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Frames and agendas in Italian films about Chinese migrants

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Abstract

In this article, I provide a critical framework to approach the growing number of Italian fiction and documentary films on Chinese migrants in recent years. I contend that Italian cinema deploys two main frames to depict this migration, including paralleling organized crime and negotiating business competitions and collaboration. A minor frame concerns practicing intercultural education. By examining the processes of these frames and the specific agendas that they support, I suggest that they addressed "migrants" social, economic and cultural capital in relation to pre-existing social and media dynamics. Thus these films partook in a rather complex representational regime about this migration, which is part of a larger Italian culture of mobilities.

Keywords: agenda, Chinese migrants, filmic representations, frame

Introduction

The emergence of a significant number of Italian fiction and documentary films on Chinese immigrants since the mid-2000s (with over 25 notable films at the time of writing) has not escaped critical attention (Zhang 2013b; Bertozzi 2014; Chung, Luciano 2014; Liu 2015; Zhang 2017; Pedone 2018)[1]. But a study that offers a general framework in order to interpret these feature-length and short films is still lacking. In particular, more critical attention should be paid to what communicative goals these films attempted to accomplish and why in relation to the larger media and social contexts concerning recent Chinese

[1] I count film titles that I cite in this article and the following ones: *A Ming* (Alessandro De Toni, Matteo Parisini, 2005), *Ovunque splenda il sole ci sono cinesi* (Where the Sun Shines, There Are Chinese; Chiara Berattino, Sara Montin, 2008), *Quartieri cinesi* (Chinese Quarters; Bruno Oliviero, 2009), *Un cinese a Roma* (A Chinese in Rome; Gianfranco Giagni, 2004) and *Xie Zi* (Shoes; Giuseppe Marco Albano, 2010).

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migration to Italy, in which these films were made and became meaningful for the filmmakers and viewers.

In this article, I examine through what main interpretive lens or organizing ideas – i.e. frames (Entman 1993, 52-53) – Italian-Chinese films constructed this migration based on existing relevant social and media dynamics. For Entman, frames:

> *define problems* – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes* – identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments* – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies* – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. (52; author's emphasis)

Consequently, I also ask what implications these frames carry and what agendas they aim to accomplish within the specific social and media networks in which the films partook. To place Italian-Chinese films within their broader contexts – in particular, their interactions with the news media and the social reality these media covered and conveyed – is possible thanks to the prolific sociological and anthropological studies on Chinese migration to Italy (e.g., Farina *et al.* 1997; Baldassar *et al.* 2015) and relevant media studies (e.g., Pogliano, Solaroli 2012; Zhang 2013b; Latham 2015; Sredanovic 2016). In so doing, the theoretical and methodological scope of the current essay goes well beyond cinema studies. I am also making a conscious choice to analyse both fiction and documentary films within the same sections below on the basis of showing how these frames inform both filmic genres.

I consider the agendas of two main frames: paralleling organized crime and negotiating business competition and collaboration. In the early 1990s, the "Chinese mafia" became a primary approach for the Italian news media to interpret the then emerging Chinese immigration to Italy, as the media speculated whether the "Chinese mafia" trafficked migrants into Italy in what appeared to be a sudden surge of Chinese nationals in the country, particularly in Milan and in Prato, near Florence. The media often drew analogies between the "Chinese mafia" and the *Cosa nostra* thereby consolidating a criminological perspective on this migration (Zhang 2019, 48-57). During the 2000s, this frame also activated a correlation between Chinese migrants and the *Camorra* gangsters through their supposedly shared economic crimes based in Naples and the surrounding areas. Although pro-Chinese Italian and Chinese migrant journalists and activists fought against these criminological biases with considerable zest, this parallel persisted to this day. Several Italian films addressed this journalistic frame; they added more vivid details to enrich it, or they contested it by explaining specific Chinese customs that the media misinterpreted and perpetuated as criminal (see section 2).

Another major focus of social and media debates about Italy's Chinese communities, particularly since the 2000s, concerned the Italian-Chinese business competition in Prato[2]. Compared to other migrations to Italy, the Chinese one is distinguished by a highly-motivated and organised agenda to develop entrepreneurship in ethnic businesses, the most successful of which has been the ready-to-wear, fast-fashion garment manufacturing in Prato. In this sector, Italy's Chinese compete with, but also benefit from, mainland Chinese economic globalisation. During the 2000s when fast fashion truly became a preferred global mode of garment manufacturing and consumption, Prato's Chinese factories prospered and Italian textile factories and garment artisan workshops went into crisis. While the reasons behind this economic phenomenon were complex, the Italian media and politicians often accused Chinese (and the Italian state govern-

[2] Sociological information presented in this paragraph comes from Ceccagno 2017.

ment's mismanagement of Prato's industrial district) for the failure of the city's Italian textile and garment sector. Often this accusation pointed to the fact that the economic profits made by Prato's Chinese did not benefit the city's Italian companies. For example, migrant entrepreneurs used mostly Made in China, and not local Made in Prato, fabrics. Within this context, the local government implemented short-term economic policies and extensively used the police to crack down on illegal factories, which often resulted in considerable international-wide media controversies and uncertain economic outcomes. While the social and media debates about the Prato case study have been by far inconclusive, Italian cinema often depicted Italian and Chinese entrepreneurs as ultimately willing and capable of collaborating for a shared future in Prato (see section 3). This cinematic frame thus participated in the larger discussions, starting in the late 2000s, about long-term plans to harmonize the Italian-Chinese cohabitation in Prato.

