). <http://www.corriere.it/cronache/12_febbraio_22/fabbrica-tessile-prato-cinesi-schiavi_f7fbee5a-5daa-11e1-8d58-29f34aaed5a4.shtml>

Cultural Conflicts

Contrary to popular belief, Italian social hostility toward the Chinese in Milan was not always prevalent. In the 1980s, when the Chinese started immigrating in large numbers, many Italians were excited to meet and get to know their new neighbors.⁷⁰ In recent years, however, Italian hostility toward the Chinese has increased not only as a result of their economic success but also because of rapidly expanding Chinatowns in Italy, which have created cultural clashes with Italians.

For many native-Italians, their hostility is rooted in the mere fact of change in their hometowns. This resentment, stemming from demographic shifts, is an important factor in tensions between the Chinese and Italians but is not as significant as the economic competition.

Middle-aged and older Italians are especially upset that main avenues in their neighborhoods, such as Via Sarpi in Milan, have become largely occupied by Chinese businesses, including clothing stores, bars, supermarkets, etc. “This used to be a Milanese neighborhood with stores to buy thread, bread, electrical things – the kind of stores neighborhoods have,” says Corrado Borrelli, a longtime resident of the Via Sarpi area. The transformation of neighborhoods from traditionally Italian to Chinese is a daily challenge to many Italians’ sense of identity. At the same time, young native Italians who have grown up going to school and socializing with immigrant children are showing signs of increased

⁷⁰ Oriani and Staglianò, 9.

acceptance of a multicultural Italian society. I will discuss this in depth in Chapter 3.

Some Italians are upset by any change of the neighborhood, while others are particularly dissatisfied that the change is Chinese. Corrado Borelli's quote is an exemplar of this attitude. He states:

The Chinese have taken over the neighborhood...they haven't developed relationships with the residents...they shop at their own stores – their culture closes them off. And there are small things, like they speak too loudly.⁷¹

Corrado Borelli's quote also shows how cultural intolerance and lack of understanding play a role in social hostility. The common Italian complaint that the Chinese are a “closed community” has some truth to it, but it is also misleading. For Italians, maintaining broad relationships throughout their community is an important social strengthener. The apparent lack of interest by the Chinese in developing relationships with the outside community is disturbing and even insulting to Italians.⁷² Giuliano Amato, the Minister of the Interior during the Milan riot, says:

The Chinese community is difficult to dialogue with. It is the most closed of the communities that live in our country. For the Chinese, isolation seems to be a chosen condition. The integration is a problem that they do not seem to realize. Because of this, building a relationship with them is really difficult.⁷³

⁷¹ “Chinatowns Not Welcome in Italian Cities.” *This Big City* 28 July 2011. Web. (Accessed 30 September 2012). <<http://thisbigcity.net/chinatowns-not-welcome-in-italian-cities/>>

⁷² Marsden, Anna. *Cinesi e Fiorentini: A Confronto*. Firenze: Firenze Libri, 1994, 168.

⁷³ Polchi, Vladimiro. “Un Mondo Chiuso, Ma Serve Dialogo, Vivono Se Stessi Come Città nella Città.” *La Repubblica* 13 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 30 September 2012). <<http://www.repubblica.it/2007/04/sezioni/cronaca/milano-rivolta-cinesi/commento-amato/commento-amato.html>>

One of the issues raised by Amato's statements is that he seems to focus only on how the Chinese people's culture and psychology contribute to the problems in communication with Italians. He does not address the Italian community's contribution to these issues. In an article in *La Repubblica*, he observes that other immigrant groups are more inclined to assimilation, such as the Moroccans and the Albanians. He attributes their assimilation to their cultures. Culture may be a relevant factor in how quickly and easily people assimilate, but it is neither the only factor nor arguably the most important.

By contrast, the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* features a heated discussion with Beijing ambassador to Rome Dong Jingyi on whether the Chinese or Italians are to blame for the perceived failure of Chinese to integrate in Italian society. The interviewer writes that the Chinese are "closed" and "willfully against integration." Dong Jingyi passionately fights this accusation, saying that the Italians play a large role in the failure of integration. Dong continues:

People who say this do not understand the history and culture of our country. The Chinese people want to integrate themselves but very often the Italians do not allow it because they consider us a danger...they accuse us of being the cause of the Italian economic problems.⁷⁴

The back-and-forth blame for the lack of integration among the first-generation Chinese community can be attributed to contrasting expectations about the immigration experience. Based on my research and interviews with Italians, I

⁷⁴ Salvia, Lorenzo. "Non Tentino di Cacciarci Altrimenti Rivedremo i Nostri Investimenti in Italia." *Corriere della Sera* 15 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 20 September 2012). <http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2007/04_Aprile/15/salvia_intervista_ambasciatore_cinese_via_sarpi.shtml>

have observed that Italians generally expect immigrants to assimilate into Italian culture, including mastering Italian, eating Italian food and adopting other cultural norms.⁷⁵ In many countries where the Chinese have immigrated, such as Australia and Malaysia for example, they have been largely left alone to set up their own ethnic enclaves. In many American cities, especially, they are free to establish urban Chinatowns, where they set up businesses, import Chinese products, and maintain their own language and customs without pressure to assimilate to American culture or even to speak English. Based on my experience growing up in New York City and attending schools with many first-generation Chinese immigrants, I observed that New Yorkers who live near urban Chinatowns generally expect nothing more of Chinese immigrants than that they obey the law. This attitude is a product of New York City's high degree of tolerance of immigrants and its low expectations for rapid assimilation. The establishment of their own communities and ethnic enclaves suits the Chinese communities very well, who like the Italians, are very proud of their culture and tend to value maintaining many aspects of their culture in their communities.

In their accusations that the Chinese are a “closed community,” Italians do not understand that Chinese immigrants tend to be unconnected to the greater community not as a matter of their culture, but for the most part because they are engaged in a struggle for survival that the more comfortable Italians are not able to understand. Chinese immigrants tend to work in jobs with long hours that allow

⁷⁵ For more on this, see: Severgnini, Beppe. *La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind*. Milan: Broadway Books, 2006.

little time to learn Italian or interact with the community. Operating coffee shops and stores involves opening very early in the morning and closing quite late, and the *pronto moda* industry requires workers to work all night in order to have clothes ready in the morning for delivery.⁷⁶ A combination of two factors, Italy's sense of cultural pride and lack of experience with immigration, explains the difficulties it faces with adjusting to the development of foreign ethnic enclaves such as the Chinese one.

