

Funeral Music in Wencheng and its Transnational Application in the Chinese Community of Milan

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese immigration in Italy has long been attracted public interest and often caused heated debates in the national press, especially for the way of doing business and for problems and disagreements between the Chinese settlements and the local population. Also, the scientific community has turned some attention to the phenomenon. In particular, the topic has been studied at least since the early nineties, when the presence of Chinese people has become clearly visible in Italian cities. In some cases, they have begun to modify the economic and social environment, especially in larger settlements, such as Prato, in the textile district, where the number of Chinese residents has exceeded the local population, and Milan, where an entire district in the center has become in fact a new Chinatown. The studies published so far are mainly about the sociological nature of the process based on quantitative analyzes, often commissioned by public authorities such as municipalities, provinces, or chambers of commerce. Moreover, there are more recently published journalistic reports that have actually explored this reality more deeply. Some documentary films have also been shot about this subject.¹

Based on a bibliographic survey, there are no works that explore the cultural aspects of the community and there were not found any ethnomusicological works.

An analysis of cultural and musical practices could contribute to the understanding of the way of thinking as well as the lifestyle of the Chinese in Italy and consequently encourage greater interaction and a higher level of cultural exchange between the local population and the Chinese migrants (Serratore 2014; 2018). For my investigations I have taken as reference the Chinese community of Milan which, as Daniele Cologna underlines (2005: 1): "Because of the large number of its population and the seniority of this presence, [...] it represents a privileged observatory of the changes that occur in Chinese immigration in Italy and in its relationship with the local society".

One of the peculiarities of the Chinese community in Milan is that most of its components come from a rather limited area of China, the outskirts of Wenzhou city in Zhejiang province, more specifically from the Wencheng county. This peculiarity pushed me to set up a multi-sited² research in order to investigate both the musical and cultural aspects that emerge from an observation of the migrants in their place of landing, and the characteristics of the musical and cultural practices of the place of origin of Chinese migrants in Milan. This

¹ In 1992 in the volume *Silent Immigration*, the Chinese communities in Italy (Campani, Carchedi, Tassinari 1992) a series of essays was published about the structural, organizational and cultural characteristics of the various Chinese communities in Italy (Milan, Prato, Florence, Rome, Ferrara, Vercelli, Treviso). Many sociological studies aimed at the Chinese community in Italy were also made by Daniele Cologna (1997; 2002a; 2002b), mainly dedicated to the community of Milan and Antonella Ceccagno (1997; 2003; 2008), which has focused on studies of the Chinese community of Prato. On Chinese migrants in Campania it was published in 2006 from Zhejiang to Campania: Some aspects of Chinese immigration (Sant'Angelo, Varriano 2006). The Chinese community in Rome, see the thesis *Chinese immigration to Italy and the case of the Roma community* (Dente 2003). The journalistic surveys above were made by Orliani and Stagliano (2008; 2009) and by Casti and Portanova (2008). Among the anthropologists he dealt with the relationship between Chinese and Italian citizens in the Milan's Chinatown Pietro Scarduelli (2005). The documentaries include 'Un Cinese a Roma' (Gianfranco Giagni, 2004); *Via (da) Paolo Sarpi* (Lidia Manzo, 2009); *Io sono Li* (Andrea Segre, 2011).

² The 'multi-sited' terminology referring to a fieldwork has become part of the anthropological and ethnomusicological vocabulary starting from the text of Marcus (1994). In fact, some ethnomusicologists were pioneers in what is today defined as the field of multi-site research: already at the beginning of the '70s the article by Regula Qureshi (1972) about Indian immigrants in Canada, among the various research strategies, has proposed that to identify a certain musical repertoire of migrants both in the place of origin and in the landing place. In 1988, Giovanni Giuriati (1988) compared the musical practices of Cambodian refugees in Washington D.C. with those of the places of origin in Cambodia.

approach therefore envisages a perspective of transnational observation, which is even more necessary if we take into consideration that the Chinese community of Milan has been formed since the eighties.

In this article I will focus on some aspects related to the musical traditions of the Wenchengnese migrants in Milan. More specifically, the text will refer to the funeral rituals, the musical and religious practices attached to them, and the way in which the migrants live those moments.

The funeral, in my opinion, is one of the main examples to highlight how much the Chinese community of Milan is actually transnational, and how it affects the musical choices of migrants, both in the place of origin and in the landing place. The aspects that will be presented below will show how the Chinese community of Milan can represent a valid example of a 'new diaspora' that differs greatly from the oldest Chinese diasporas, especially with regard to the choice of musical practices to be brought to the place of emigration.