A more ambitious long-range strategy to further incorporate Chinese migrants into Italian society was to focus on the intercultural education of young Italians and migrants. While the Italian state government is not well-organized in authorizing and implementing migrant integration programs, several municipal governments and non-governmental Italian and migrant organizations actively fill the void (Malavolti 2006). Documentary films are in fact one of the tools of these municipal-level efforts at migrant integration. Several such films feature the so-called second- and third-generation Chinese migrants or Chinese-Italians and their Italian peers in secondary schools (see section 4). Taken as a whole, these films not only advised second-generation Chinese students to assimilate into Italian society, but they also encouraged Italian students to learn Chinese in order to understand the home culture of their classmates or their parents, promoting a form of two-way accommodation and learning. As this focus is still developing in Italian films, I will examine this as a minor frame concerning practicing intercultural education.

An analysis of agendas and implications of these films becomes only meaningful with reference to the audience they wish to connect, entertain and persuade. The audience that I will assume in this article are Italians, and not Italy's Chinese or international viewers. This is an assessment based on the films' circulation. Most Italian-Chinese films had limited prospects for a wide theatrical distribution because of independent productions and film genres, such as the quirky sci-fi movie *L'arrivo di Wang* (The Arrival of Wang; Manetti Bros., 2011). But feature fiction films made for a mainstream audience, including *Questa notte è ancora nostra* (The Night is Still Ours; Genovese, Miniero, 2008), and art-house/commercial hybrid fiction films meant to be launched first in film festivals and then distributed nationally and internationally, such as *Io sono Li* (Shun Li and the Poet; Segre, 2011), did have a respectable theatrical run.

Documentaries also appeared in small and large film contests and festivals. *Giallo a Milano. Made in Chinatown* (Thriller in Milan: Made in Chinatown; Basso, 2009) was shown at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York City in 2012, having won an honorary mention at a young Italian filmmakers' film contest; *Leonardo* (De Falco, 2008) participated in the 26th edition of Torino Film Festival. But documentarians used more platforms to reach the audience. Some resorted to television showings and pay-per-view websites: *Di tessuti e di altre storie* (On Fabrics and Other Stories; Paoli, 2011) was shown on Rai 3 and was available on <http://www.onthedocks.it/it/00023/58/page.html> at the time of my research in 2014 (but no longer so at the time of the publication). Others used multimedia websites (e.g., *Giallo a Milano* has a complementary website at <http://www.corriere.it/spettacoli/speciali/2010/giallo-a-milano/>) and product bundling (e.g., *Miss Little China* [Riccardo Cremona, Vincenzo De Cecco 2009] was issued on a DVD with a nonfiction book) in order to amplify the commercial appeal of documentaries. In particular, Rai Cinema, which helped finance or distribute many films analysed

in this article, has consistently invested in documentaries for education purposes and for wider public distribution. While the variety of distribution tactics makes it difficult to determine the exact composition of viewers from Italy, we may nonetheless assume that the intended audience is informed on some aspects of Chinese immigration to Italy through the Italian news media, even though they may have limited contact with Chinese in their daily lives.

In the following pages, I examine the three frames outlined above in this cinematic trend, attending to both coverage and detailed discussions of specific Italian-Chinese films.

1. Paralleling organized crime

The first frame addresses the so-called "Chinese mafia" – i.e., various forms of Chinese organized crime and, in particular, the transnational Chinese criminal organization, the Triad. The discourse on the "Chinese mafia" articulates a criminological perspective on Chinese immigration to Italy which emerged in the Italian mass media in the early 1990s (Zhang 2016 68-69). Partially based on existing police investigations at that time, journalists viewed this migration as the outcome of activities that the "Chinese mafia" was supposed to specialize in, including migrant smuggling and trafficking and employing migrants as forced labourers in shabby factories (Di Gianvito 1995). Indeed, most of the media coverage on Chinese migration to Italy in the early 1990s, while ostensibly focused on migrants' activities, belonged to the Italian tradition of crime reporting. Thus while the criminological perspective on this migration was flawed, it was too ingrained in this journalistic genre to be critically examined by the same crime reporters (such as Di Gianvito).

Moreover, during much of the 1990s and the 2000s, Italian crime reporting became increasingly contaminated with the literary and cinematic genre of crime fiction and journalistic sensationalism became rampant (Papuzzi, Magone 2010, 61-62). The *Cosa nostra* was a frequent journalistic subject in the 1990s because of the extensive judicial trials of prominent Mafiosi. Coverage of Italy's Chinese using an Italian-Chinese criminal parallel gave newsworthiness to coverage of the *Cosa nostra* by providing a supposedly parallel phenomenon. Symptomatic of this situation was the journalists' and screenwriters' application of the metaphor of the "octopus" to both the *Cosa nostra* (e.g., the Italian television serial *La Piovra* (The Octopus: The Power of the Mafia; various directors, 1984-2001) and to the Chinese mafia (e.g., Sasinini 1995; *Piovra cinese*, TG2 Dossier, Rai Due, 28 May 1995). In reinforcing the gravity of these issues for the Italian audience, the media also compared the supposedly analogous styles and structures of the Chinese mafia and the *Cosa nostra* (e.g., Spazio 5, Canale 5, episode n. 23, 17 March 1993).