Suspicion underlies much Italian social hostility toward the Chinese. It is particularly characteristic of anti-Chinese sentiment as opposed to other immigrant groups in Italy. The Chinese are especially threatening and suspicious to Italians because of the combination of foreignness in culture, language and appearance, and their economic success. When the Chinese in Milan bought stores from Italians who wanted to retire, many Italians asked where and how they obtained the capital – a question that would be unthinkable if asked about fellow *Milanesi*. When talking about the closedness of the Chinese community, accusations that the Chinese must be doing something illegal or improper are common. These suspicions often color public policy. In 2011, hysteria about the Chinese sending money they made in Italy back home to China influenced Prato's parliamentary deputy, Riccardo Mazzoni, a member of Silvio Berlusconi's *Popolo della Libertà* party, to propose laws that would forbid Western Union

⁷⁶ Chen, Calvin. "Made in Italy (by the Chinese): Economic Restructuring and the Politics of Migration." Unpublished manuscript, 19.

money transfers between Italy and China.⁷⁷ Concern about money not being spent in the country in which it was earned is understandable, especially in a time of economic recession. However, banning money transfers to a particular country is blatantly discriminatory.

“The Chinese never die” is a popular myth that exemplifies the dehumanization of the Chinese and the Italians’ suspicion of them. It could originate from two possible sources.⁷⁸ It could be that some people think all Chinese look alike and therefore never seem to disappear or “die.” It could also originate from the fact that the Chinese community in Italy is very young and that funerals for the elderly are not commonly seen. Statistics show that of all legal Chinese residents in Italy, the majority are ages 17 and under, followed by 18-24 and 35-39. The population of Chinese aged 50 and above is quite small, less than 20,000 out of 277,570.⁷⁹ This rumor is one of many that reflect racist views that stem from growing Italian suspicion of the Chinese and popular representation of them as “other” or “inhuman,” but it is certainly the most disturbing. Even though there are more Albanians than Chinese in Italy⁸⁰, this myth is only used in reference to the Chinese. This could be because the Chinese are different in appearance and more obviously not Italian. While the European-looking Albanians are much more likely to blend in with Italians, the Chinese are easily

⁷⁷ Burleigh. “Italian Jobs, Chinese Illegals.”

⁷⁸ Oriani and Staglianò, 15.

⁷⁹ “I Cittadini Non Comunitari Regolarmente Soggiornanti.” *Istat.it*. 25 July 2012. Web. (Accessed 1 February 2013). <<http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/67648>>

⁸⁰ As of 2012, there are 491,495 legal Albanians. See “Caritas e Migrantes Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 22 Rapporto 2012.”

identifiable as foreign. Their different language, looks, and behavior triggers a fear of the “unknown”, which has easily led to negative stereotyping and the feeling of being “threatened” by the Chinese.

Making the foreigner the “enemy” is an exaggerated version of a time-honored aspect of national identity in Italy. Italians freely admit that they self-identify in this order of importance: small town, city, region and country.⁸¹ A popular joke is that Italians only unite as a people during the football World Cup.⁸² Because they are aware of the dangers that a weak Italian national identity presents, Italian politicians have used anti-immigrant and “us against them” rhetoric to create a sense of national unity that most Italians do not actually feel. This kind of rhetoric is widely used by politicians of the *Lega Nord* party. This is paradoxical for two reasons. The anti-immigrant agendas are popular in Lombardia and the Veneto, regions whose large and successful industries are highly dependent on the unskilled labor that immigrants provide. Anti-immigrant sentiment in areas where immigrants supply a large amount of labor is not that unusual, as it can be seen in some regions in the United States with Mexican immigrants.⁸³ *Lega Nord* also sells the fantasy of a “pure white and Catholic

⁸¹ Interviewee #2, Personal Interview, Skype, March 9, 2013.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ See: Booth, William. “Mexican Officials Condemn Arizona’s Tough New Immigration Law.” *The Washington Post* 27 April 2010. Web. (Accessed 15 May 2013).
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/26/AR2010042603810.html>>

native” Italian country without immigrants, while at the same time excluding Italians from the regions below Emilia-Romagna.⁸⁴

Other right-wing political parties such as *Popolo della Libertà* have also advocated for anti-immigrant legislation such as expulsions of immigrants, immigration quotas and military reinforcement on the coasts and have also bought into the fantasy of a “pure native Italian” state. Graziella Parati writes, “This fascination with sameness aims to prove that migrants are ‘breaking and entering’ a culturally unified country that needs to defend the rights of the majority from cultural contamination.”⁸⁵ Focusing on immigration as a national issue has been a convenient way for politicians to avoid discussing arguably larger issues in Italy such as the vast unemployment especially among young people, government corruption, and even Italy’s lack of a genuine national identity. A return to the not-so-long-ago past where Southerners were blamed for increased crime instead of immigrants could bring even more instability to the Italian state.⁸⁶ The fact remains that Italy was never a unified country.

Florence’s aggressive hostility towards the Chinese in the 1990s demonstrates how factors such as fear of newcomers, economic restructuring and excessive nationalistic sentiment that exist in Milan and Prato can present real dangers to immigrants. According to Anna Marsden, anti-Chinese sentiment in Florence took the form of resentment about their increasingly successful

⁸⁴ Parati, Graziella. “Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture.” Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005, 24.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

businesses, and their perceived lack of interest in assimilation into Italian culture. Italians complained that the Chinese did not respect rules on limited working hours during the day, and therefore bothered neighbors with noise at night. They also lamented their foreign customs, especially regarding alleged poor hygiene and strange food.⁸⁷ Soon after, local committees formed to evict Chinese residents, in effect because they did not live like Italians. During this period, the *Lega Nord* was very involved in organizing public protests against the Chinese presence in Florence.⁸⁸

Although conspicuous demonstrations of anti-immigrant sentiment like these have not occurred recently, the sentiment behind them is still prevalent. *Lega Nord* continues to be a powerful and influential political force. What happened in Florence in the 1990s could easily happen again. According to Marsden, the anti-immigrant sentiment in Florence stemmed from two main factors that are also prevalent in other areas of Italy such as Milan and Prato: the fear that the Italian population will eventually die out if the birth rate continues to drop⁸⁹ and the belief that immigrant presence is a threat to Italy's so-called "national identity." This kind of hostility may help unite native Italians, but it can create an unfriendly, unwelcoming, and even dangerous environment for the Chinese and other immigrants.

⁸⁷ Marsden, 162.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 167.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 28.

