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The Social Sources of Migration and Enterprise: Italian Peasants and Chinese Migrants in Prato

Donald Fels

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CARIM-East Research Report 2013/46



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CARIM-East
Creating an Observatory of Migration East of Europe

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CARIM-East RR 2013/46

**The Social Sources of Migration and Enterprise:
Italian Peasants and Chinese Migrants in Prato**

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This project which is co-financed by the European Union is the first migration observatory focused on the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union and covers all countries of the Eastern Partnership initiative (Belarus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and Russian Federation.

The project's two main themes are:

- (1) migration from the region to the European Union (EU) focusing in particular on countries of emigration and transit on the EU's eastern border; and
- (2) intraregional migration in the post-Soviet space.

The project started on 1 April 2011 as a joint initiative of the European University Institute (EUI), Florence, Italy (the lead institution), and the Centre of Migration Research (CMR) at the University of Warsaw, Poland (the partner institution).

CARIM researchers undertake comprehensive and policy-oriented analyses of very diverse aspects of human mobility and related labour market developments east of the EU and discuss their likely impacts on the fast evolving socio-economic fabric of the six Eastern Partners and Russia, as well as that of the European Union.

In particular, CARIM-East:

- builds a broad network of national experts from the region representing all principal disciplines focused on human migration, labour mobility and national development issues (e.g. demography, law, economics, sociology, political science).
- develops a comprehensive database to monitor migration stocks and flows in the region, relevant legislative developments and national policy initiatives;
- undertakes, jointly with researchers from the region, systematic and *ad hoc* studies of emerging migration issues at regional and national levels.
- provides opportunities for scholars from the region to participate in workshops organized by the EUI and CMR, including academic exchange opportunities for PhD candidates;
- provides forums for national and international experts to interact with policymakers and other stakeholders in the countries concerned.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: <http://www.carim-east.eu/>

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Introduction

We want to thank the organizers of this conference for the opportunity to give this keynote address. We feel a little like interlopers here because neither of us are specialists in the diaspora of the Wenzhou Chinese, and although Fels has been able to spend concentrated time in Prato on several occasions, this is Hamilton's first visit. Therefore, we are doubly honored to be here and to present our thoughts to you today.

What we bring to this conference is our joint fascination with what the Chinese presence in Prato means in the context of today's world economy. Prato has been a textile center of international renown for centuries. After World War II, it also became the locus of hundreds of small textile enterprises established by Italian peasants who left their traditional plots and migrated to Prato to start businesses (Absalom 1991, Absalom, et.al. 1997, Dei Ottati 1994a, Spinelli, 2012). These former peasants organized their enterprises much like the farms that they had left behind: small-scale, family-run, and staffed by persons who lived in adjoining structures to the business at hand. Though poorly educated, and unskilled in the textile trade, these resilient peasants brought with them a strong communal work-ethic, robust kinship and personal networks, and a commitment to making money for the welfare of future generations.

By the time the Wenzhou Chinese arrived in Prato, several thousand small Italian-run textile enterprises, each performing a specific function in textile production, had gone into decline, and the vast majority of them had closed. The Italian ex-peasants had succeeded in leaving the land, and now they and their children were leaving the textile industry behind. When the Chinese established their enterprises in Prato, they re-established the small-scale, often family-run enterprises, living in or adjacent to the work place, as well as the economic networks linking them together, much as the Italian peasants had done before them, and for many of the same reasons. In creating *pronto-moda*, the Chinese arrivals added significant new markets for Prato's production. Still, their goals of wanting to leave the land and to make money for this and future generations were consistent with the Italians before them.

In our presentation today, we will start with an analysis of small-firm economies in Italy and China and then compare and contrast the two migrations to Prato. The purpose of our analysis is not to argue that, despite many differences, the rural to urban migration of Italian peasants and the international migration of Wenzhou Chinese are fundamentally the same. To be sure, there are many similarities, as well as some significant differences, between the two cases of migration, and we want to stress these similarities and differences because sociologically they give us insights into the organizational nature of these two migrations. Rather, our larger purpose is to argue that, by understanding the sociological organization of these two cases of migration, we can better understand the crucial historical differences between the two cases, differences give us insight into the more complex questions about the place of Italian and Chinese family firms in the global economy of the 21st century.

The Institutional Logic of Small-Firm Economies

Over two decades ago, shortly after his first research trip to Taiwan, Hamilton's colleague, the late Marco Orrù, who grew up in Italy, was so inspired by the similarities between the small-firm economies of Italy and Taiwan that he wrote a paper (Orrù, Biggart, and Hamilton 1997) comparing the two economies. In this paper, which he entitled "the institutional logic of small-firm economies in Italy and Taiwan," he develops a thesis that even though Italy and Taiwan are vastly different in almost all respects—culturally, politically, and socially—the small-firm economies in both locations share a similar institutional logic. This similarity, he argues, results from four organizational characteristics that Italian and Chinese factory owners have in common: 1) familism, 2) entrepreneurship and independence, 3) personal ties and business networks, and 4) patterns of personal

savings and investment. Before we briefly explain these four characteristics, we should add that these four organizational features also characterize the Italian peasants and the Wenzhou Chinese who migrated to Prato.¹

According to Orrù (1997, pp. 350-352), familism is the key organizational feature in the small-firm economies in both the Chinese and Italian cases. By familism, Orrù means that the owners of small businesses use “kinship relations as the structuring principle of industrial organization.”² In both cases the family organization is characterized by patriarchal households normatively organized through patrilineal principles of kinship. In the context of family firms, familism has both inner and outer manifestations (Hamilton 2006, 220-236). Inside the firm, the owner of the firm is also the head of the household, and accordingly patriarchal principles of control apply to decision making and to the use of labor, which in small firms would include family members, relatives, and friends. Outside the firm, the owner (the *laoban* in Chinese) is responsible for the fate of the family-owned business, and therefore must take advantage of whatever opportunities exist in an economic setting where every other firm owner is doing the same thing.