In such accounts, the Chinese mafia is often coded as a trait of Chinese ethnicity and culture, as has previously occurred to popular descriptions of the Italian mafia and southern Italians. For example, working long hours illegally is viewed as typical of ethnic Chinese under the control of the "Chinese mafia". To counter *negative* ethnic essentialism, the first examples of pro-Chinese Italian news accounts used *positive* ethnic essentialism to praise, to use again the aforementioned example, migrants' industriousness thanks to their cultural upbringing in China that valued this quality (Barina 1995).

Generally speaking, in Italian cinema the first Italian-Chinese documentaries aimed primarily to show that the so-called "Chinese mafia" and the migrants' presumably enigmatic activities could be explained by resorting to facts and alternative approaches, and not with reference to a loosely-based comparison with the Italian mafia. For example, according to a well-known urban legend in Italy – i.e., "the Chinese never die", – their bodies are supposed to be shipped back to China and their identity papers are recycled for the use by other illegal

migrants, both of which are deeds of the "Chinese mafia" according to much Italian reporting and in popular imagination. In response to this fabrication, *Giallo a Milano* and *Miss Little China* mention how older Chinese prefer to return to the homeland and therefore there have been few public funerals or tombs in Italy for these migrants. The two films also show images of Chinese tombstones in Italian cemeteries, and the short film *I cinesi non muoiono mai* (The Chinese Never Die; Wen 2013) gives a detailed portrayal of a funeral of a socially-prominent Chinese migrant in Milan. Further, in *Giallo a Milano*, Basso's use of "giallo" in the film's title reveals the semantic richness of the term, which can mean the yellow colour and the thriller genre in Italian. This use mocks the commonplace use of it in popular media that is meant to elicit laughter at stereotypes – i.e., the supposed yellow-colour skin of Chinese and their mystery because of a presumed community closure to outsiders ordered by the "Chinese mafia". By imitating the structure of the thriller, Basso's film also exposes the constructiveness of this cultural genre, questioning its generic and moral premises for depicting Italy's Chinese.

The dangerous dissolution of boundaries between news coverage and fiction films or television serials, which documentaries were determined to counter, found a fertile ground in most Italian-Chinese feature films. For these films, the question of whether the "Chinese mafia" corresponded to a real phenomenon in the material world or not was hardly the point. Instead, almost certainly acting on that which initially suggested in the news media, these film narratives draw a loose analogy between Italian and Chinese organized crime and illegal practices in order to generate comic moments, such as in *Questa notte è ancora nostra* when the urban myth of "The Chinese never die" is articulated, or to tease out genre requirements of a crime film, which must involve cops and criminals, like in "Vendetta cinese" (Chinese Revenge; Manetti Bros. 2006; Zhang 2013a; Zhang 2016). To dissociate the "Chinese mafia" even further from the social reality, while still sharpening a critique of Chinese criminality, *L'arrivo di Wang* makes its protagonist into a Chinese-speaking extraterritorial alien who lies about his real mission on Earth to his sympathizer, a Chinese-speaking Italian interpreter, and succeeds in setting up an extra-territorial assault on Rome (Zhang 2017).

In the early 2000s, when unsophisticated journalistic depictions of the "Chinese mafia" proved to be unsustainable due to increasing police and sociological evidence, an overt frame based on Italian and Chinese organized crime was abandoned. In *Gomorra* (Gomorrah; Garrone 2008), the criminal Italian-Chinese criminal parallel in Naples only makes a brief appearance in the narrative, despite the parallel's prominence in the first two chapters in Roberto Saviano's book with the same title on which Garrone's film is based. This is despite the fact that during the 2000s the Italian media speculated that Chinese migrants and the *Camorra* gangsters reached an agreement, or even collaborated, within the city's underground garment sector, for both groups invested heavily in it but there seemed to be no notable violent episodes about this potential clash of economic interests (Calabrò 2000). But remnants of this parallel were still traceable, occasionally in journalism and certainly in cinema, like in *Gorbaciof* (Incerti 2010), also set in Naples, where organized crime serves as a narrative framework to speak about other things. Let me discuss *Gorbaciof* in detail as it exemplifies the subtler use of this frame in recent films in highlighting similar social positioning of Italian and Chinese characters with criminal association.

Lila (Mi Yang) works in a Chinese restaurant owned by her father (Hal Yamanouchi) whose backyard is reserved for group gambling. Gorbaciof (Toni Servillo), a nickname owing to his birthmark resembling that of Mikhail Gorbachev, is an accountant for a prison and regularly steals money from his job and engages in courier jobs and robberies for a colleague of his who is supposed to be associated with the *Camorra*. More generally, Naples is depicted in this film as a place where loosely-organized petty criminality based on exchange of favours occurs daily.