It is important to remember that Italy is made up of regions that have different cultures and histories. The regions that have experience with immigration have handled it in different ways. In the regions that have Chinese communities, some are more welcoming than others. In communities where tensions exist, some derive from economic competition while others are purely cultural. In Milan, tensions leading up to the 2007 riot were caused by a combination of economic and cultural factors. The Milan riot demonstrates the danger that arises when popular resentment leaks into public policy. As we saw in the first chapter, the combination of economic and cultural resentment led the Milan government to relocate many Chinese businesses to the suburbs.⁹⁰

The Role of the State

The Italian state has been largely inadequate at controlling and regulating immigration and work conditions. The result is large influxes of immigrants that have been welcomed by parochial interests such as the fashion industry that want exploitable unskilled labor but that many Italians are unprepared to handle psychologically. Because the Italian state has not considered the new arrivals to be permanent settlers, it has been slow to devise legislation to help integrate them and has failed to initiate any sort of dialogue about multiculturalism in the affected Italian communities.⁹¹ Italian public services has also had difficulty handling the rapidly expanding communities administratively. The struggle to integrate immigrants via legislative and community efforts has been intermittent

⁹⁰ Carra Ilaria and Vanni Franco. "Il Comune: Patti con i Cinesi per Risolvere il Caso Sarpi."

⁹¹ Marsden, 39.

and ineffectual, often causing chaos and instability for which immigrants have become the scapegoat.

Italy's frequent grants of amnesties are a major reason for large influxes of immigrants that the police, social services, and local communities are unable and unprepared to handle. The amnesties are well known in the Chinese community and are considered a major attraction to immigrating there. A benefit is that they can secure regularization (legal status short of citizenship) in Italy and live there or move to another EU country where regularization is harder to obtain.⁹² In Calvin Chen's interviews with Chinese migrants in Italy, he found that "a running joke among Chinese migrants is that all one needs to do is wait five years or so for the Italian government to announce one of its periodic regularizations (*sanatoria*) and residency in Italy could be attained."⁹³ This perception is in fact accurate: grants of regularization to all illegal immigrants were issued in 1977, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998 and 2002.⁹⁴ News travels fast when the amnesties in Italy are announced, attracting thousands more Chinese to Italy. According to Ceccagno, in just one day in Prato in 2002 more than 3,000 irregular Chinese came to the Chinese Consulate to apply for passports, as passports were a requirement to qualify for the amnesty. These were not limited to Chinese who were illegally residing in Italy; there were also Chinese who had come from other

⁹² Ceccagno, Antonella. "New Chinese Migrants in Italy." *International Migration*. Vol 41. Issue 3 (2003): 194.

⁹³ Chen, 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

European countries such as Spain, France and the Netherlands.⁹⁵ Given the fact that the Italian state and cities were struggling with devising legislation and other means to integrate immigrants, it was counterproductive and even irresponsible to grant such frequent amnesties.

The Italian government has also struggled with how to handle the issue of illegal immigrants in the textile factories. Some Italian business owners in the fashion industry have expressed concern about the unfair competitive advantages of Chinese factories that exploit illegal immigrants. In recent years, the government has responded to these concerns by organizing police raids on factories to check for violations regarding working conditions, building codes and immigration law.⁹⁶ Chinese employees have been particularly upset about increasingly harsh police enforcement and some cite discrimination as a reason for the raids. Lin Xia, a resident of Prato for twenty years and an owner of many small businesses, says:

I understand there is a need to regulate this industry, but I'm not happy about the way they're doing it. They arrest the illegal immigrants and release them after a few hours but they aren't allowed back into their homes for a month. So they're left on the street with nothing to eat, nowhere to sleep.⁹⁷

A historically difficult relationship with the Italian police could explain why the Chinese protesters in Milan had such an angry reaction to their presence at the

⁹⁵ Ceccagno, "New Chinese Migrants in Italy", 194.

⁹⁶ Chen, 26.

⁹⁷ Ridgwell, Henry. "Ancient Italian Town Turns Against Chinese Migrants." *Voice of America* 22 October 2010. Web. (Accessed 1 March 2013).
<<http://www.voanews.com/content/ancient-italian-town-turns-against-chinese-migrants-105597568/128777.html>>

riot. The police raids, which prevent illegal immigrants from returning to work after they are released, create homelessness among illegal immigrants, resentment and fear in the Chinese community, and further social tensions. This lack of effective regulation of illegal immigrants and work conditions is causing a vicious cycle. The lack of enforcement of work hours and conditions leads to increased economic competition, causing Italian businesses to suffer, and creating more tension between the communities.

Concluding Remarks

Social tensions caused by economic resentment and other grievances between the Italians and Chinese built in Milan until they reached a breaking point: an open demonstration in 2007 of anger and frustration by the Chinese, an ethnic group that had been considered uninterested in expressing discontent with the Italian state and communities. The riot should not be considered an isolated case only relevant to Milan. The tensions that caused the riot reflect conflict between the two communities in many parts of Italy. Based on the evidence examined, I argue that Italian racism is not the sole cause of social tensions. At least as great a factor is resentment caused by inter-ethnic economic competition, which is made worse by demographic shifts and the Italian state's inadequacy in regulating immigration and work conditions. Racist language and discrimination are provoked by the fear and hostility that economic competition generates. Far from being limited to Milan and Prato, these factors exist, actually or potentially, throughout Italy.

It is difficult to predict if, when, or how relations between first-generation Chinese immigrants and native Italians might improve. While the American and Italian media tend to paint a picture of permanent conflict, it may well be that time will be the ultimate solution to Italian xenophobia and resentment towards the Chinese. However, Italy does not have much time. With the growth of the Chinese “second-generation” population, it is crucial that Italy’s government and communities adjust to Chinese immigrants’ permanent settlement and find ways to include and integrate them. Failure to include and integrate second-generation Chinese immigrants in particular could signify disaster for an increasingly multicultural Italy.

While many Chinese families are permanently settling in Italy, many are also returning to China or planning to. In the wake of Italy’s economic crisis, some Chinese are returning to China to seek better economic opportunities.⁹⁸ If this trend grows, it might be welcomed by the *Lega Nord* and its supporters, but it could also negatively impact the Italian economy and signify Italy’s failure to integrate immigrants. The survival of Italy’s garment industry without the first-generation Chinese is doubtful. Other Italian industries may also suffer from the dwindling supply of unskilled labor. Will the Chinese second-generation move to China in search of better economic opportunities or will they remain in Italy, the place they call home? Will Italian businesses collaborate with the second-

⁹⁸ Brogi, Paolo. “Crisi e Affari: I Cinesi Lasciano l’Italia Serrande Chiuse nella China Town di Roma.” *Corriere della Sera* 10 January 2013. Web. (Accessed 4 April 2013). <http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/13_gennaio_10/cinesi-in-fuga-da-italia-financial-times-2113486634689.shtml>

generation, who are often fluent in Chinese and Italian, to convince them to stay and promote economic growth? These are important questions to ponder.