The results that will be presented have emerged following a long multi-sited research between Milan and Wencheng to study the musical practices, the methods of identity representation through the music and the transnational ties between the Chinese migrants of Milan and the county of Wencheng, the place where most of them come from.

I made several long-lasting fieldworks in both the Milanese Chinatown and Wencheng, during which I spent a lot of time with the migrants, and I followed some of the migrants returning to Wencheng. I also spent some time with the local musicians of Wencheng, and I watched their lifestyle, their musical habits, and their way of making and understanding the music. I have documented through video recordings several of these moments, including a series of interviews with musicians who have had a migratory background in Italy.

The ways of holding the funeral rituals in Wencheng, the motivations that stimulate Chinese migrants from Milan to hold their own funerals in the motherland rather than in Italy are discussed below. Also, the repercussions of their decision to the Wencheng local music scene and in the diasporic context will be discussed considering what Bonanzinga (2014: 1) writes:

“In ancient and communitarian cultures, death is a moment of crisis to be resolved through symbolic practices that signal the elevation of the deceased to the status of benevolent entity and restore balance to the group’s relationship with its physical and existential environment. In essence, the sounds and acts of mourning always and everywhere serve as functional ‘techniques’ to ensure the success of this transition. They punctuate its process and mark its most important moments.”

It is evident how the study of funeral rituals and musical practices that are part of it is useful to understand specific aspects of the culture being studied, especially the sound and gestural expressions. In the case of the Wenchengnese migrants of Milan, these practices, if viewed from a transnational perspective, become an important element of comparison and allow us to highlight some particularly significant aspects for a clearer understanding of disjointed flows (Appadurai 1996) of people, cultural and musical practices.

A literature review on funeral rituals in China allows us to observe the phenomenon from a historical-religious point of view (Scott 2007, Brook 1989, Cohen and Teiser 2007, Sutton 2007), from a socio-economic point of view (M Yang 2007) and an anthropological perspective (Shuang 1993, Yick and Gupta 2002, Oxfeld 2004). The last two decades have also been rich in contributions related to the musical practices of funeral rituals in various regions of China, both rural areas of the north (Carpenter 1996, Jones 1998, 1999, 2007, Rees 2009, Jinfang 2016, Li Ming 2003), and those in the south (Dean 1988, 1993, Song Qing 2012, Wang 2010). Regarding the analysis of funeral rituals in the other Chinese diasporic communities, important contributions were made to the Chinatowns of San Francisco (Crowder 2000), Singapore (Kiong 2004), and some places in Thailand (Hill 1992). In addition, the text edited by Tan and Rao (2016) was focused on the ritual musical practices of Southeast Asian Chinese migrants.

In the context of the Chinese diaspora,³ these rituals have been studied from just one point of view that is related to the place of landing of the migrants. On the contrary, among the studies that refer to the transnational

³ I will use the term diaspora to indicate the communities of Chinese who live outside their homeland, those who in English are called overseas. In recent decades, the term diaspora has acquired a new position and new meanings within the anthropological and ethnomusicological debate (Cohen 1997; Clifford 1997; Su Zheng 2010; Carter 2010). This term, which was previously used only in reference to Jews or Armenians, is often used to mean any "dispersal" of a people in many other areas of the planet. An important contribution to the history of the concept of diaspora and of the theories that accompanied it was presented by Cohen (1997), who divides the diasporas into various types based on the motivations that determined the phenomenon. Cohen distinguishes then: 1) The diasporas of the victims (Africans and Armenians) 2) The imperial diasporas (whose greatest example is the British case); 3)

dynamics of the music practices among the Chinese diaspora, such as Su Zheng's *Claiming Diaspora* (2010) which dealt with the Chinese diaspora in the United States, there are no clear references to ritual musical practices. But instead, the studies are focused on the transnationality of the most institutionalized musical practices and their dissemination through mass media.

In the specific case of this research, the use of this perspective of transnational observation aims at the musical practices of the funeral rituals of a newly formed community, such as the Chinese one in Milan. This is to verify how the increasing speed and frequency regarding migrant movements between the places of emigration and immigration and their strong sense of belonging to the homeland has contributed to maintaining funeral rituals and musical practices connected to them in the motherland and consequently contributed to creating a partial absence in Italy.