Gorbaciof spends the money he illicitly earns at gambling parties at Lila's restaurant. But when Lila's father seems poised to prostitute her in order to consolidate debts accumulated from gambling, Gorbaciof tries to clear all his debts and to help Lila escape. Therefore, although the depictions of Italian and Chinese migrant criminality are kept to the minimum, the initial narrative setup borders on re-enacting the parallel, drawn in the Italian media and films, between Italian southerners – especially Neapolitans – and migrants based on criminality (Palidda 2011, 227-233).

This narrative setup is the basic device of drawing analogies between the two characters for *Gorbaciof* to study them as misfits in their respective social milieus. Solitude cued by a sparse dialogue dominates the lives of both characters. Applying gloomy and metallic colours in both cases to signify their loneliness, the filmmaker frequently intercuts between scenes concerning Gorbaciof and Lila to parallel their similar life constraints. To accentuate Gorbaciof's routine stealing, the film repeats similar scenes in which, with supreme precision and confidence, he saunters through the prison gate, approaches the safe, puts the day's earnings in it and extracts and keeps a few banknotes in his own pockets. All these scenes are captured by an equally formulaic camerawork that knowingly picks up specific gestures in close-ups. Using a similar kind of narrative repetition and camerawork, the film depicts Lila in several scenes as she brings drinks to gamblers at her father's restaurant in visible trepidation. Just as Gorbaciof attempts to extricate himself from his obsession with gambling and other criminal activities, Lila longs to escape from the dullness and hassles by unruly customers at the restaurant. Both characters dream of leaving the semi-criminal or criminal groups in which life's circumstances have involved them.

Gorbaciof develops the theme on misfits through the couple's three dates, which are rendered in light and colourful tonalities, which hare starkly different from the gloomy atmosphere that pervades the rest of the film. Gorbaciof takes Lila to window-shopping in an airport, shows her the zoo at night and gives her a parrot as a gift. Lila is unsure about how to react in the first two places. But with his guidance, she enjoys the peculiar beauty of them. Equally peculiar is his attraction to her, which the film explains as the transferal of an obsession with gambling to an impulse to protect her from her father. She welcomes his advances, partially because he has previously saved her from sexual harassment at the restaurant. From this perspective, Lila also helps Gorbaciof psychologically, providing him with the fantasy of the white man's rescue of a Chinese woman in trouble (Liu 2015) in that Lila is a Madonna figure who risks becoming a whore, recalling a characterization scheme used in "Vendetta cinese" and *Spaghetti Story* (De Caro 2013). Eventually Gorbaciof proposes to her about leaving together for a new land.

But the film's end suggests that there is no easy escape from the protagonists' respective criminal milieus. On the day of their departure from Naples, Lila eagerly awaits Gorbaciof in the airport, unaware that he has already been killed by a collaborator in crime by accident during the last mission to which he commits himself in order to obtain more money for the trip to the promised land. If Gorbaciof is killed in redemption for his criminal activities, then Lila's detour from the Chinese migrant community into the fantastical world conjured by Gorbaciof also runs its course. Their destinies are once again absorbed into the larger Chinese migrant and Italian criminal networks. Drawing on the speculation about collaboration between Italian and Chinese organized crime in Naples, *Gorbaciof* first relegates it to one between Italian and Chinese illegal activities (i.e., stealing and gambling), and later humanises it to one between similar social plights (i.e., a common desire to escape from isolation). But by suggesting that the couple's romance cannot be consummated because the force of criminality overrides individual destinies, Incerti's film returns to the root problem of organized crime, and through this, the criminological frame based on this subject.

2. Negotiating business competition and collaboration

Chinese migrant-managed fast-fashion factories mainly work outside Italian labour unions' restraints, and they supply for Italian clients including major fashion brands from outside of Prato. As such, many Italian journalists, entrepreneurs and politicians viewed the prosperity of migrants' entrepreneurial success as directly causing Prato's Italian textile workshops to fail. Acting on such a perception, many Italian owners of small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) and politicians agree that a first step to accelerate Italian industrial districts' abilities to address contemporary globalization was to integrate Prato's Chinese migrant entrepreneurship more organically into the city's local and legal economy. A dominant interpretation of this standpoint envisions incorporating Chinese migrant businesses into a coherent production line of low-to-medium quality garment manufacturing based in Prato in which Italians would provide fabrics and Chinese the workforce. Since the mid-2000s, this view led to many economic policies aimed at favouring legal Chinese migrant entrepreneurs' inclusion in the city's local economy (e.g., "Siamo cinesi e molto borghesi", *L'Espresso*, 7 October 2008), to popular protests and police raids to curb illegal Chinese migrant economic activities (" 'Prato non deve chiudere': 8000 i manifestanti in città", *La Nazione*, 28 February 2009; *Le Storie. Diario italiano*, Rai Tre, 5 December 2011) and to dissenting views by elite Chinese migrants intent on creating high-end fashion brands (Yuan 2011). These occurrences also captured the attention of important international news media (e.g., "Chinese Remake the 'Made in Italy' Fashion Label", *The New York Times*, 12 September 2010), becoming exemplary of the tension between economic globalization and local protectionism in Italy in recent media analyses.