CHAPTER 3. “I DON’T HAVE TO INTEGRATE, I’M ALREADY HERE”: HOW THE SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE IS BECOMING THE NEW ITALIANS

Although first-generation Chinese immigrants in Italy have been widely seen by Italians as self-isolated and uninterested in engaging with the larger Italian society, their children or “second-generation Chinese,” are becoming culturally assimilated into Italian culture and well integrated into Italian society. They are the children of the Chinese immigrants that came to Italy in the 1980s and 90s, who are now coming of age. These teenagers and twenty-year-olds are not renouncing or abandoning their identity, but rather forming a new identity: Italian-Chinese.

Degrees of assimilation and integration are obviously to some degree subjective and difficult to measure. There is also a limited amount of scholarship in Italy on second-generation immigrants’ educational attainment and social mobility, which are factors typically associated with assimilation and integration. However, certain indicators allow us to see that the Chinese second-generationers are assimilating and integrating to a surprising degree through education, social mobility, economic success, and greater interaction with Italians in social and cultural venues. In this chapter, I argue that their parents’ strong ethnic network and Chinese values have paradoxically contributed to this successful assimilation and integration into Italian culture and society. These, of course, are some of the same factors that made the first-generation Chinese appear more insular and

isolated. I also argue that the second-generation is more accepted by Italians than their parents because despite their economic success, the second-generation Chinese is less threatening because they seem less foreign in language and culture. While some scholars define assimilation as involving abandonment of an old language and culture, the definition that I will use here is the adaption to the cultural values and practices of the host country.⁹⁹ The definition of integration that I will use is the incorporation of individuals or communities in a society.¹⁰⁰

Assimilation and Integration Through Education

The second-generation Chinese has shown extraordinary educational achievement in Italy, compared to other immigrant groups. A recent research study on educational achievement in middle school among immigrant youth and second-generationers shows that Chinese students as a group achieve higher exam scores than any other first and second-generation immigrants, and surprisingly, higher scores than native Italians.¹⁰¹ Unlike other immigrants, they also generally choose to attend the academically more demanding high schools or *licei* rather than vocational schools.

By comparison, children of non-Chinese immigrants are more likely than native Italians to have inferior outcomes on the middle school exam, to enroll in vocational and polytechnic high schools, and to have higher dropout rates. Non-Chinese immigrants and children of non-Chinese immigrants are notably absent in

⁹⁹ Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2009, 247.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 246.

¹⁰¹ The study shows that students originally from Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Morocco and Tunisia are significantly more likely to have lower outcomes compared with Italians.

high schools. The percentage of foreign students (including second-generation) enrolled in the first year of vocational school is 10.6%, while the percentage of those in the first year of high school is only 2.5%. The choice between high school and vocational school has significant implications for an individual's future social mobility and integration. More than 88% of students who graduate from high schools enroll in universities, while only 17.8% of students from vocational schools enroll in universities.¹⁰² Obtaining a university degree is an important step for children of immigrants to pursue more advanced and traditionally Italian-dominated careers and to improve their standard of living and social status. Universities also provide an open, tolerant environment that fosters social interaction between second-generationers and native Italians.

According to Barban and White, the authors of the study, there are a variety of reasons why immigrant students in general do not perform as well academically as Italians, and why they tend to go on to study at vocational schools. Perhaps reflecting pessimism about the possibility that their children will be fully accepted into Italian society, families of some immigrant students prefer that they follow a more direct path to work instead of attending university. Some immigrant families who plan to return to their native countries consider higher education to be too "country-specific" to be economically worthwhile. On the other hand, because of Italy's lack of experience with immigration (see Chapter 2), Italian schools lack mechanisms to guide immigrant families through the

¹⁰² Barban, Nicola and Michael J. White. "Immigrants' Children's Transition to Secondary School in Italy." *International Migration Review*. Vol 45. Issue 3 (2011): 704.

education system. They typically do not provide extra classes to help foreign students learn Italian, making it hard for them to even consider pursuing higher education. Immigrants sometimes face discrimination by middle school officials, who discourage them from attending high school in favor of native Italians.¹⁰³ Discrimination could stem from the assumption that immigrants favor low-skilled jobs over advanced careers achieved through higher education.

The study uses a variety of factors to predict a student's secondary school choice, including home ownership, number of siblings, length of residency in Italy, and parents' education. Although the Chinese also exhibit the very attributes that point to lower academic achievement and vocational school attendance, nonetheless they perform better than native Italians and go on to study at high schools. In a way this is unsurprising, given that first-generation Chinese immigrants in Italy tend to actively encourage their children to do well in school, in order to have access to the advanced career opportunities that they themselves did not have.¹⁰⁴ Enzo Colombo emphasizes the greater influence of family cultural capital than socioeconomic condition on children's educational choices and future careers. Colombo writes, "Family orientation towards sacrifice, hard work, personal commitment and upward mobility is also a powerful motivator for their children."¹⁰⁵ Chinese students perform better academically than their peers

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 719.

¹⁰⁴ Bignoli, Marco. "Il Dialogo Parte dalla Seconda Generazione." *Associna* 22 December 2007. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013).
<<http://www.associna.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=553>>

¹⁰⁵ Colombo, Enzo and Paola Rebughini. *Children of Immigrants in a Globalized World: A Generational Experience*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 60.

because of differences in cultural values, and they are well aware of it. A popular discussion topic among second-generationers is how their parents worked hard in Italy and made sacrifices in order to afford to send their children to university and see them achieve a higher standard of living.