THE MUSIC OF THE FUNERAL IN WENCHENG

If in Italy it is difficult to find a Chinese funeral, in Wencheng it is almost impossible not to see and not even hear the music that accompanies the ritual.

During the first fieldwork in Wencheng between January and March 2015, musical practices related to funeral rituals were the first types of musical performances that were noticed.

This is due to the age of the population, to the visual and sonorous appearance of the rituals, and to the concomitance of several events scattered throughout the town during the same day. In fact, the celebrations for the dead are made at home rather than in temples. Moreover, the ritual dates are chosen by the masters' *fengshui* provided through the consultation of the *huangli* calendar. When a date is designated as particularly fortunate, there is a strong concentration of events.

It is a type of event that requires the presence of multiple ritualists and musicians. The funeral market is a driving force for the main traditional Wenchengese musical formations.

Literature on funeral rituals in the Wencheng area is limited to an article by Wang (2010) which outlines the main features:

- The ritual celebrated in most cases by Taoists doesn't belong to the temples.
- The ritual is completely accompanied by music and the musicians can be both lay Taoists who celebrate and play at the same time, and non-celebrants.⁴
- Despite this, if the Taoists themselves are asked what their religion is, the answer will be that they believe in the *sanjiao* (三教) or the 'three teachings' by referring to Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

Both the instrumental and the vocal music draw from the local operatic repertoires *yueju*, *kunqu*, *ouju* and from religious repertoires (Taoist and Buddhist). The musical instruments can be divided into two categories: religious and profane. Among the religious ones are the bells, the wooden fish, the Tibetan bell, the small cymbals (Wang 2010). Among the secular instruments, on the other hand, are mainly used drums (*baokuo gu ban*, *tanggu*, *xiaogu*), cymbals (*bo*) and the gong (*gou jiao luo*), various bowed lutes (*banhu*, *yuehu*, *erhu*, *zhonghu*), oboe (*suona*), and flute (*dizi*).

However, all local musical instruments except the mouth organ (*sheng*) can be used, as the pronunciation of 笙 (*sheng* = 'mouth organ') is the same as the pronunciation of the character 生 (*sheng*), which instead refers to life and birth. For this reason, the *sheng* cannot be used in funeral rituals, as Wang confirms:

“文成丧俗道场乐队中不能用笙，因为“笙”通“生”字，“死”与“生”相对立，在丧葬道场中用笙奏乐，一不吉利，二有讽刺意味。”

[The musicians that perform during the Taoist funeral rituals in Wencheng cannot use the *sheng*, as the character of 笙 (*sheng* = 'mouth organ') sounds the same as the character 生 (*sheng* = 'life'). The characters

Diasporas of work (exemplified by Indian contract workers in plantations, but in some respects also by Italians in America); 4) Cultural diasporas (among which Cohen places the Caribbean migrations); 5) Commercial diasporas (Chinese and Lebanese).

⁴ Rarely can there be Christian funerals or Buddhist funerals celebrated by the monks at the Wencheng Temple (Wang 2010).

死 (*si* 'death') and 生 (*sheng*) have opposite meanings, so using *sheng* during the funeral ritual is an ominous sign and has a completely satirical flavor.] (Wang 2010: 4).

The information provided by Wang corresponds to the reality that was observed during fieldwork. However, to fully understand the structure of the rituals, the importance of the music within them, the connections and the implications that they have with the local population and with the diaspora in Italy, a deeper fieldwork was needed through participant observation and the collection of videos, archive material, and interviews.⁵

A FUNERAL IN WENCHENG

In Wencheng, the death of a relative determines the beginning of a series of procedures that involve both the religious sphere and the relational sphere of the deceased's family. Regarding the religious aspect, it takes shape through the realization of a series of rites and prayers that involve in different ways the members of the family of the deceased, who turn to specialists, usually lay Taoists, who can organize and manage this series of practices by scanning the process and marking the fundamental moments through the reading of sacred texts and their implementation, through sound expressions and shared gestures, of a series of rituals that serve to symbolically accompany the deceased in the passage between the world and the other world in which, thanks to a series of procedures of purification and blessing that the deceased receives during the ritual, will become a beneficial entity subject to the cult by the same family members.