Only within this context can we begin to grasp the significance of the second cinematic frame I discuss in this article, one that concerns primarily films about Prato's Chinese entrepreneurship. This frame is explicit in advising Italy and China to join forces in sectors in which both are world leaders and direct competitors, such as garment manufacturing. To be sure, films including *Cenci in Cina* (Rags in China; Limberti 2009) and *L'occupazione cinese. Made in Prato* (The Chinese Occupation: Made in Prato; Luconi 2013) depicted the negative pressure that Chinese migrants' fast-fashion garment industry exerted on the failing local Italian textile industry. But these films viewed popular and institutional anti-Chinese rhetoric as a by-product of globalization and the insecurity it provoked among Italian entrepreneurs and politicians. These films then went on to argue that Italy still had the ability to face the challenge of globalization and to benefit from it as China did. *Cenci in Cina*'s narrative clearly supports this reasoning. This film opens as the Italian textile and garment factory "Gobbotex" owned by Giachetti (Francesco Ciampi) and Pelagatti (Alessandro Paci) is on the verge of close-down because of financial troubles. And the film ends with the inauguration of a new Italian-Chinese enterprise "Dragon Gobbotex", spearheaded by Li (Man Lo Zhang) with the two Italians as her associates. *Cenci in Cina*'s endorsement of Chinese-Italian cooperation is explicit.

In order to advance this argument, *Cenci in Cina* devotes much screen time to positing Chinese migrants and Italians as equal business partners, and especially, establishing the Italian protagonists' hardworking habits and business acumen. Giachetti and Pelagatti embody two vital ingredients for business success in Italy – namely, solid production and creative design, or good work ethic and shrewd marketing. Investing excessive money and energy on public relations and on beautiful women, Pelagatti frequently flaunts his frivolity and pokes fun at Giachetti's seriousness. This combination of character traits works fine until Gobbotex goes bankrupt. *Cenci in Cina* originally analyses this character contrast, which is viewed as the base of Italian entrepreneurial success, through eight flashbacks. In them, the filmmaker examines Prato's

industrial district during the 1940s-1970s when Giachetti's and Pelagatti's grandfathers seized any opportunities, including morally questionable business choices, and worked diligently to become successful owners of a SME. In 1949, Pelagatti's grandfather accidentally found yarns hidden by locals during WWII, which he kept for himself. He then met Giachetti's grandfather who had just finished repairing a pre-war loom. Subsequently they started a new enterprise. During the start-up years of their enterprise, on Pelagatti's suggestion, they sold unfinished or unpolished woollen covers to countries where wars were waged. They also made uniforms similar in appearance for soldiers from enemy countries, and blithely ignored complaints from these clients. Not only did they employ illegal Italian labour when their factory was expanding, they also manufactured low-quality hats that lost colouring when wetted with water. Meanwhile, these flashbacks praise Giachetti and Pelagatti as hardworking entrepreneurs who made Gobbotex successful in Italy's capitalist economy during the 1940-1950s. The duo tirelessly went on long train trips to Milan to sell their fabrics. For the benefit of all businesses, they publicly shamed the fraudulent go-between that made a profit by faking his English language ability to both Italian producers and American buyers. The two Italians also enforced meritocracy by dismissing an employee who feigned his ability to quickly and correctly calculate large numbers in *lire* mentally.

While the main agenda of these narrative details is to restate the legitimacy and capabilities of Italian entrepreneurs in preparation for the eventual creation of the Italian-Chinese joint venture toward the film's end, they have the secondary effect of defending Prato's Chinese against Italian biases through two considerations. First, much of this description of the two entrepreneurs' exploitative practices and genuine hard work in the heyday of Italy's SMEs would resonate with the audience familiar with media accounts of Prato's Chinese entrepreneurship during the 1990s-2000s. The media coverage in Italy has extensively condemned or praised Chinese migrants' economic and business practices guided by the will to entrepreneurship and profits (e.g., "Il rosso e il nero", *Annozero*, Rai 2, 19 March 2009; "Aldo Milone: 'Vi spiego la mia guerra per la legalità' ", *It's China*, 49, July 2009). This film serves as a reminder to the Italian media and public about their apparent amnesia of the past of Italian industrial districts when accusing Prato's Chinese of illegal business practices and unfair competition by a landslide.

Furthermore, by using flashbacks, the film's narrative questions what male inheritors of these SMEs may have missed and retained from previous generations, given the patrifilial succession pattern prevalent in Italy's family firms (Yanagisako 2002, 35-69). When we note that the playboy Pelagatti has no heir and Giachetti's children are still young, *Cenci in Cina* seems to suggest that the failure of Italian SMEs in Prato partly owes to the likes of Pelagatti who have not nurtured the next generation of Italian entrepreneurs. In fact, one of the possible explanations proposed by sociologists regarding the closure of Italian textile factories during the 2000s is that inheritors of these SMEs were no longer interested in working in this sector (Ceccagno 2017, 106). Meanwhile, as the film also hints, the children of responsible Italian entrepreneurs like Giachetti may indeed still have a role to play in the future of Italian SMEs. But for the time being, the current generation would have to address the dual force of Chinese migrant entrepreneurship and mainland Chinese economic globalization.

