



MONASH University
Information Technology

The Chinese community in Prato

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Italy and immigration

- **Large-scale immigration to Italy commenced in the 1980s**
- **Immigration quotas, introduced in 1998, are geared in favour of manual workers**
- **Laws passed in 1995, 1998 and 2002, aimed at tightening immigration, served to encourage illegal immigration because they were accompanied by mass amnesties (approx. 1.2 million people)**

Italy and immigration

As of the end of 2006:

- **3,690,000 immigrants – 6.2% of the population (European average 5.6%)**
- **500,000 arrivals in 2006 (a 21.6% increase)**
- **Top five countries:**
 - Romania (15.1%)
 - Morocco (10.5%)
 - Albania (10.3%)
 - Ukraine (5.3%)
 - China (5.1%)
- **48% of Europeans think that immigrants are the principal threat to public order, problems with social security, tax increases and unemployment.**

(Caritas 2007)

Prato

- **The Province of Prato is one of the smallest in Italy. It includes the City of Prato, which has a population of some 180,000 people**
- **Prato specializes in textile production and is characterised by a production model based on small businesses with a strong division of work processes**
- **Prato's strong position can in part be attributed to its growth after the Second World War, stimulated by internal migration from the south**
- **The textile industry underwent an economic crisis in the 1980s, with the loss of 3,550 small businesses and 15,000 jobs, after which it repositioned itself, focusing on the supply of textiles for clothing**



Prato: Chinese community

- In 1989 there were only 38 Chinese resident in Prato
- By 2006, there were 10,080 Chinese immigrants holding residence permits
- 83.35% indicated their place of birth as Zhejiang, 13.21% as Fujian
- Those from Zhejiang and Fujian tend to have a preference for small family based businesses and one of the primary aims of emigrants in their first years of work is to gain sufficient resources to open their own business.
- Similar behaviour in the PRC itself, where it is commonly known as the Wenzhou or Zhejiang model

Prato: Chinese community

- **Many Chinese migrants arrive in Italy illegally as ‘clandestinos’, smuggled in by human trafficking middlemen. On arrival in Italy, they have significant debts to pay.**
- **Estimates of the number of illegal immigrants vary, from the relatively conservative figure of 20% to 30% of legal immigrants, to unsubstantiated estimates such as that quoted in the *Corriere delle Sera* of 29 January 2007 suggesting that there may be as many as 20,000 illegal Chinese immigrants in Prato.**
- **Caritas estimates the total immigrant population of Prato at 28,357. If the ratio from the official figures holds, approx 44% of these are Chinese.**

Prato: Chinese community

Chinese immigrants live in all parts of Prato, but the highest number are in Via Pistoiese, popular because it is an old artisan area, rundown after the building of new industrial estates, with typically artisan hybrid housing and workplaces. Buildings in this area are characterized by poor safety and hygiene conditions and inflated prices. The Comune has tried to restrict the use of these shared facilities by imposing stricter conditions but have had little success. The Chinese have continued to build up in this area and have opened a wide range of businesses: bars, restaurants, videos, food, and so on. These have primarily a Chinese clientele, which sets them apart from other Chinese areas in which businesses have a more multi-ethnic clientele.

Prato: Chinese companies

- **By the end of 2005, there were 3,682 businesses in Prato managed by foreign nationals, of which 2,414 were managed exclusively by Chinese**
- **Most Chinese work for Chinese companies producing clothing and undertaking various tailoring jobs (69.15% of Chinese companies work in this area)**
- **The most common size of a Chinese-owned company is 10 to 15 employees, with firms of 30 to 40 being rare**
- **There is a high turnover rate: of 1,358 Chinese companies registered during 2004-05, 50.3% were still active at the end of 2005**

Prato: Chinese companies

- **Most Chinese-owned companies undertake subcontracting for Italian firms**
- **Chinese companies initially lacked knowledge of local conditions and Italian clients.**
- **The rapidly increasing number of Chinese businesses has led to increased competition and increased difficulty in maintaining a position in the market, particularly as the Italians can then reduce prices, and/or discontinue contracts.**
- **Other difficulties experienced include the need to maintain a high level of flexibility, always 'urgent' commissions, and instances of non-payment for large orders.**
- **There is a high rate of worker mobility, tied not only to the clandestine status of many migrants, but also to the desire of many new migrants to start their own business.**

Prato: Second generation Chinese

- **50% of Chinese students drop out between second and third years of secondary school, many doing so to join their parents in business.**
- **Scholastic failure, occurs for many reasons, e.g- difficult socio-economic conditions or because families often move city, or country, looking for work.**
- **Working conditions have a big impact on lifestyle as many live where they work, children included, and only the lucky ones have their own private space.**
- **Ceccagno (2004) undertook research into school-age second-generation Chinese in Prato. She noted a range of problems, starting with language difficulties, but extending to lack of success at school, lack of socialisation with Italians, the centrality of groups of co-nationals and recreation with ethnic connotations**
- **Younger Chinese are more educated than their parents, and in general more competent with Italian and familiar with the overall culture.**
- **In terms of the generation gap, the facility of younger Chinese with Italian and technology potentially opens up new prospects for them.**



Prato: New models of immigration

- **The globalisation of the Chinese economy and culture facilitates the success of new migratory models among the Chinese, so that now migration can be lived as a dynamic and reversible process. Chinese immigrants in Europe form an economic and socio-cultural network based on their familial links and their place of origin that transcends the host country. Information obtained through the migratory chain indicates those destinations best suited to emigration and capable of providing business opportunities (De Giorgi 2002).**
- **This new model of migration may also have implications for levels of integration. It would seem, however, that while those Chinese who are economically successful mainly gain recognition within the Chinese community, and that is also what they value most.**
- **The Chinese in Prato, unlike other ethnic groups, have a strong sense of community, have plenty of work, and can create a new life for themselves without a knowledge of Italian. This reinforces the isolated nature of those communities.**

Research program

Monash University is engaging with the Chinese and Italian communities in Prato to undertake a series of research projects on the Chinese community in Prato

Funded projects either currently being undertaken by Monash staff cover the following topics:

- **Portrayal of the Chinese community in Prato in the Italian media.**
- **The social integration of the Chinese and Italian communities in Prato.**
- **Urban development of the areas where Chinese migrants in Prato have settled. Comparisons with Chinese urban settlement in Melbourne.**
- **Role of migrant remittances from the Chinese in Prato in the development of the Wenzhou economy.**
- **Use of technology and internet points by the Chinese in Prato.**