The second organizational feature that Orrù points to is “entrepreneurship and independence.” This feature flows from the fact that family ownership confers on the head of the firm the necessity to be economically aggressive but simultaneously risk adverse. The combination of these two seemingly contradictory traits results in the incentives to make alliances with others in a similar situation. Without the alliances, a small or medium-size firm would be unable to achieve economies of scale needed to compete with large firms or with other inter-firm networks. And without alliances, competition from well-organized networks would soon overwhelm and crowd out whatever innovations a small firm owner could come up with by himself or herself. Therefore, the desire to maintain the family firm as an independent enterprise in an economic environment of other small firms owners desiring the same is, paradoxically, only possible through forming a series of alliances with others.

The necessity to form alliances leads to the development of personal relations with other firm owners, as well as the formation of business networks. The cultivation of personal relations in both the Italian and the Chinese cases nurtures a cultural environment in which the personal honor of the patriarchal head of the firm is at stake in business dealings and where the principle of reciprocity is the moral glue that holds the network together and reduces opportunism and rapacity. In the Taiwan case, the personal ties between firm owners operate on this principle of reciprocity and are typically identified by the term “*guanxi*.” Dei Ottati (1994) observed remarkably similar features in the industrial districts around Prato.

This moral climate resting on personal ties evaporates without the formation of a viable business network. A viable business network is one that makes money for the firm owners in the network. In the Taiwan case, such business networks of small, medium-size, and a few larger firms dominate the production of most products, everything from apparel and bicycles to personal computers and smart phones. The same is true in the Italian case, where all manner of products, ranging from apparel to automobiles, were produced by networks of small and medium-size firms. In all these examples, the network of business owners only last as long as the network is economically successful. Without an economically successful network, the moral glue comes undone (Hamilton and Kao 2009).

The fourth organizational feature that Orrù points to is the pattern of personal saving and investment that appears in the context of these business networks. Several aspects of this pattern are important. First, for small firms, independence and autonomy depends on firm ownership. Because banks and other types of formal credit institutions are often reluctant to loan money to small businesses, the owners must obtain the initial capital investment from their family and friends, as well

¹ There is a considerable literature on using the economic region around Prato as one of the chief exemplars of “Italian industrial districts.” For some recent statement see Becattini, 2006; Becattini, et.al., 2003; Dei Ottati 1996.

² Orrù here quotes Piore and Sabel (1984, pp. 227-228) in their analysis of the economy of northern Italy.

as their own personal savings. For many types of business, the amount of capital needed is relatively modest, and informal sources often proved sufficient (Dei Gabi 1994b, Hamilton 1997). However, even when these firms are successful and expanding, the owners still want to keep clear control of their firms, and in the Chinese cases, the development of business groups and pyramid schemes for shareholding help prevent loss of control even when the need for capital grows.

Second, inter-firm networks of small and medium-size firms often generate their operating capital from credit taken in advance of sales. Informal money markets have emerged in Taiwan and Italy that allows firm owners to obtain their needed production inputs on credit (Hamilton 1997, Dei Ottati 1994b). Because business networks operate on the basis of personal ties and trustworthiness, the credit worthiness of firm owners has even generated a viable market in Taiwan in post-dated checks. The firm owner pays a second party for his supplies with a post-dated check, which can then be sold to a third party immediately for a small discount. The third party pockets the difference between the face value of the check and what he paid for it.

Taken together, these four organizational traits create what Orrù calls an “institutional logic” that permeates economic activities and encourages the reproduction of these traits in many different product markets, in as many markets as such networks prove successful.³ As the Taiwan case shows, these networks can be extremely successful in a wide variety of endeavors. The key characteristic of their success is, however, their flexibility in contract manufacturing, in making products that retailers and merchandisers have ordered. These networks respond to the demand generated by other firms, and rarely have the capability to advertise and distribute their products in response the demand for goods that the networks themselves generated (also see Dei Gabi, 2003).

We will now argue that this same institutional logic characterizes the Italian peasants and Wenzhou Chinese in Prato, but with some crucial differences that result from the patterns inherent in the differences between the two migrations. The first question we address is, however, the reason that Prato became the destination for these two migrations.

Prato as a Location for Migration

Florence has been a renowned center for wool and silk manufacture since the Middle Ages. The Florentine wool guild, *arte della lana*, was arguably the most influential of the city’s highly important craft guilds, and its membership, including such leading families as the Medici, wielded enormous power for an extended period of time. Even before the Renaissance, textiles were the city’s single most valuable commodity. Until 1992, when the Province of Prato was established, Florence had administrative control over Prato, only 24 kms from Florence. Although the guild no longer has any official power, the economic power of Florentine producers still directly and indirectly influence the rules governing wool production and manufacture throughout Tuscany, including those in Prato. Florence is known today, as it was several hundred years ago, as an important market for luxury goods, very much including those fashioned from wool. For centuries, Prato was forbidden to manufacture the highest grades of wool, and accordingly those Pratese who have made their fortunes from textiles, have done so at the bottom end of the market.