While the Barban and White research study on educational achievement highlights important trends with the second-generation Chinese, it fails to address the issues of the second-generation Chinese whose parents prefer that they work in their industry, a garment factory, for example, instead of pursuing higher education. It is important to keep in mind that Chinese families in Italy vary in socioeconomic level and while many parents made sacrifices to give their children a better life, many still have children who willingly or unwillingly choose to work for their parents' business.¹⁰⁶

Regardless of this exception, the importance of higher education is still recognized as a typical Chinese value. The conviction that higher education is as an important step to upward social mobility and economic success can be seen not only in Italy, but also in other Chinese diaspora communities around the world. To use New York City, as an example, Stuyvesant High School, the top public science high school in the city, boasts an Asian student population of more than seventy percent, most of which is Chinese. While many parents of different ethnic groups complain that the entrance exam, a test whose format is similar to the SAT, is an unfair assessment of academic achievement or aptitude, the Chinese

¹⁰⁶ Interviewee #3, Personal Interview, South Hadley, Massachusetts USA, April 22, 2013.

simply adapt. To help their children gain admission to Stuyvesant and similar schools, the strong Chinese network in New York operates dedicated preparatory schools for children as young as eight years old. During this period of intense preparation for the high school admission exam, some of my friends' Chinese parents seemed unnecessarily demanding in their emphasis on the importance of studying for the test to get accepted into a competitive high school. However, I now understand that they merely wished to give their children the best education possible and the opportunity to go on to study at prestigious universities. What this demonstrates is that the roles of Chinese values and the Chinese ethnic network in achieving social mobility through higher education are not specific to Italy, but are typical Chinese trends in many diaspora communities.

Why Age Matters

According to Cologna, age is an important factor in determining successful assimilation and integration. The earlier children start Italian school and the longer they stay there, the more likely they are to assimilate into Italian culture as measured by linguistic fluency and acculturation (food and music preference, cultural values, etc.).¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Castles and Miller argue that school plays a crucial role in forming children's cultural identities and assisting the assimilation process through learning the new language, and forming peer group relationships with natives of the host country.¹⁰⁸ Those who immigrate to Italy after completing elementary school abroad have the hardest time assimilating into

¹⁰⁷ Cologna, *Asia a Milano*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Castles and Miller, 28.

Italian culture. They commonly deal with the problems of feeling “half Chinese and half Italian.”¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, those who attended only one or two years of elementary school in China or who were born in Italy are much more likely to fully assimilate.¹¹⁰ Once a child is emotionally invested and settled at school in a new country, the parents are less likely to return to their home country, making the assimilation process easier. This can explain why the second-generation Chinese is particularly open to assimilation and integration. The fact that they were born and raised in Italy and spent little or no time in China means that their frames of reference or world views are more oriented towards Italy.

Among children born in Italy to Chinese immigrants, it is not unusual to find that many consider themselves culturally more Italian than Chinese. The school experience certainly plays a large role in this acculturation. They eat Italian food, dress in an Italian style, and adopt Italian cultural norms in areas such as dating, for example. Francesco Wu, a thirty-two-year-old founder of *Associna* says, “I opened an Italian restaurant. Why should I feel different from the classmates that I had here in Milan? I grew up on pizza and arrosticini, I feel that I belong in this country.”¹¹¹ We can see here that the media is mistaken in categorizing the Chinese community in Italy as a monolithic group; in fact, there

¹⁰⁹ Cologna, *Asia a Milano*, 58.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Dazzi, Zita. “La Carica dei Cinesi Milanesi Tra Vecchi Pregiudizi e la Voglia di Fare Impresa.” *La Repubblica* 30 January 2013. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013).
<<http://ricerca.gelocal.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2013/01/30/la-carica-dei-cinesi-milanesi-tra-vecchi.html>>

are significant cultural differences within the Chinese community and even between parents and children.

The cultural differences between second-generationers and their parents, which can be viewed as an indicator of progress in assimilation, can be disruptive within Chinese families. Qifeng Zhu, a twenty-five-year-old college student who immigrated to Italy with his family at eight years old says that major differences exist within his family; the differences are especially notable in relation to his older brother. He states, “He thinks like a Chinese person, and I think like an Italian.” Because during their childhood, the older brother lived in China five years longer than Zhu, they find that they do not share the same values.¹¹² This anecdote reinforces the importance of age in assimilation. Yiyu, a seventeen-year-old daughter of Chinese immigrants who was born in Italy says that while she has a more liberal Italian view on male and female relationships, her father is more conservative. This clash of views, which is related to the timing of her parents’ immigration, is straining their relationship. Yiyu says:

The Chinese mentality is far more open in China than among the Chinese in Italy, because Chinese immigrants in Italy have kept the mentality which existed twenty years ago and brought up their children with that mindset, but their children rebel because they have an Italian mentality.¹¹³

Paradoxically, the second-generationers’ parents’ emphasis on education allowed them to experience integration and interaction with Italians in the schools, thereby

¹¹² Eduati, Laura. “Noi Giovani Cinesi Aperti alla Società Qifeng, Yue e Junyi. Voci della Seconda Generazione.” *Seconde generazioni*. 14 April 2007. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013). <<http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/articoli-eparole/20070714-%C2%ABnoi-giovani-cinesi-aperti-alla-societa%C2%BB-qifeng-yue-e-junyi-voci-della-seconda-generazione-liberazione/>>

¹¹³ Colombo, *Children* 82.

helping them become better Italian speakers and far more culturally assimilated than their parents.

The clash of values between the first-generation and second-generation shows how different they really are. Although they come from the same family, they are living in different cultures.¹¹⁴

Are Italians accepting the second-generationers?

Not all native Italians understand that although the second-generationers look different and some do not hold Italian citizenship, they often self-identify as Italians. Daniele Cologna states, “For them, Italian is their first language, they have lived their whole lives in our cities and they don’t feel like foreigners at all, despite their almond-shaped eyes and identification card¹¹⁵.”¹¹⁶ Gianni Lin, a twenty-four-year-old coordinator of *Associna* says, “We first feel like Italians, because of language and culture.”¹¹⁷ Although the concept that a child born and raised in a country would be considered a native is very familiar to Americans, one should keep in mind that the second-generation population is a fairly new phenomenon for Italians. It will certainly take time for them to adjust.

¹¹⁴ Read this article about cultural differences between a second-generation Indian woman in Milan and her parents. Wadia, Laila. “Chicken Curry.” *Metamorphoses*. Vol. 13 Issue 1-2 (2006): 150-157.

¹¹⁵ The identification card, for complicated reasons, will list them as Chinese citizens if they have not been granted Italian citizenship.