From the point of view of social relations, a series of actions is carried out, involving in various ways those belonging to a *guanxi*⁶, a network of social relations and often mutual aid, which goes beyond family ties. In fact, for a member of a *guanxi* it is a duty to attend the funeral of another member or a close relative of a person belonging to his group of relationships. Participation in Wencheng includes both the physical presence and the economic contribution that is donated in the form of a *hongbao* (a red envelope also used for weddings and New Year gifts in which is put money). This obligation, albeit in an attenuated way, also concerns the members of a *guanxi* living abroad.

I was invited to a funeral ceremony in Wencheng by some Chinese who emigrated to Italy. As Andrea Lin, a Chinese migrant from Milan, suggested, if there is a funeral in town of a member of the enlarged family including uncles and cousins, it is compulsory for of at least one family member to return home for the participation. The same would apply if the deceased were to be the father or mother of a member of a *guanxi*, who in the past had contributed in particular to the implementation of the migratory project through economic or logistic support.

In a place of emigration, such as Wencheng, the realization of a funeral ritual becomes a privileged moment in which it is possible to observe the dynamics among the people and therefore the global connections of a small village in south-eastern China.

In Wencheng, the ritual and the reception of guests are usually carried out in the house of the deceased and in the surrounding areas.

I have noticed that for the realization of the funeral rituals two rooms of the dwelling are used where the deceased person lived in the past. An area outside is also set up. In the inner one of the rooms the coffin is placed. In this room there are no chairs. The participants pass for a few moments to visit the deceased and then go out and linger for longer periods of time to offer condolences to the family in another room, near the entrance to the house⁷, where an altar called *lingzhuo* (altar of the soul) is set up, on which the image of the

⁵ Although I have witnessed multiple funeral rituals, I have encountered several difficulties in collecting the audio and video material presented in this chapter. In most cases I had the opportunity to document small parts of the ritual rather than the whole event. Only in one case did I manage to resume a ritual in almost totality. In fact, despite being invited several times by the musicians and the Taoists to make the recordings, in various circumstances, due to their strong emotional involvement, the relatives of the deceased asked me to avoid shooting. The shootings, as well as much of the research have been carried out at Wencheng Daxue, the common leader of the county, as well as the one with a greater concentration of immigrants in Italy.

⁶ Network of social relations and often mutual aid that goes beyond family ties, and which is the hub of the social system of the current rural China, and which I believe are particularly important in the county of Wencheng where the same chain migratory flow and the result of these networks that today have become transnational.

⁷ In Wencheng, generally, all buildings have a very similar structure. These are houses of three or four floors, which have two rooms on each floor. The entrance of these houses has a large door that occupies most of the front side of the floor. The entrance is always very large and is used as a living room.

deceased is placed together with ritual objects such as candles, incense, and sacrificial offerings of fruit and liqueurs. This is the room where the main part of the ceremony takes place.

Another very important part of the funeral rituals is the one conducted outside the house, which is usually set up in front of the entrance door. This area is recognized as it is circumscribed by a white, blue and red striped tarpaulins⁸ under which dozens of round tables are placed that are normally rented by the temples or by the agency that organized the funeral. Hospitality to the guests and participants being present is an obligation of the deceased's family. There are offered during meal times various dishes and drinks, especially alcoholic drinks. Normally at the funeral, the number of participants varies according to the number of family members and the social and economic status of the family that has been mourning. However, it is difficult to attend funerals with less than fifty people coming for lunch or dinner. In fact, the moment of the funeral at Wencheng represents the relational results built during a life engaged in the construction of wider and more structured social networks. The number of participants in these cases also depends on the duration of the funeral itself that can vary from one to several days: if the funeral lasts only one day, the people present are usually more in number because the visits cannot be staggered in the following days. From what has been reported by several musicians who play at Wencheng's funeral, sometimes a funeral can last a week. However, in recent years the most common formula for particularly wealthy families is one or two days, since a particularly long funeral is considered, in addition to being very expensive, also an expenditure of energy as well as in terms of health for the other elderly family members. Lunch and dinner represent moments of greater participation by people outside the family nucleus, and at the same time, in the case of Wencheng, a funeral represents a rare moment of union between families and guanxi living around the world. It is very common for Wencheng to take a photo of the entire official family gathered at a funeral both to get a picture of the whole family, and to highlight the possible size and vigor of the family, also due to the merit and work of the deceased person.⁹

On the contrary, during the moments of prayer and the actual ritual, external guests are few, and everything is done only by the members of the family. However, considering that the ritual is carried out outside in public the entire Wenchengnese community can be seen as part of the spectators, who also have a ritual function.