Textile production in Prato has always been a function of making-do and doing well with ‘left-overs.’ Nearly through to the end of the twentieth century, this making-do made many in Prato very wealthy and provided a steady level of income for the entire city. Nonetheless, even at the height of their economic success, the Pratese were aware that their work, and their lovely city, compared unequally to that of the Florentines, or even to those nearby towns, comely Pistoia and learned Pisa. Theirs was a center of hard

³ Dei Gabbi (2003) phrased the analysis in much the same way when she refers to the “organizational logic of the industrial districts.”

physical work, even messy toil, delivered with industriousness and inventiveness- the ingredients necessary to turn less than desirable raw material into highly marketable textiles.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Prato had been in the business of creating what is known as “shoddy wool,” wool made by recycling woolen fabrics as raw materials. The development of the shoddy wool industry was one of the outcomes of the war of the British against Napoleon. In 1813, Benjamin Law invented a “pulling machine,” a stop-gap effort at restoring the flow of wool to the looms of Yorkshire. The machine was capable of producing “regenerated” wool (albeit of shorter, less well-lasting fiber) from the pulling apart of woolen rags and old garments. For many decades the city of Batley in Yorkshire was the manufacturing center of shoddy and its upgrade cousin mungo (made from new rags), producing ‘recovered’ wool. But by the end of the 19th century, the center of manufacturing for recycled wool had moved to Prato.

The production of shoddy wool arrived in Prato via the efforts of Giovanni Battista Mazzoni. Graduating in both letters and science from the University of Pisa in the same year of Law’s invention, Mazzoni then traveled to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. There he immersed himself in mechanics, and because it was illegal in both England and France to take machine drawings out of the country, he memorized the plans for the pulling machine before his return to his home in Prato. Once back in Prato, he built several mechanical devices for the wool trade of his city, including his version of the rag pulling/tearing machine. In the decades that followed the world’s center of shoddy production gradually moved from Batley to Prato. Neufield suggests that the rags themselves became plentiful in Prato thanks to the proximity of Livorno, home to Italy’s largest rag trade (Neufield 1961). Livorno was the main port from which the highly sought-after Italian marble was shipped world-wide, and the rags were needed to wrap the slabs for protection. The machines did well for Mazzoni (a major Pratese street bears his name, his statue is in the *plaza del Duomo*) and for Prato.

Before the Great Depression, production of this recycled wool was concentrated in large vertically integrated factories, but with the collapse of the economy during the depression, entrepreneurs in Prato established a putting out system to maximize their production of woolen fabrics while minimizing their risks. These entrepreneurs in Prato’s wool-based hierarchy gave weaving and sewing piece-work to peasant families in the rural areas outside of the city.⁴ The arrangers of this putting out system were called *il impannatore*, a word known only to the Pratese (*panno* in Italian means cloth). The *impannatore* owned no factories, nor any raw material, but put deals together and made sure that production goals were met for textiles. Though not deemed wholly trustworthy by all, the *impannatore* had regularly visited the farms, where they introduced and reinforced the concept of non-farm work, and its remuneration, to the peasant families.

During WWII, the city’s old wool producing factories had been prime bombing targets by the Allies because they produced army uniforms and blankets (out of wool blends- a percentage of virgin wool, and a higher amount of shoddy wool). In retreat, the Germans blew up what factories remained, and destroyed all the wool producing machinery they could. After World War II, several factors contributed to the quick re-establishment of Prato as the wool regeneration center: huge pent-up demand for warm woolen clothes (sweaters, coats, scarves etc), scarce availability of fuel for home heating, few plentiful sources of virgin wool, and the arrival in Italy of bales of donated clothes from America, ostensibly to clothe victims of war. The least attractive of the donations ended up as fodder for the shoddy-making machine. The piles of used garments had to be shorn of buttons and fasteners and non-wool items, sorted by color, turned into fiber after being soaked in an oil/chemical mixture to soften the wool and reduce its static electricity. The fiber was then re-spun, dyed, and woven into cloth. These task required labor, but none was readily available, except for the peasants in the countryside. Thus begins the story of the peasant migration to Prato.

⁴ On the industrial organization of Prato woolen industry before World War II, see Mori 1988, volume 3. We acknowledge Gabi Dei Ottati for this reference.

The Tale of Two Migrations

Although historical contexts between the two migrations differ substantially, they nonetheless share some similar historical and sociological characteristics. First, most cases of large-scale migrations begin through happenstance, through a historical accident that leads to the formation of a migration chain. Second, the migration chain itself has both an organizational dynamic and a historical fate. In the case of these two migrations to Prato, they both involve a rural to urban migration that, once the migrants began their enterprises in Prato, duplicates the institutional logic of small-firm economies, but there the similarities cease. The migration of rural Italian tenant farmers to urban Prato is a case of permanent migration. By contrast, the migration of rural Chinese in the hinterland of Wenzhou to urban Prato is a case of “institutionalized temporary migration” (Hamilton 1985).

Italian Peasants to Prato: Like the weavers who toiled under the aegis of the Florentine guilds, the lives of the peasantry who worked the land in the Tuscan countryside before WWII were strictly proscribed. For generations, their existence was firmly controlled by *il padrone*, by landowners with whom they maintained patron/client ties. Although no longer tied to the land by feudalistic bonds, the lives of these rural inhabitants had changed surprisingly little well into the twentieth century. Working communally, they shared the demanding work, especially with family members. It was expected that they remand half of their production to their landlords, that they reproduce well, and that they not bother with such things as education.

World War II changed the lives of those Tuscan peasants living in the hinterland of Prato. In his 1991 book, *A Strange Alliance, Aspects of Escape and Survival in Italy 1943-5*, historian Roger Absalom gives a glimpse how Second World War turned “everything upside down” for the peasants. As wartime shortages made what they grew ever-more precious and sought after, the peasant’s work became increasingly more important and stressful to carry out under such difficult conditions. Yet because they had adequate food and shelter, they were well able to live better than those in the cities. Organized well, they could sell at least part of their production on the thriving black market at a high markup.

