

[Building 19, Room 710, 13 April 2017, 17:00-18:30](#)

Waseda Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
Migration and Citizenship Research Group Colloquium

City Making and Global Labor Regimes:

Chinese Immigrants in Prato, Italy

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Abstract

Starting from the theoretical strand that stresses the role of migration and migrants' entrepreneurial activities in processes of 'rescaling' of the city, I analyze the role played by the Chinese migrants in the Italian fashion industry. The focus will be on the city and industrial district of Prato, Italy, the hub of Chinese immigration to Italy. Prato is not only the quintessential Italian industrial district, but also the center of a fast fashion value chain that stretches from China and Turkey (as the sourcing areas) to most European countries (as the buyers of low-end fast fashion made in Prato).

I contend that Prato is an exemplary case that yields insights into the complex dynamics between migrants and the locality. In fact, any assessment of the role of the Chinese migrants in the process of repositioning of the Prato district case appears far more controversial than elsewhere as Prato is the place where migrants' contribution to its wealth is bitterly contested by the main stakeholders and Chinese entrepreneurship is under attack. In Prato, any assessment of migrants' contribution to restructuring the locality is tinged with anger and fears that have been mounting nationwide and locally against China.

My lecture dwells on the forces, dynamics, and narratives conducive to the contestation of Chinese entrepreneurship and wealth through the enactment of a criminalizing policy and the creation of social consensus around it. This, in turn, brings about a reflection on the nature of policies and the new social reality they shape. I deconstruct the dominant perception that ignores the global context and regards the rise of the Chinese migrant business as the cause of the decline of the Prato economy. The decline of Prato economy and the rise of the Chinese migrant business are indeed related, I argue, but are related because they are both parts of the same global processes.

Professor Antonella Ceccagno is a leading scholar on Chinese migration into Europe. Based on long-term ethnographic research, she has written extensively about Chinese immigrants in Italy and the garment industry in Prato. Her work builds upon the fields of critical migration studies, labor studies, and urban studies. Major research foci include the emergence of new labor regimes and the role of migrants in processes of urban, regional, and industry restructuring.