Having established the qualifications of Italians as equally capable business partners in the Italian-Chinese joint venture, the film goes on to explore what format such an enterprise can take. Even more striking than the duality of solid production and shrewd marketing exemplified by the two Italians, *Cenci in Cina* essentialises Chinese and Italian strengths in this future joint venture. In a nutshell, whereas Giachetti and Pelagatti contribute with authentic Italian creativity and masculine prowess and authority, Li brings her global business compe-

tencies trained in Chinese globalization and female cunningness. As the head of a Chinese migrant start-up in Prato, Li's postures are domineering, which her black suits and pronounced make-up help accentuate. She shows resoluteness and even mercilessness in dealing with her Italian counterparts, making the final decision to dissolve Giachetti and Pelagatti's company with aplomb. As such, Li disrupts the Italian company's intergenerational male legacy. But toward the film's end, Li displays a whorish fetish for Italian manliness, and through it, the authenticity of everything "Made in Italy". Li invites Giachetti to her house one evening to strike a deal on the joint venture. But soon her seductive intent will become all too obvious to Giachetti and to the viewer. Wearing a black leather mini-skirt, she performs dance moves to a sexy ambience music, touching herself suggestively. Later, Giachetti, finding the Tuscan dish *pappa al pomodoro* prepared by Li's Chinese chef unappetizing, cooks an "authentic" *bistecca alla fiorentina* for both of them. This gives Li a chance to praise Giachetti's cooking skills in a blatant sexual double entendre. In a parallel scene, Pelagatti sneaks into Li's house, uncovering evidence of her schemes to buy out Gobbotex from its suppliers and customers in order to purchase the company point-blank. Li's splitting identity as a "Dragon Lady" in public and a "Lotus Blossom Baby" in private is in keeping with the Orientalist gendered fantasy in Italian films about Chinese women (Tajima 1989, 309-314; Zhang 2017, 397). As Li has no way of redemption in *Cenci in Cina*, except for being the third business (and maybe sex) partner to Giachetti and Pelagatti, the film falls back on a discourse of Italian male lineage and legitimacy in Prato's SMEs in the closing scene about the inauguration of the joint venture.

Although *Cenci in Cina* promotes Italian-Chinese collaboration in reviving Prato's SMEs, it views the Chinese partners as lacking in substance and business ethics, relegating them to pawns in "Made in Italy" by native-born Italians. Luconi's documentary film *L'occupazione cinese* takes the pro-globalization position too, but with the intent to show successful paths to a re-definition of the "Made in Italy" label, as both Italian and legal Chinese migrant entrepreneurs benefited from, and were challenged by, globalization. Drawing on his view of the Chinese Diaspora as both a fear-provoking event and a source of fascination for Italians, in this film Luconi asks whether Chinese provoked the crisis in Prato's Italian textile industry, or helped revive the city's economy when this sector was already in difficulty before the arrival of a significant number of migrant factories. At first sight, the director's use of the Italian word "occupazione" in the film title seems to reinforce the commonplace journalistic depiction of the so-called economic and migratory Chinese "invasion". But later on, the viewers learn that the once-dilapidated Italian factories and warehouses in Prato's Macrolotto area were sold to Chinese who now own them and create jobs there. Here Luconi mobilizes two other possible meanings of "occupazione" in Italian – i.e., the use of buildings and employment. Most of the film's editing and montage also emphasize the positive contributions of Chinese migrants. In one sequence, the film quotes an entrepreneur named Michele Hu who proudly claims that Chinese migrants invented Prato's ready-to-wear garment sector and made the city their base to reach European markets, thereby re-inventing the "Made in Italy" reputation. A caption then appears on the screen to inform us that non-Italian fabrics, if made into garments in Italy, are allowed to carry a "Made in Italy" label. Following this caption, Wang Liping, the vice president of the National Confederation of Artisans and Small- and Medium-size Enterprises, restates this principle commenting on quality and legal economic activities as two essential components for Chinese to further grow in their entrepreneurship in Italy.

When proposing ways to better incorporate Prato's Chinese migrant entrepreneurship into a "Made in Italy" logic, *Cenci in Cina* and *L'occupazione cinese* unabashedly envision a positive and bright Italian-Chinese future. In the haste to move beyond the current crisis, the

pro-globalization viewpoint as expressed by these two films tends to dismiss the real plight of Prato's former SME owners and to view it as an outcome of their provincialism and lack of business planning. In so doing, these films do not truly address the social turmoil in Prato, missing an opportunity to delve into popular anti-globalization sentiments and nostalgia for Prato's past, which are always on the brink of slipping into anti-Chinese diatribes (Pieraccini 2008). Paoli's documentary *Di tessuti e di altre storie* is an exception in this mediascape as it focuses on demoralized Italian entrepreneurs and workers who were mired in a dire economic situation with little chance for revival. While the film orchestrates multiple perspectives on the Prato case study, it privileges those of ordinary Italian workers and small artisans whose voices were often cited but were not taken seriously in the Italian media, even in television programs apparently dedicated to them (e.g., "Il rosso e il nero", *Annozero*, Rai 2, 19 March 2009).