Shortly after the Allies invaded Sicily in July 10, 1943, the Italian government began secret negotiation with the Allies and formally surrendered on September 8 of that year. Almost simultaneously, the Germany reinforced its military presence in Italy and took over control of most the Italian peninsula. In the short interval between the surrender and the recapture of Italy by the Germans, fifty thousand Anglo and American prisoners of war escaped Italy’s prisons. Weak and badly undernourished, very few of the POWs knew anything about the countryside surrounding the prisons where they had been incarcerated, some for years, and very few spoke Italian (Absalom 1991). Pouring out of the open jails, despite their pitiful condition, most quickly disappeared. They had fled into the fields of the nearest farms where they begged for help and succor from the peasants. Resoundingly the peasants took them in, fed them well and when they were strong enough, put them to work in the fields. When the Germans or bands of remaining Italian Fascists tried to round up the escapees, the peasants took their charges up into the hills, posting look-outs, hiding and keeping them in food and shelter. At considerable risk to themselves, the peasants declared to the enemy that they had no idea of the whereabouts of the prisoners.

We know these details from testimonies given just months after the war ended to the Allied Screening Commission, which Absalom studied in-depth. He also tracked down the former prisoners in the U.S., Great Britain, Australia, and South Africa to interview them further about the relationship of the peasants and themselves. From these testimonials and interviews, Absalom learned that in the process of saving the lives of thousands of English and Americans, the peasant farmers learned from the POWs that their life could be different. Absalom discusses the reasons why this would have occurred spontaneously throughout the countryside. The Commission reports portray a picture of respectful, friendly, and very grateful English-speaking prisoners. Well-practiced at avoiding contact with ‘outsiders’ and disliking the Germans, the peasants did everything in their power to safeguard the escapees. According to the testimonies, the closed peasant families had never shared themselves so

openly and unguardedly with others, but from these men from across the seas, the peasants were offered a view of self-determination previously unseen and unknown to them. Absalom persuasively argues that the POW's came to embody for the peasants the possibility of a life off the tenant farms.

Though largely uneducated, the peasants were excellent at strategizing and getting things done well, as the POWs' very survival made clear. As the war ended, the same Tuscan farmers streamed into Prato to live and work. Prato needed laborers and the tasks to be done conformed well to the mind and skillset of the Tuscan farming families, who had experience with Prato's putting out system and who could collaboratively reorganize the process of making shoddy wool. The reorganization of the Prato industry took place soon after World War II, first with the expansion of the putting-out system, and then between 1949 and 1952 with the disintegration of the large vertically integrated mills due to the loss of overseas markets in such places as South Africa and India. (Ottati 1994a, Absalom, Becattini, Ottati and Giovannini 1997) Now with experience and connections in the industry, the former peasants reorganized the production of recycled wool by means of "a vast network of small shops, employing one to twenty workers (often members of a single extended family) who possessed an intimate knowledge of materials and machines" (Piore and Sabel 1984, p. 214). Running at full bore, the Prato post-war shoddy production brought in steady returns of ten-fold above costs (Nesi, 2012). Once the peasant families understood what their manufacturing was worth, they established new factories with themselves as the *padrone*. There was no longer a 50% split with overseers. They were able to do this by creating small niche factories for each of the incremental tasks in the production chain, most of which required very little if any initial investment. The *impannetore* would handle the coordination between the separate factories and separate tasks in the chain and deliver the finished order.

By the late 1960s, the woolen goods sold from Prato's flexibly organized production system had rapidly expanding new markets. Although the wool itself and the apparel made from the wool were made of 100% wool and labeled "Made in Italy," much of the unprocessed wool itself was sourced from foreign producers, filtered through American and later ironically German garment donations. These woolen products were reprocessed into shoddy wool, which became the primary input for the new, low-cost Italian designer apparel goods that became widely available in Europe from the 1960s on. The best known example of new trend in fashions then was Benetton. The bright-looking, inexpensive Pratese wool was an important component of Vicenza-based Benetton's early success. The sweaters made from reprocessed wool didn't last far into the following season, but then again it did not need to because these were marketed as fashion that everyone could afford. The clothes were cheap, sexy and colorful, and Benetton led consumers to understand that they could easily be replaced with the must-have colors and styles of the next season. Price and styling, and the blending of inexpensive regenerated wool with some virgin wool mixed in, helped make Benetton's low price points possible, and distinguished these products from other woolen apparel products in the marketplace.

In the late 1960s, Benetton represented a new type of manufacturer that had just emerged. Combining design, merchandising, and retailing, Benetton itself owned few factories. Instead Benetton relied on a network of manufacturers that delivered the pre-specified goods in batches based on the orders received in advance. This new putting out system made brand name manufacturers into a factory-less merchandisers that designed goods for other firms to make and that then sold these branded products through their own and other retail outlets. This model of production relies on what Piore and Sabel (1984) call "flexible specialization," with northern Italy being their prime example of this new system of production.⁵

As production in Prato ramped up in the 1970s, the small manufacturers required more workers than their own families could supply. Southern Italians were hired, strictly off the books. Prato's work force supposedly had a larger proportion of black market workers than anywhere else in Italy. Prato's

⁵ According to Giacomo Becattini, in the case of Italian industrial districts, such as Prato, the more appropriate name should be "flexible integration."

regenerated wool production thrived through the 1980's. By this time, families, which had a generation earlier lived near subsistence levels, had become wealthy. Prato became home to Ferraris and Mercedes and a large Henry Moore sculpture. Families one generation removed from farming now took their offspring on vacations to their mountain and seaside homes.