In these terms, the presence of a higher or lower number of musicians and religious specialists, the quality of the arrangements, and also the level of the dishes prepared for the guests become indirectly an exposition of the status of the family towards the whole village. The element that most symbolizes the vigor of the family is given by the composition and the union of the family itself. This is particularly evident during the execution of the rites, when all the closest relatives of the deceased wear white ceremonial clothes and begin to perform ritual and prayer actions under the guidance of the religious present. As told by Marco, ex-owner of a housewares shop in Milan, there is a real 'aesthetic sense' of the family group that has to be complete and should include many children, young couples, distinguished adults and healthy elderly, 'this is what each of us wants to get and at the same time wants to show when he has it' (Marco, 2016).

For this reason, during prayer, rarely there are moments that show evident sadness and pain. On the contrary, music, together with a series of ritual gestures serves to make the atmosphere more cheerful. So, it is common to see the youngest of the family, children and adolescents alike, playing and have fun during the recitation of prayers and this is seen as a joy even for adults, who are experiencing a moment of sadness for the disappearance of a loved one. They may find consolation and relief in seeing young people growing up healthy and having fun.

Here is a short report focusing in particular on the role of music and musicians in this funeral context.

After the reception and having been offered lunch or dinner to the guests who arrived to bring condolences to the family of the deceased, a moment of prayer began, managed completely by the ritual specialists. The members of the family start then to carry out a series of ritual actions with the use of instrumental music, singing and prayers. The beginning and end of the ritual is sanctioned by the performance of a rhythmic music

⁸ It is tarpaulins that are used in many circumstances even outside of rituals. For example, they are widely used to protect a building scaffolding from rain and to create a gazebo for a local festival.

⁹ It should be emphasized that the ceremony in the manner described in this paragraph is carried out in the event of the death of an elderly person. Rarely such ceremonies are organized for accidental deaths and for the death of a person of a young person.

session called by the Wenchengnese '*toutong*', made with the instruments of Wenzhou luogu¹⁰ followed by the different moments of prayer, penance, and purification in the following order:

- 1 *Toutong*, opening passages.
- 2 Yang zhi ling shui, blessing of water, heaven and earth.
- 3 Baichang and Changhui, ritual of confession and penitence.
- 4 Ritual of Jiao Chang, transfer of the benefits of confessions and penances to the deceased.
- 5 Jiahe xiyong, prayer to the crane to accompany the deceased in the world to the west (paradise).
- 6 *Toutong* to finish very similarly to the initial part.

Each of these moments is accompanied by music. The musical group consists of five instrumentalists plus the celebrating Taoist. Two of the musicians play the erhu while the other three play the percussion *gu*, *luo* and *bo*. On the altar there are texts containing the prayers that will be read during the celebration. Also on the altar are placed additional musical instruments: on the side of the erhu players, there is a sound tool that will be used later by one of the two players, while on the side of the percussionists there are a little bell, a muyu and small cymbals *xiao bo*. There are three texts used for reading the chants and prayers from the Dizang and the Guanyin.¹¹ There were no scores or sheet music.

TOUTONG

During the performance of the *toutong*, four of the musicians are seated around the inner altar, two on each side, while there are two standing musicians in front, and they both play the cymbals, but in a different way: while one, the eldest, performs a regular binary rhythm along with the rest of the musical formation, the youngest, positioned in front of the entrance of the house, makes the cymbals rotate in a rather spectacular way around themselves, around the hands and in different positions. Sometimes he really struck the instruments, except at the end of the piece, when, intervening more decisively with a syncopated rhythm, he sanctioned the end of the piece.

The purpose of this musical introduction is to attract attention and to signal that the ritual is about to begin. The sonic rendering of this percussive introduction is shaped in such a way that it is perceived at a considerable distance in a rural context such as that of Wencheng, and at the same time dampens the discussions among the participants in the ritual. Although the *toutongs* follow a binary and regular rhythmic structure, the emphasis during their execution is given by the various sound effects that are created by striking the cymbals and the gongs in different ways, and by the execution, in a relatively extemporaneous manner, of rhythmic patterns. that come out from the general executive scheme by the most acute instruments or the cymbals *bo* and the small gong *xiaoluo*. On the contrary, the drum, *dagu* has the task of maintaining the regular rhythmic structure and of actually guiding the execution from the beginning to the end. The beginning of musical performance marks a break with the previous situation and opens up to the ritual path.