¹¹⁶ Rossi, Emanuele. “‘Ora Parliamo Noi’, I Giovani Cinesi Si Sfogano sul Web, in Italiano.” *Panorama* 1 April 2009. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013).
<<http://mytech.panorama.it/Ora-parliamo-noi-i-giovani-cinesi-si-sfogano-sul-web-in-italiano>>

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

At the same time, native Italians are beginning to show signs of acceptance of the increasing second-generationer presence in Italy. The authors of the scholarly article “Different But Not Stranger” write:

Only recently have people begun to realize that the migration process has become established: the rise of family reunions and of children of immigrants born in Italy and attending Italian schools is self-evident proof that migrants and their families have become an important and permanent part of the nation.¹¹⁸

As we saw in Chapter 2, in the 1980s and 1990s many immigrants came to Italy with temporary guest worker visas, and were not expected to permanently settle. Only in recent years has a dialogue begun about a multicultural Italian society. Italian youth are generally adjusting well to the second-generation population, whose presence in Italian schools is becoming an everyday fact of life for native Italian youth. To some degree, their mere presence¹¹⁹ and inevitable greater participation in Italian society is leading to increased acceptance. The number of students of non-Italian nationality from primary to high school rose dramatically, from 60,000 in 1997 to over 600,000 in 2009.¹²⁰ Non-European Union minors represent 8.4% of the total number of students enrolled in school (excluding university). Around 44% of these students were born in Italy, and are in other words, “second generation.” Although statistics on how many of these students

¹¹⁸ Colombo, Enzo, Luisa Leonini, and Paola Rebughini. “Different But Not Stranger: Everyday Collective Identifications among Adolescent Children of Immigrants in Italy.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. Vol 35. Issue 1 (2009), 41.

¹¹⁹ Today, there are around 650,000 second generationers out of 1 million minor residents of foreign parents in Italy. See: Ciavoni, Carlo. “Cittadinanza ai Figli degli Immigrati. Ecco Perché l’Italia È Indietro.” *La Repubblica* 7 January 2012. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013). <http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2012/01/27/news/la_cittadinanza_ai_figli_degli_immigrati_e_una_follia_e_un_assurdit_non_darla-28850095/>

¹²⁰ Barban and White, 703.

are specifically second-generation Chinese are not easily found, one can assume that many of them are Chinese, given that China is one of the top countries of origin for immigrants in Italy.

Still, the nation's process of acceptance is comparatively slow and negative stereotypes and ideas persist. Francesco Wu says, "We are like the Italians after World War II, with this great desire to improve, to work, to sacrifice, that maybe bothers and scares people. Because of this, urban legends are rampant about us – like that we eat dogs or ants or that we never die."¹²¹ Wu's statement applies obviously more to the first-generation Chinese immigrants than to the second-generation. The first-generation made sacrifices to provide a relatively comfortable lifestyle and educational opportunities for their children. Urban legends such as "the Chinese never die" are typically directed towards the first-generation, not the second. Because the second-generation was born and raised in Italy, they are culturally more Italian than Chinese, and therefore considered by native Italians to be less foreign and threatening.

Second-generationers who have graduated from high school are showing continuing signs of academic and economic success. They are obtaining university degrees and pursuing careers that are far more advanced than their parents.¹²² There are currently 65,437 foreign students enrolled in Italian

¹²¹ Dazzi, Zita. "La Carica dei Cinesi Milanesi Tra Vecchi Pregiudizi e La Voglia di Fare Impresa."

¹²² Bignoli, Marco. "Il Dialogo Parte dalla Seconda Generazione."

universities¹²³, which is a big jump from 2006 when there were only 38,000.¹²⁴ Again, statistics on how many of them are Chinese are difficult to find, but the Chinese student presence in Italian universities is a well-known phenomenon. Their presence in universities is significant because it shows that they are not only pursuing advanced careers and achieving social mobility, but they are doing it in Italy and therefore establishing permanence. This upward social mobility is allowing second generationers to pursue careers that allow for more social interaction with Italians than did the bar and factory jobs of their parents. The second-generation is working in a much wider range of companies, including banks, insurance offices and law firms.¹²⁵ Because of this interaction, many are also marrying native Italians.

Chinese Upward Mobility and the Ethnic Network

Explaining the Chinese second-generationers' economic success and upward social mobility, Cologna points to these factors: perfect knowledge of Italian, a familiarity with the Italian business culture, and a general business sophistication that comes from watching their parents successfully run their own small business.¹²⁶ It is because they grew up in their parents' insular ethnic

¹²³ "Caritas e Migrantes Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 22 Rapporto 2012."

¹²⁴ "Caritas/Migrantes: Immigrazione Dossier Statistico 2006." *Caritas Italiana*. N.d. Web. (Accessed 20 April 2013).

<http://www.caritasitaliana.it/materiali/Pubblicazioni/Libri_2006/Dossier_immigrazione_2006/scheda.pdf?rifi=guest&rifp=guest>

¹²⁵ Martinengo, Maria Teresa. "Generazione Fusion: "Noi, Metà Cinesi Metà Torinesi." *Angitalia*. 2 September 2011. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013).

<<http://www.angitalia.org/index.php/it/rassegna-stampa/56-generazione-fusion-noi-meta-cinesi.html>>

¹²⁶ Cologna *Asia a Milano*, 56.

enclave that the second-generation was able to learn how to run businesses. Francesco Wu says, “Here is a generation that grew up here and is taking the reins of the businesses: it is a normal transition, I don’t have to integrate, I am already here.”¹²⁷ However, being an Italian-Chinese who works in companies that do business between the two countries is not as simple as it might seem. Wu, in a discussion about his job as an Italian representative for various engineering companies in China says, “The thing that was most difficult for me was the fact that the Chinese saw me as Italian, while the Italians saw me as Chinese.”¹²⁸ This feeling of being “stuck between two worlds” or of not fully belonging in either country is commonly expressed by second-generationers.

Research shows that the retention of native languages by strong ethnic networks play a large role in the trend toward upward mobility. According to the authors of “Different But Not Stranger”, second-generationers who rely on a dense ethnic network, and retain their ability to express themselves effectively both in the language of their ethnic group and in that of their host country are more likely to attain educational and professional success.¹²⁹ The Chinese network has collaborated to build Chinese-language schools that teach speaking, reading and writing of Mandarin for the sake of protecting their heritage and also

¹²⁷ Dazzi, Zita. “La Carica dei Cinesi Milanesi Tra Vecchi Pregiudizi e La Voglia di Fare Impresa.”

¹²⁸ Oursana, Samia. “Francesco Wu: ‘Ecco Come Vi Cucino i Pregiudizi’.” *Stranieri in Italia* 7 March 2013. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013).
<http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/un_altra_italia/francesco_wu_ecco_come_vi_cucino_i_pregiudizi_16765.html>

¹²⁹ “Different But Not Stranger,” 39.

to enhance future careers.¹³⁰ The present economic relationship between Italy and China is particularly advantageous for second-generationers in their pursuit of advanced careers. The demand for fluent speakers of Chinese and Italian and for people who are familiar with the two cultures has certainly increased.¹³¹

It is not at all surprising that second-generationers are pursuing different careers than their parents. Comparatively comfortable in mainstream Italian society, they have more options and are pursuing their own interests and ambitions. There is less involvement in traditionally Chinese businesses such as restaurants and textile manufacturing.¹³² In 2003, Daniele Cologna predicted that Italian-Chinese youth would soon enter the mainstream Italian job market and compete with their Italian peers.¹³³ This is precisely what is happening today, despite much of the media continuing to stereotype the Chinese as only being involved in *pronto moda* shops or restaurants. This is another example of the media's failure to grasp the differences between the first and second generations.