As the first generation of migrant entrepreneurs aged and became prosperous, some of their children and many more of their grandchildren sought to attend university. As newly minted laureates, they felt it beneath their 'potential' to sit on concrete floors and pick apart old sweaters all day or put smelly oil-soaked rags through noisy machines. Overwhelmingly, they wanted to be "free professionals" (Giovanni 2007). Eastern European workers were hired to do that work, but lacking family incentives and not pleased to labor for low wages with no benefits, these workers did not last long.

Shortly after Piore and Sabel published their much praised book, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity* (1984), in which they foresaw a glorious future for flexible specialization, including the textile industry in Prato, Prato's industries had already started their decline (Dei Gabi 1996). This generational shift combined, in the middle 1980s, with new trends in fashion, declining markets for woolens fabrics, steadily rising labor costs in Italy, and stiff competition from Turkish and Asian textile manufacturers (mainly from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s) to produce a gradual decline in Prato's fortunes. By the mid-1990s, many of Prato's firms were finished or going out of business. The rural to urban migration had ended in the 1970s. After that time, inter-generational social mobility made it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the level of technical innovation and entrepreneurship that was needed for the networks of small and medium-size firms to reproduce the successes of the previous generation.

The Chinese diaspora extends to Prato: Just as Prato has been an important location for manufacturing textiles for centuries, the Chinese for centuries have been one, if not the most prominent, ethnic group to migrate to distant locations in search for opportunities to make money (Chirot and Reid, 1997). This systematic search for wealth and well-being can be documented with some precision as far back as the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Before that time, most of China's international trade was in the hands of foreign merchant groups, but starting in the Ming period, Chinese merchants began to migrate in large numbers within China as well as to Southeast Asia, particularly to the Spanish-held territory around Manila, but also in smaller numbers to elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Throughout the last half of the sixteenth and through much of the seventeenth century, Chinese population living in Manila numbered between 10,000 and 30,000 persons. This number fell during most of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), when the Chinese emperors forbade migration from China for any purpose and limited foreign trade to Shamian, a small island in the Pearl River in Guangzhou.⁶ However, after the British victory in the first Opium War (1839-42), large scale Chinese migration began almost immediately, first to Southeast Asia for trade and labor and to California and Australia for their respective gold rushes, and then soon thereafter to many other parts of the world.

This Chinese diaspora has similar features wherever the Chinese have migrated. The migration of Wenzhou Chinese to Prato shares these characteristics, and hence this migration should not be seen as exceptional, but rather as one that conforms, more or less, to the characteristic Chinese pattern. Hamilton (1985) has conceptualized this overall type of migration as "institutionalized temporary migration," which consists of four enacted strategies that lead 1) to a structural conduciveness for migration, 2) to recruitment and network formation, 3) to patterns of settlement, and 4) to return migration.

Structure conduciveness: Unlike permanent migrants, including the Italian peasant migrants to Prato, individuals embarking on what they (as well as their family, friends, and fellow sojourners) view as a temporary migration do not reject their home society. Instead, they may value it so highly that they are willing to work elsewhere temporarily in order to live a "better" life in their permanent

⁶ Internal migration levels during the Qing period, however, were very high (Hamilton 2006, pp. 50-75)

home society at a later time. Of course, it is often the case that one's original intentions for migrating and the result of that migration do not match. But in the case of Chinese migrations, regardless of individual desires and eventual outcomes, the normative motive for migration is always to return home at a later time with enough wealth to enjoy high esteem for oneself and for one's family in one's native place.

There are two aspects of the migrating society that allows this normative strategy to emerge in the first place. First, sojourning is viewed as a comparatively low risk activity for improving one's social status in one's home town. Typically, other avenues for the accumulation of wealth and social mobility are closed. Second, at the end of the sojourn, re-entry into the local society must be viewed as unproblematic. In most case of chain temporary migration among Chinese, re-entry is facilitated by strong kinship ties in which one's sense of belonging and being accepted is prescribed by one's relationship among kinsmen. The organized lineage not only facilitates re-entry after the migrant returns (*guiqiao*) but also encourages some lineage members to migrate in the first place.

These two aspects make migration context specific. Some locations in China are more conducive to temporary migration than others. The best known examples of migration in the nineteenth century all originated in the rural hinterlands of major port cities in southern China. The 48,000 Chinese in California in 1855, only six years after the gold rush there began, came overwhelmingly from the six districts in the hinterland of Canton (Guangzhou). The famous six companies in San Francisco were the native place associations (*huiguan*) of these districts, associations that in turn organized the Chinese participation in the gold rush.⁷ Starting about the same time in the nineteenth century and continuing until the outbreak of the Japanese war in China in 1936, hundreds of thousands of Chinese migrated to Southeast Asia. Most of these migrants also came from villages in the hinterland of port cities in Southern China, and although a great many of these Chinese did not end up returning to their native place, the institutionalized nature of this sojourning is conclusively analyzed by Hicks (1993; Wang 1996), who demonstrates that there were about as many returnees from Southeast Asia as there were outbound migrants.

Even in the hinterlands of these port cities, some villages specialized in sojourning and others did not. Chen Da's masterful study (1940) of sojourning villages in southern China before World War II shows that the combination of strong kinship organization and relative poverty (due to farming marginal lands by some lineages in relation to other nearby lineages that were comparatively better off) was an important inducement to send some of their sons to distant locations to benefit the lineage as a whole. Watson's (1975) detailed analysis of the chain migration to Europe of members of the Man lineage in the New Territories in Hong Kong in the late 1950s and 1960s show exactly how this combination of kinship and marginality produces an extraordinary migratory outcome leading, in this case, to the establishment of nearly one hundred Chinese restaurants in England alone by 1975, all owned and operated by members of the lineage.

