

Smart phone-Based Social Media and Transnational Imagination: a Study of Chinese Migrants in Prato, Italy

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CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN PRATO, ITALY



When the first few Chinese who left China after its opening up in the 1980s arrived in Prato, they found that Prato was a city with an established textile industry. Almost instantaneously these new comers discovered their ideal job: sewing and cutting in Italian family factories. In only three decades, Chinese migrants have transformed their role in Prato, Italy's textile industry from laborers to collaborators, turning this previous capital of Italian textile into the basecamp of a transnational *pronto moda* network across Europe and China.

“Most stories go like this: being smuggled into Italy, working, saving, paying debts, opening one's own cutting factory, then a company. From “white” hands to bosses driving BMW,”

WECHAT AND TRANSNATIONAL SELF-/ PLACE- MAKING

- “WeChat” is a smart phone-based social media launched in January 2011 by Tencent Holdings Limited.
- Two essential features: “group chats” and “friends circle”.
- “WeChat” has become a major means of transnational communication, especially among the Chinese overseas community; by August 2014, among the 438 million active “WeChat” users, 70 million are outside of China.



METHODOLOGY

- **Formal interviews** with fourteen Chinese immigrants in Prato.
- **Participant observation** in subjects' daily activities such as Buddhism study group and weekend gatherings as well as their exchanges on WeChat.

PRATO'S FEMALE IMMIGRANT BUDDHISTS: MEDIA, RELIGION, AND GENDER IDENTITY

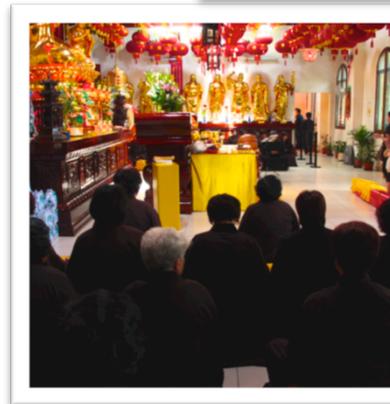


As my research went on I started to focus on a group of mid-aged woman who practice Buddhism in a Buddhist temple in Prato. However, it is not yet authorized by the European Buddhist Union's Italian branch *Unione Buddhista Italiana (UBI)*, and thus still exists as a cultural center.

“Converting to Buddhism felt like finally finding a home.”



“Being away from my family in China, I can concentrate on learning Buddhism. Human form is impeccable. It should be used to study Buddhism.”



“WeChat” enables the migrants to maintain a transnational site for learning and interpreting Buddhism in a way that transcends the rigid social and cultural boundaries in both Italy and China.