The upward social mobility of the Chinese second generationers and their increasing visibility in the mainstream workplace are striking evidence of the trend toward peaceful integration of the Chinese in Italy. Their employment in

¹³⁰ 本站原创. "How is the Second-Generation's Chinese?" *Cina in Italia* 25 May 2012. Web. (Accessed 20 April 2013).
<<http://cinainitalia.com/Article/Detail/?12e7beb5288c5cbe.html>>

¹³¹ Di Vico, Dario. "E il Made in Italy Recluta i Cinesi di Seconda Generazione." *Corriere della Sera*. 17 February 2011. Web. (Accessed 23 April 2013).
<http://archivioistorico.corriere.it/2011/febbraio/17/made_Italy_recluta_cinesi_seconda_c_o_8_110217002.shtml>

¹³² Caiffa, Patrizia. "Cinesi in Italia: Da Luoghi Comuni a Relazioni Nuove." *Seconde Generazioni*. 27 March 2007. Web. (Accessed 15 March 2013).<<http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/articoli-e-%20parole/20070327-cinesi-in-italia-da-luoghi-comuni-a-relazioni-nuove-%20agensir/>>

¹³³ Cologna *Asia a Milano* 56.

industries that also hire Italians is allowing for greater and greater social interaction and dialogue. By attending university and working in traditionally Italian-dominated fields such as law and medicine, the second-generation Chinese have been able to interact easily with Italians and to become far more culturally Italian. Despite the fact that they are immediately recognized by their facial features as Chinese, an obstacle that other immigrants such as Albanians and Romanians do not encounter, they are still able to succeed economically, assimilate culturally, and thereby to earn the respect of native Italians. The bottom line is that in Italian and other capitalist societies, immigrants who are economically successful eventually earn respect and prestige.

Community Efforts to Create Dialogue

The second-generationers are also becoming more vocal in their desire for communication and inclusion in the greater Italian community. They have observed the historic tensions between their community and greater Italian society, noted the failures of Italian governments and institutions to address them and have taken matters into their own hands. In recent years, they have used Internet forums on the websites of organizations such as *Associna* and *G2-SecondeGenerazioni* to debunk myths, discuss community issues and spread awareness about the second-generationers' identity as Italian-Chinese. Ironically demonstrating their Italian-ness by buying into negative stereotypes of their own people, they openly criticize their parents for isolating themselves in an ethnic

enclave, and for being unwilling to build real forms of interaction with Italians.¹³⁴ *Associna* was established in 2005 as a community specifically for children of Chinese immigrants. *G2* was also established in 2005, but is intended for children of immigrants of all ethnic groups that were born in Italy or who arrived at a young age. *G2* is especially committed to cultural activities and videos that address civil rights and identity.¹³⁵

Associna was started to help create dialogue between the Italian and Chinese communities. Bai Junyi was a twenty-four-year-old law student when he founded *Associna*. In an interview, he explains that Chinese immigrants were unable to open up to the Italian community and to interact with them largely because they were focused on improving their socioeconomic conditions; in effect, they were too busy to learn Italian or to learn much about Italians. He says, “The job is up to us, to those who were born or raised in Italy, and privileged enough to have enjoyed the Italian life style and education, to build a bridge, working for mutual respect between Italians and Chinese.”¹³⁶ He adds, “We feel it is necessary to be more open with the Italian community.”¹³⁷

The second-generation Italian-Chinese has been open about its desire to integrate and about the need to change the way the Italian media portrays the Chinese community. In an interview, Bai states, “The future generations do not

¹³⁴ Caiffa, Patrizia. “Cinesi in Italia: Da Luoghi Comuni a Relazioni Nuove.”

¹³⁵ “Different But Not Stranger,” 42. See Rossi article: Some second generationers have taken up fighting stereotypes with irony. In 2009, *G2* organized the sale of T-shirts with the image of the panda from the movie “Kung Fu Panda” with the text “I know kung fu.”

¹³⁶ Bignoli, Marco. “Il Dialogo Parte dalla Seconda Generazione.”

¹³⁷ Eduati, Laura. “Noi Giovani Cinesi Aperti alla Società.”

want to isolate themselves. If the media continues to only show the negative aspects of the Chinese community, we will have problems integrating because there will be useless barriers. Certainly, there will always be people that discriminate, but if we are able to give a positive image and show that we want to integrate, that would already be a lot. We want to work on this.”¹³⁸

Associna, in discussing the problems of integration and assimilation, seems to place more blame on Chinese immigrant parents than on Italian society. It could be argued that in blaming their parents for being “too isolated” or “not willing to assimilate,” second-generationers are adopting negative attitudes towards their own heritage. Ironically, this could be evidence that they are truly assimilating into Italian culture.

It is unrealistic to expect a first influx of immigrants anywhere to fully assimilate into the host country’s culture. In addition, the nature of the Chinese and Italian cultures makes assimilation even more difficult. The Chinese people’s cultural confidence and pride often makes them reluctant to embrace another culture, which, of course, is also true of Italians who emigrate. Quite understandably, given its historic lack of experience in this area, the Italian government and community have not yet learned how to integrate immigrants into their society and to assist or manage the assimilation process.

¹³⁸ Caiffa, Patrizia. “Cinesi in Italia: Da Luoghi Comuni a Relazioni Nuove.”

Concluding Remarks

After considering the obstacles that first-generation Chinese immigrants faced in assimilating, it is hard to imagine that their children would have had this much success. The parents' Chinese cultural values, such as stressing educational attainment and economic expertise, have contributed greatly to their children's successful assimilation into Italian culture and upward social mobility. The parents' sacrifices for economic success, which may have hindered their own assimilation, allowed them to invest more in their children's higher education and resultant assimilation.

In a final irony, another reason why Chinese second-generationers in Italy assimilate more easily than other immigrant groups is their strong ethnic network and sense of connectedness with China. This ethnic network provides economic and moral support, fosters collaboration on economic ventures – and even helped them organize a movement to open a dialogue with Italians. The fact that some second-generationers have maintained fluency in Mandarin Chinese, along with other connections to China, has made them economically valuable to Italian businesses that interact with China. The strength and significance of the Chinese immigrant community's connectedness with China was evidenced in the Via Sarpi riots, when the Chinese government advocated for its Italian cousins with the Milan government and protested against perceived discrimination – something

that would be unimaginable if the immigrants in question were Libyans or even Romanians.