The migration from Wenzhou shows the same characteristics. Migration from Wenzhou started in small ways after Wenzhou became a treaty port city in 1876. Like the previous examples, most Wenzhou migrants came from the villages in the districts in hinterland of Wenzhou, the largest number from Qingtian, a district in Wenzhou's hinterland. Mette Thunø's (1999) investigation of the origins of migration from Wenzhou suggests that migration from Qingtian started accidentally in the late nineteenth century when Chen Yuanfeng, a stone carver from the district, began selling soapstone cravings in Wenzhou city to European tourists who showed up in the treaty port. Convinced that a market for soapstone carving existed in Europe, Chen seems to have been "among the first Chinese from Qingtian to reach Europe via France" (Thunø 1999, p.163). Many other people from Qingtian soon followed, establishing a migration chain that continues today. According to Thunø (1999, p. 176), "By 1995, 60,000 Qingtian Chinese lived in fifty different countries, eighty per cent of them in

⁷ For a detailed description of the social sources of this migration, see Hamilton 1978.

Europe. Additionally 80,000 persons have ventured overseas and returned.” Remarkably, he (1999, p. 1999) continues, “These massive population movements took place from only a small number of villages primarily in the southeastern part of a county that itself has a mere 480,000 people in 1987.” And the desire of these people to migrate to Europe is nicely summarized by Li Minghuan, “to get rich quickly” (1999).

Recruitment and Network Formation: Although factors relating to structural conduciveness may be a necessary condition for temporary migration chain, it is not a sufficient one. Equally important are the initial economic successes in a distant place of a few fellow regionals, who in turn, recruit family and friends to join them in a common or related endeavor. This pattern of recruitment is able to spawn a substantial network of fellow regionals in a surprising short time. The original recruitment may be based on advantageous opportunities for wage labor, but in the course of migration may change to many other types of individual and group endeavors.

For instance, the initial migration chains to the British colonies in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century were for coolie labor in British-owned mines and plantation. However, once in Southeast Asia, Chinese migrants fanned out, seizing opportunities to establish small, independently run businesses in an amazing variety of areas. These small businesses, in turn, linked to other businesses in the same or related economic activity to form a collective economic endeavor that reduced individual risk and increased the chance of success for the entire network of firms. As one Chinese trader in Southeast Asia explained,

...we Chinese are always financially tight. We depend a lot on giving credit. For example, rubber from Thailand may be sent here first and then we pay later, or my buyer will give me money first to buy the rubber. Either way, with this sort of credit giving, you can basically take and run. So *xinyong* (trust) is important. With *xinyong*, I can do business up to a few hundred thousand dollars, ever though I have, maybe, only ten thousand dollars.

These networks add scope and depth to individual family firms. By being part of such networks, family firms are tied to other family firms so that, in combination, they reach beyond the limitation imposed by their size and geographic location.⁸ Economic success through trust-bearing networks at the host destination creates the migration chain back to the home society.

The migration of Wenzhou Chinese to Prato seems to follow this general pattern of recruitment and network formation. In the end-1980s there were hardly any Chinese in Prato, but after a change in regulations in 1986 allowing non-European Community members to obtain a residency permit, Chinese migrants began to arrive in Tuscany in greater numbers. It appears that the earliest Chinese started to work as home workers for small knitwear Italian firms, as did the Italian tenant farmers in the previous era.⁹ The Chinese soon began their own businesses, often in collaboration with Italian producers and especially with Italian distributors of textiles and increasingly of garments. By 1995, 3228 Chinese had registered in the greater Florence region (Tomba 1999, p. 283), and a little over 1000 Chinese in Prato (Dei Ottati 2009, p. 30). In that year, the number of registered independently owned Chinese firms in the greater Florence area had jumped to over 700. By 2006, the number of Chinese registered in Prato had increased to about 11,000 and the number of Chinese owned firm in Prato had grown to 2,254 (Dei Ottati 2009, p. 30).

All research on the Chinese enterprises in Prato point to the importance of chain migration from the Wenzhou area and the emergence of increasingly complex networks of Chinese firms that connect all the niches in the industries in which they specialize. It is easy to see, at this point, that the logic of small firm economies in Prato, as we described in the first section of this paper, dovetails with the institutional framework of temporary migration. Each reinforces the other. As one person who Li (1999, p. 191)

⁸ See Hamilton 2006, pp. 220-236, for more analysis of how these firms and networks interlink.

⁹ This information comes Gabi Dei Ottati.

interviewed said, “Our predecessors have established excellent opportunities for us to get rich in Europe. If we cannot grasp these opportunities and maintain these links, we are unworthy sons.”

Patterns of Settlement: The differences between temporary and permanent migration are nowhere more apparent than their respective patterns of settlement. Permanent migrants look towards obtaining long-term occupations and social mobility over the course of several generations. They spread out physically and socially in their new location. By contrast, temporary migrants exploit short-term opportunities (as well as their own labor and their family’s labor) in locations where they do not intend to live permanently. These migrants tend to cluster physically and socially among themselves. Unusual, if not unique, among other migrants, Chinese migrants established “Chinatowns” in most location where they settled temporarily. These residential areas reproduce not only a Chinese ethnicity, but also a regionally specific way of life, complete with intragroup associations (e.g., surname and hometown associations), regional cuisine, and local dialects. Sojourning Chinese share their commonalities—their place of origin, the experience of migration, the difficulties of living in a new society—over the long term as few other ethnic groups do.