Rather than examining Prato's Chinese migrant entrepreneurship directly, Paoli critiques its use by Italian politicians during in the 2009 local electoral campaign, through which the centre-right businessman-politician Roberto Cenni became the city's first right-wing mayor since WWII. As the documentary shows, during the campaign Aldo Milone, the head of Prato's municipal department of security and police, spoke about the massive amount of money which Chinese were said to send daily from Prato to China – a supposed loss of the city's tax revenue. The film also shows Silvio Berlusconi exuberantly claiming that China was no longer near but here at home during his visit to Prato in support of Cenni's campaign. In the filmic space, these pompous and forceful male voices are countered by Paoli's calm, formal and soft voice-over that denounces male politicians' mismanagement of Prato's industrial district and their scapegoating of Chinese migrants and Italian artisan producers to political ends. With an understated modulation, her commentary even lends a warm touch to her denunciation. Paoli's voice-over, to borrow Stella Bruzzi's words, is "an overt tool for exposing the untenability of documentary's belief in its capacity for imparting 'generalized truths' faithfully and unproblematically" (2006, 66) in interaction with these politicians' highly publicized television appearances.

If these public proclamations obscured real dynamics, what lesser-known, private thoughts about Prato and Chinese migrants former owners Italian SME had? In an extreme close-up, one of the film's subjects, Manuela, reveals that the locals are bothered by the thought that certain Chinese migrants today seem wealthier than Italians, and that they also feel outsmarted by Chinese who were much poorer twenty years ago. From Manuela's perspective, most Chinese migrants today are able to accept harsh working conditions because they have not yet experienced better conditions, a situation that has happened to Prato's Italians in the past. In commenting on the often-cited lack of social integration of Chinese migrants next door, Salvatore, another of the documentary's subjects, confesses that he had little social life in the past when there was a significant amount of orders to fill. These scenes reveal the locals' empathy, through reflections on their own past, for migrants' economic activities and social behaviour that the Italian media so vehemently criticized. The scenes also show these former entrepreneurs' awareness of moral relativism, which "threatens to deprive us (i.e., Italians) of moral confidence: of the sense that we (i.e., Italians) are *right* to condemn the actions of wrongdoers (i.e., Chinese migrants) and to think that their victims (i.e., Prato's Italian workers and entrepreneurs) are entitled not to be wronged" (Lukes 2008, 18, my added parentheses).

The affective relationships Paoli formed with her subjects and the respect she showed them helped uncover these private insights. In the two aforementioned scenes, Paoli's camera zooms in on Salvatore's face when he reveals inner thoughts, but distances itself away from him as he retreats to the back of his workshop in tears, overwhelmed by the thought that his once busy workshop is now in disuse. Paoli's film demonstrates the healing power of autobiographical

documentary cinema as the director poses herself as daughter to her protagonists. In fact, one of the film's subjects is Paoli's own father. The intimacy Paoli established with her subjects manifested a poetic developed by contemporary Italian women documentary filmmakers (Luciano, Scarparo 2010, 193). This poetic is evident when, to use the aforementioned scenes as examples, Paoli juxtaposes close-ups of interviewees in her own footage with the predominantly long shots of male politicians taken from television archives.

The emotional intensity of Paoli's documentary is achieved without recourse to any Chinese migrant subjects. The inclusion of Chinese-speaking voices would force Paoli to take a moral stand on the benefits and drawbacks of Prato's migrant entrepreneurship as in *Cenci in Cina* and *L'occupazione cinese*. But by refocusing on the current plight of Italians, Paoli's approach lends historical and personal nuances to Italian cinema's frame of recent Chinese migration in Prato as about business competition and collaboration.

3. Practicing intercultural education

Currently in Italy there is a growing number of the so-called second- and third-generation migrants coming of age. Among them, Chinese-Italians have been gradually and confidently building a public persona and a hyphenated identity through websites, organizations and appearances in the Italian media and in films (Pedone 2011; Marsden 2014). Recently there has also been a wave of short and documentary films about Chinese-Italians born or raised in Italy (e.g., *Italiani made in China* [Italians Made in China; Real Time, 2015]; *Huayi* [Ethnically Chinese; Liu, Primiterra, 2016]). The last frame I discuss is most evident in these films, but as it is still consolidating here I provide tentative comments on it. This frame focuses on Italian-Chinese intercultural education, including both Chinese migrants' Italian education and Italians' Chinese education.

In the short film *Il Caleidoscopio: visioni interculturali* (The Kaleidoscope: Intercultural Visions; Luongo, D'Alì, Bianchi 2011), Chinese and other young migrants from Prato's professional institute "Francesco Datini" describe their relocations from various countries to Italy at a very young age and how they learn to adapt to Italian society. Chinese teenagers and their Italian classmates also visit the city's Chinese neighbourhood, an Islam centre and a kebab eatery, showing familiarity with Prato's multiethnic neighbourhoods. A group of young Chinese who participated in a Milan-based research project named "Oltre Chinatown" (Beyond Chinatown) wrote a short film titled *Come me* (Like Me; Mariani 2013). This project, sponsored by Milan's Agency for Research in Social Codes, examines young persons who were born in China, moved to Italy between 14 and 18 years old and therefore underwent a process of becoming acquainted with the Italian language and culture. *Come me* resembles *Il Caleidoscopio* in its fusion of documentary and fiction components to depict a Chinese adolescent girl on the first day of school in Milan. Chinese-Italians participated in the film's creative process and published their interviews with peers on the website of Associna, an association for Italy's second-generation Chinese migrants and Chinese-Italians[3]. As minor documentaries, both films adopt the autobiographic, diarist and testimonial modes of filmmaking (Renov 2004, XVI-XVII), exhibiting an emotional spontaneity that makes an optimistic view of these migrants' intercultural future compelling.