Rapidly increasing Italian acceptance of the second-generation Chinese is an exciting recent development. Although this is a positive sign for relations between the Italians and second-generation Chinese, a more negative interpretation would be that the Italians have only accepted the second-generation to the degree that they have become culturally and linguistically Italian. Does this mean that every first-generation Chinese immigrant in the future will experience discrimination, misunderstanding, and hostility? Because the Italian state and communities have still not learned to integrate or communicate with the first-generation Chinese, it is likely that Italians will continue to have similar difficulties adjusting to first-generation immigrants. In a way, the second-generation Chinese have adjusted more to Italy than vice versa.

CONCLUSION

Looking back, we can see how although the 2007 Milan riot may seem like an isolated incident caused by a simple disagreement over new parking laws, it reveals a lot about the Chinese and Italian attitudes towards immigration and their own identities. My analysis of the 2007 riot reveals the deep communication problems that exist between the Italians and Chinese, and it also demonstrates the unusual dynamic created by the interaction of these particular communities. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Italian authorities and media's response to the Milan riot was completely different than their response to other ethnic riots in Italy. Because it was essentially the first large public display of grievances by the Chinese in Italy, the riot made waves and attracted international press coverage. This attention increased pressure to the Milan government to address the issues that caused the conflict, as did the very unusual involvement by the Chinese government, which demanded an investigation of the allegations of discrimination. Because China is an emerging world power, it felt entitled to pressure the Milan government on behalf of its countrymen. China has a new sense of pride at having emerged from "third world country" status. Its new power and prestige have given it the confidence to intervene when it feels that its people have been treated badly abroad. If this had happened fifty years ago, the Chinese government would likely have done nothing and the story would have never made news in China.

My research into the sources of tensions between the two communities that caused the riot led me on an exploration of the deep underlying issues such as the Chinese and Italian expectations for their immigration experience, their cultural identities, Italian legislation from the 1980s, and demographic shifts over the last thirty years. While the media simply points to Italian racism and cultural clashes as reasons for tensions between the two groups, my research shows that inter-ethnic economic competition mainly generated by demographic shifts is the main source of tension. Other important factors are cultural tensions, caused by demographic shifts, and the Italian state's inability to control immigration or enforce work conditions.

After examining the tensions between the Chinese and Italians and the larger issues of Chinese emigration in Italy, can we say that a riot similar to the Via Sarpi 2007 one will happen again? Because the Italian state and communities have remained relatively ineffective at integrating immigrants and creating dialogue about multiculturalism, riots like the Via Sarpi one could certainly happen again, perhaps with new influxes of Chinese immigrants or with other immigrant groups. Although we are seeing progress in the relations between Italians and second-generation Chinese, issues between the Italians and first-generation Chinese have been left unresolved. The Milan government essentially admitted failure when its idea of a solution to the problems between the two groups was to evict and relocate hundreds of Chinese businesses outside of Milan.

Although the second-generation has made efforts to create dialogue between the first-generation and native Italians, negative attitudes and stereotypes still persist.

A key factor in Italy's future as a tolerant multicultural society is how it handles conflict with immigrant communities. So far, we have seen a similar pattern of the Italian state in its management of conflict. With the African immigrants in Calabria and the Chinese ones in Milan, the Italian state has acted on varying degrees of sending them away as part of a solution. While the Africans' deportation back to their countries was certainly harsher than the Milan's eviction and relocation of Chinese businesses, both solutions are severe and ineffective. It is also a sign that the Italian state and communities have not learned to create dialogue and solve social tensions in a peaceful way.

Is an Italian society that is more open to multiculturalism a possible outcome in the future? Societies around the world differ in many ways, including in their openness to immigration. History has shown that societies that were once closed can become more open with time. Although the Italian and American media often portray the issues between the Italians and Chinese as inevitable conflicts, the Italians' acceptance of second-generation Chinese is certainly a positive sign for the future. The Chinese second-generation is forming a new Italian-Chinese identity that Italians are finding easier to adjust to than the first-generation. They are assimilating and integrating to an astonishing degree. Their successful assimilation and integration are surprisingly due to their parents' Chinese values and strong ethnic network, which helped many of them achieve

social mobility and pursue higher education and advanced careers, which have allowed for more integration and interaction with Italians. The second-generationers have also made many efforts by themselves to promote dialogue and understanding between the two communities.

Although the second-generationers are culturally very Italian and call Italy “home”, the Italian state has still not recognized them as Italian citizens. Because Italy’s citizenship law is based on “*ius sanguinis*” rather than America’s “*ius soli*” principle, second-generationers, although born and raised in Italy, are not legally recognized as Italian citizens. This has created an array of problems for them, including issues with working, traveling, and marrying. Many second-generationers suffer from the constant threat of deportation that their insecure legal status provides. While many second-generationers are moving to China for better economic opportunities and to live in a country where they are recognized as citizens, others are staying in Italy with the hope that new citizenship laws will soon be put in place. A large reason for the delay in citizenship legislation stems from lack of dialogue, which as we have seen before, has created numerous problems with communities affected by immigration in Italy. Policy makers and communities do not dialogue about multiculturalism and citizenship and therefore cannot devise legislation. There are different expectations and understandings of assimilation and integration, and until people decide to talk about them and agree on them, citizenship policies for the second-generation will not be implemented.

Second-generationers' sense of being not entirely Italian and not entirely Chinese, may be problematic in its own way, but it appears that the issues between the two communities are gradually solving themselves. The moral of the story of the Milan riot is that even when governments and people fail to communicate or negotiate across cultural and linguistic gaps, cultures contain their own mechanisms that can solve social problems, given enough time, in an organic way. The Via Sarpi riot will almost certainly not happen again; and these Italians and these Chinese appear to have put their conflicts behind them. But could similar riots happen for similar reasons between other first-generation immigrants and other Italian communities? If the communities and state continue to not dialogue about issues, the answer is probably yes. Dialogue and time may just be the ultimate solutions. In the future, Italy may stop considering immigration as a "problem to solve" or as an "invasion" of its territory, and might actually regard immigration as every human's right and as a part of the change that every society must undergo. Dialogue between the native Italians and Chinese immigrants may actually lead to a future that many of them can agree on: a peaceful, multicultural and tolerant Italian society.

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