Routinized exclusiveness serves sojourners’ purposes well. It reconciles them to a life away from their native place, but at the same time it reminds them constantly of their obligations to fellow sojourners and to those at home. And if some among them are remiss, others are there to remind of their duties. Most important, ethnic exclusiveness reinforces their original intentions, to make money and return home. (Hamilton 1985, p. 417)

Wenzhou migrants in Prato have also developed an exclusive way of life in Prato. They live in the same areas in Prato, celebrate regionally specific holidays, eat Wenzhou cuisine, develop exclusive associations, speak local dialects as well as Mandarin, and maintain ties back in their home districts. As Dei Ottati (2009) has stated, they have developed an “ethnic economy,” which incorporate all aspects of life into an exclusive whole.

Return Migration: Many people who begin their migration with the intention to return home and who follow the institutionalized paths of their predecessors that reinforce this intention, nonetheless, drop out and settle permanently in their new society. The reasons for their change of mind are undoubtedly numerous. But the evidence still shows that many people who start with the intention to return home do, in fact, return home.

The intention to be a returnee (*guiqiao*) is typically reinforced very early in the migration through sending money earned in the host society back to one’s hometown and family. One of the main sources of income for emigrant communities in China is from remittances from migrants living elsewhere. Da Chen’s study (1940) in the 1930s revealed, amazingly, that over 80% of family income of emigrant communities in Southern China came from migrants living overseas. Hicks’s analysis of remittances from Southeast Asian back to China is equally astounding (1993). Huge amounts of money earned through migrant savings were sent to home communities in China, where this money supported an ostentation style of life. Watson’s study (1975) of the Man lineage migration to Europe shows the very calculated way that migrants returned money to their home district in order to engage in a conspicuous style of life after their migration was over.

Remittances and return migration is a characteristic of Wenzhou case as well. Although it is somewhat dated now, Li’s study of Wenzhou emigrant communities (1999) reveals the same results as those observed in southern China. Those towns known as “*qiaoxiang*” (emigrant communities), notes Li (1999, p. 191), are viewed in Wenzhou as “rich and lucky.” These towns obtain their status because of the “conspicuous consumption by returned migrants.” These migrants now have the wealth to spend on status-bestowing rituals, such as building ornate housing, funding ancestral halls and schools, and providing lavish funerals and grave sites for themselves and family members.

The Historical Fate of Migrations

Migrations run their course in two ways: through the internal dynamics of the migration itself and through changes in the social, political or economic environment in the host society. In the first instance, the internal dynamics of migration directly influence how migration flows reduce to a trickle, dry up, and end. The two cases of migration to Prato reveal characteristically different fates.

The migration of sharecropping peasants to Prato was a case of permanent migration of short duration. Once these sharecroppers left the land, re-entry back to the land was closed to them. The landowners got other tenants, sold the land, or used their land in other ways. Once the peasants moved to Prato and filled the economic space open to them, the migration was over, and the institutional logic of a small firm economy began. But this small firm economy was not long lasting. Over the course of a generation or two, as the owners' children were better educated and moved on to other careers and as wages of Italian workers rose, the small firm economy lost its dynamism—lost the closeness of family ties, the use of family labor in the factory, the interpersonal connections that underpin the economic networks, and the desire to save and reinvest in the firm. Without new migrations and without constant renewal, the textile industry no longer had the organizational dynamism or the innovation of a small firm economy.

The migration of Wenzhou Chinese to Prato will have a different fate, at least for a time. Temporary migration will resupply the people who will want to get rich in Prato and who will scrimp and save and reinvest for that purpose. This migration has an internal momentum that will keep it going for a while. However, temporary migrations also run their course. A generational dynamic works here as well, but slower and with less certainty. The area around Wenzhou is changing, is becoming more prosperous and sophisticated. Children in the emigrant communities are better educated than before. As they become adults, other opportunities to get rich and earn esteem will draw these people away from long-distance migration and away from the long, hard work it takes to save enough money to make migration worthwhile in the first place. In Prato, the children of the Chinese migrants go to Italian schools and become fluent in the language and ways of Italians. Some will decide to marry Italians and stay in Italy. In the long run, this migration chain will be broken as well.

Besides the internal dynamics, both cases of migration are also influenced by the businesses in which they were successful and the markets for those businesses. In the first migration, the Prato textile mills rode the wave of success of the retail boom in the late 1960s and 1970s. All across Europe and the United States, the 1960s marked the beginning of a transformation in retailing and life-style merchandising. Large discount chains (e.g., Carrefour, Aldi, Tesco and many others), selling a range of goods—everything from groceries and apparel to home furnishing, spreading across France, England, and Germany, as well as the United States—created a huge demand for inexpensive woolen textiles. In Europe, hypermarkets in the central cities and large retail chains in the outlying urban areas spread rapidly (Wortmann 2011). At the same time, life-style merchandisers lined the newly built shopping malls in the United States and Western Europe. Benetton was one of those merchandisers, but there were many, many others as well. Woolen textiles from the factories in Prato blossomed from this new demand created for relatively good and relatively cheap woolen clothes designed and made in Italy.¹⁰

By the mid-1980s, however, the market had begun to turn away from woolen fabrics toward cottons, synthetic fabrics, and various types of sophisticated blends. The small factories in Prato could not compete in these new textile markets with Asian and Turkish manufactures, most of whom had new equipment, large orders, and cheaper prices.¹¹ As these new fabrics succeeded in capturing a

¹⁰ These are also the years that high end design houses had their start, merchandisers such as Armani, Valentino, Prada, and Verance.