[3] For a description of "Oltre Chinatown" and the link to view *Come me*, see <http://www.associna.com/oltrechinatown/> (11/2019).

In a way, the importance for young migrants to learn the Italian language and culture is self-evident. Showing language proficiency can also combat the Italian bias toward migrants based on their perceived or real lack of fluency in Italian. In "Vendetta cinese", the male protagonist uses simple words to talk to a Chinese restaurant owner, who turns out to speak fluent Italian, causing him momentary embarrassment. In *Tutti all'attacco* (All at Attack; Vignolo 2005), when an Italian man shouts rudely at Chinese in his building's courtyard, a Chinese girl responds in fluent Italian suggesting that he should learn Chinese if he were to continue to live in a neighbourhood where he is part of the ethnic and linguistic minority.

Indeed, as the last example shows, the more pressing issue in the current Italian-migrant interactions, I believe, is for Italians to acquire intercultural competencies in addressing Chinese migrants. De Falco's *Leonardo* is the only documentary feature film so far that puts this issue at its narrative centre. Frequent references to the Mediterranean Sea in *Leonardo* often signify fluid cultural border crossings which are at the core of the several storylines in this film, unlike the depiction of it as a barrier for refugees in many Italian films (O'Healy 2010). Fluidity articulates a cardinal principle of the "Archivio Liquido dell'Identità" (Liquid Archive of Identity) project which co-produced the film (my interview with De Falco in 2013). Within this context, the film focuses on events surrounding the titular subject, the infant son of an interracial couple – Italian husband and Chinese wife – living in Bari in Southern Italy. During a Chinese language class in an Italian middle school, where Leonardo's parents work, the teacher encourages students to bring the two radicals of a Chinese ideogram closer in order to write it correctly. This is a metaphor of the need for the two cultures to move closer. The climax of Italians learning Chinese occurs at the end of the film when Italian students from the same middle school perform a rendition of "Mo-Li-Hua" in Mandarin, a Chinese folk song well-known in the West because of Puccini's quote in his opera *Turandot* (1924).

Another emerging theme in films that adopt this frame concerns young Chinese migrants who grow up speaking Italian, and sometimes also the dialect of their parents, but decide to learn Mandarin Chinese and Chinese culture. The short documentary film *Tanto lontano quanto vicino* (So Far So Close; Cinieri Lombroso, Kuangyi 2016) features a university student who prefers expressing himself in Italian and socializing with his Italian friends. But he insists that he feels Chinese and will become Chinese if he hones his language skills further. Another film in the same series by the same filmmakers, titled *La mia stella polare* (My Polar Star, 2016), gives an example of a Chinese girl who was raised entirely by her Italian adoptive mother but recently returns to live with her biological Chinese mother. The girl learns Chinese in order to better adjust to the new living arrangements and new affective relationships. In *Il futuro è troppo grande* (The Future is Too Grand; Buccheri, Citoni 2014), while the female protagonist speaks Italian, Mandarin, and the dialect of her parents equally fluently, she returns to China to discover cultural aspects of this vast country and to reclaim her Chinese identity, only to find that she is Italian at heart. What all of these films convey is a conviction in the value of acculturation, the process through which individuals assimilate traits of a culture different from their own in order to, in our case, maintain an affective link with their Chinese parents and their motherland.

Conclusion

If we were to analyse these three frames by asking what they reveal about Italy's Chinese, then I contend that the frames address migrants' diverse forms of non-economic capital, a concept used by Pierre Bourdieu to expand Marxist analysis of economic capital to include other

spheres of human life, such as social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Ong 1999, 88-93). The frame on paralleled organized crime concerns migrants' social capital which they used to build communities in a foreign land in a short time period, only since the 1990s, which in some cases are located in prominent urban settings – notably, Milan's Via Sarpi neighbourhood, Prato's Via Pistoiese area and Rome's Piazza Vittorio neighbourhood. Indeed, the "Chinese mafia" served as a catalyst for many films to uncover social aspects of this migration. The frame about negotiating business competition and collaboration points to migrants' economic capital: Chinese took advantage of the efficient networks within their own ethnic business circles to borrow start-up capital and to employ affordable labour for the purpose of entrepreneurship in the fast-fashion industry and other sectors since the 1990s. The frame about intercultural education examines migrants' cultural capital in that documentarians usually take pains to explain the necessity of developing basic Italian and Mandarin Chinese linguistic and cultural competencies in order to better live between Italy and China.

Responding to rapidly-changing media and social dynamics, these cinematic frames have achieved considerable degrees of complexity and comprehensiveness about recent Chinese immigration to Italy, one of the largest flows from China to Europe since the 1980s (Li 1999, 19-20). If Italian cinema has shown a deep interest in engaging with contemporary Chinese migration to Italy, it is because this migration represents one facet of the multiple, intersecting Italian mobilities that permeate Italian culture and its relation to the wider world (Ben-Ghiat, Hom 2016).

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