¹¹ The introduction to the market of Malden Mills' Polartec fleece fabric, made of 100% polyester. Malden had been operating as a American woolen mill since the early twentieth century. But in the late 1980's, having also once thrived making military uniforms, and like the Italian mills facing less demand for wool, the

larger and larger share of the apparel market, the fortunes of Prato producers began to decline. In the face of this new competition, and in light of the changing dynamic of Prato's small firm economy, Prato was ready for the change that the Wenzhou Chinese brought.

Today, most of Prato's textile factories have closed and in their place, the Chinese firms mostly produce apparel, mostly for women, made from cotton and synthetic blends, and leather goods. The raw materials for these products often come from Asia, mostly from China, and from these inputs, the Wenzhou factories in Prato make racks and racks of clothes and leather goods in response to orders they receive from regional buyers. Much like the market for shoddy wool in an earlier era, the demand for the products from Chinese factories in Prato resides at the low end of the respective markets, wearing apparel without famous brand names. The buyers represent a variety of consumer outlets in a variety of geographic locations--open air periodic markets across Europe and retail outlets in Eastern and Central Europe. These low end markets will not disappear, but they are highly competitive, filled with clothes from Bangladesh and other places in South and Southeast Asia, clothes that are made in large factories filled with women working for lower wages than the Wenzhou Chinese can afford to pay. Eventually, the combination of migration dynamics for the Chinese and market forces for their products will require the factories in Prato to change yet once again. What those changes will be is impossible to predict.

Conclusion: Implications for the Small Firm Economies in Italy and China

The Chinese have a saying that all banquets must end (*tienshawubu san de yehsi*). That aphorism is true also for the current heyday of the Wenzhou Chinese in Prato. This feast, too, will end, and for that very reason, in this conclusion, we want to stand back from the details of these two cases of migration and think about what these cases might be telling us about the larger issues confronting small firm economies in Italy and China.

The decline of small Italian owned firms is not merely a local problem in Prato; it is a national dilemma. In Italy, artisan craft factories of all types have declined precipitously, and many of the reasons for the decline of Prato's factories is also true for other industries in other locations. Except for the most upmarket consumer, demand for products made in Italian factories has vanished. The craft traditions in Italy and the knowledge that goes with these traditions are fast disappearing in most areas. Their level of education and the promises of a new style of life have encouraged a generation of young adults to leave those industries experiencing decreasing demand and to aspire to enter the new professions requiring new skills. However, in the wake of the Great Recession and Europe's open borders, unemployment in Italy among people in this generation has never been higher since the end of World War II. The story of Prato is indeed the story of Italy.

The global success of the Wenzhou Chinese and the so-called "Wenzhou Model" may be a temporary occurrence and a long-term illusion. As China industrializes and becomes, with the aid of foreign-owned firms, an increasingly sophisticated, high end producer of consumer goods, Wenzhou city will itself become a world-class city. Young people in the hinterland of Wenzhou will be pulled into the new China, and will be reluctant to migrate. Moreover, the very process of temporary migration limits the kind of businesses that Wenzhou Chinese can enter and succeed. It is not simply

(Contd.) _____

company put its engineers to work finding a new use for its weaving machines. Malden created a way to weave polyester into lightweight 'pile', which unlike wool didn't absorb water and didn't become odiferous when wet, and yet provided good warmth wet or dry. They launched the inexpensive fabric in 1991, with their first customer Patagonia, a company that smartly proclaimed their clothing as made from 'technical fibers' for 'today's active outdoor life', casting wool sweaters as heavy and sedentary bound. Within a decade the mill could also claim that the product was fashioned for 100% recycled plastic, which unlike the shoddy wool, carried an upbeat not a pejorative message. As a true sign of the future, after helping sink Prato's ship, holding no patents on the pile-making process, Malden lost so much market share to Chinese manufacturers producing similar, yet far less expensive fabric, that it also went bankrupt.

the size of the Wenzhou firms, but rather the constant short-term horizons and general lack of increasing technological sophistication condemns the Wenzhou agglomerations to the low end of whatever market they enter in whatever location they choose. These limitations are real and will eventually spell an end to the migration of Wenzhou Chinese.

Trends, however, are not destiny. In an age of global capitalism, small firm economies have a niche, but that niche has grown increasingly sophisticated in terms of technology for production and for linking production to consumer demand. In Prato, there is perceived to be a deep disconnect between the Chinese manufacturing sector and what remains of the 'traditional' one in Prato. While there are equally obvious reasons for this perception, it would seem that there are very compelling reasons for a refiguring of the relationship. Pratese manufacturing has changed because the world has changed.

The situation in Prato, once again in advance of most everywhere else in Italy, is special in regards to the global changes affecting it. They are not only coming from afar, but with the large Chinese migration to Prato, are situated very nearby. It would seem that such proximity would yield potent cross-pollination of ideas and approaches to global markets. So far, this has rarely been the case. Yet such a re-positioning of Prato would be to the advantage of everyone at work there.

Certainly it is far easier to come up with new ways of working old wool than it is to find new ways to work with people from different social, ethnic, and business cultures. But the stakes could not be higher. If Prato is to thrive once again, it must yet again re-work its primary material, which in fact is not wool, or new textile combinations or clothing. Prato has long succeeded because it could mix and match ideas. Today's Prato is a laboratory- one of importance to Italy and all of Europe. Can it find a way to creatively bridge the gap between the old and new, the Italian and the Chinese? Its fabric of life is surely at stake, and what is clearly needed is not another mechanical Mazzoni machine, but a joining of traditions and real innovation, a crossing of cultural and conceptual fibers. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the situation in Prato today presents an opportunity of far-reaching possibilities.

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