At the end of this first musical performance, one of the musicians, who played the gong *xiao lu* during the execution of the *toutong*, wears the robe and the hat of the main Taoist, both purple and blue with the *taijitu* printed on it, and he positions himself with his view towards the interior altar and then to the other musicians and to the image of the deceased.

¹⁰ In traditional Chinese music, musical percussion formations that take the name of luogu which literally means 'gongs and drums' are spread all over the national territory. The main tools of Wenzhou luogu are the cymbals *bo*, the gong *dalu* and *xiaoluo*, and the drum *dagu*.

¹¹ The texts refer to two Buddhist deities: Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) and Dizhang 地藏 (Kṣitigarbha). These texts are defined by the scholars of Daoism with the term '*baojuan*' or 'a form of vernacular religious literature associated with the popular Buddhist preaching and the religious syncretist sects so often considered heterodox by the Ming and Qing dynasties. A *baojuan* is usually a lengthy prosimetric (alternating prose and verse) narrative meant to be recited or sung in a private or public group setting (Pregadio 2013: 212). Many of the Daoist *baojuan* derive from Buddhist writings as Taoism as a popular religion tends to absorb the main characters of the three teachings, Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism.

YANG ZHI LING SHUI

Some drumming marked the beginning of a second part of the ritual dedicated to the blessing of the earth and water. On the altar, right in front of the lay Taoist priest, there was placed the text Guanyin open on the first page where you could read the prayer for the blessing of the water '*Yang zhi ling shui*'. The text was sung by the Taoist, while two erhu players accompanied him in heterophonic fashion, weaving in fact a new melody on that sung. The melodies were repeated in a similar but never identical way until the end of the blessings. At this juncture, the percussive accompaniment saw the use of different musical instruments. While the *dagu* drum remained the same, the gongs and cymbals were replaced by a brass little bell, and wooden fish (*muyu*). These percussions differ from the others in their use as they are used only in a ritual context.

The musical moments described above accompanied the gestures of the celebrating Taoist who, picking up a bowl containing water, with began to spread the water a little brass bell in one hand and a willow twig in the other: first towards the inner altar, then into the chamber burning and then towards the outer altar. At the same time, an elderly collaborator lighted the candles of the '*dengshu*' light tree,¹² placed on the altar. During the three operations, the vocal melody was sung in chorus by all five musicians and by the celebrant. When the latter has returned to the original position in front of the altar, the musical part ended with slowing down the tempo. During these first two moments, some family members were sitting in silence on a bench placed to the left of the interior altar, while all the other guests had left. The blessing through the water was followed by two more prayer sessions of about fifteen minutes each, respectively for the blessing of heaven and earth.

The sung text was related to pages two and three of the Guanyin text while the musical accompaniment was the same as the *Yang zhi ling shui*. The final of the three sessions was sanctioned, however, by the intervention of the player. The erhu player, changing the instrument, performed a very brief melody that was accompanied by the 'profane' *bo* and *xiaoluo* percussion instruments. This musical intervention was very short yet had different goals. It has modified the previous sound environment and has endorsed the end of the blessing moments of the fire and the earth. It also wanted to attract the attention of the deceased's family members, who from then on will transform from their role as passive participants to that of active participants in moments of prayer.

BAICHANG AND CHANGHUI

At this juncture there was a change in course of the celebration. The musician who, until now, had officiated the moments of blessing removed the Taoist robe and went to sit in their original place while the *bo* player wore the red Taoist robe and positioned himself before the altar to officiate this second series of ritual acts consisting of the rituals *baizhang* and *changhui*, respectively rituals of confession and penitence. In these two moments, the relatives of the deceased began to participate actively in the ritual through physical gestures that included bows and genuflections.

The relatives arranged themselves in three rows, outside the house with the body facing the main door and then towards the internal altar, showing the shoulders, instead, to the external altar. Also, in this juncture, the sung melody and the instrumental melody were the same as the *yang zhi ling shui*, as well as the rhythmic accompaniment. The text of the songs came from *dabei dizang jing shi chan*, and the two open pages were titled just *baizhang* and *changhui*. With the beginning of the musical performance the musical-choreographic activity of penitence of the family members also started. They followed the movements of the Taoist who, with his hands joined as a sign of prayer, made bows on a regular basis at the end of each 'litany'. The bows were turned towards the four cardinal points. The confession procedure lasted about thirty minutes, after which the penance began. In this second moment they were sitting on the floor outside the home of their car seat mats which were necessary to kneel down in direction of the deceased.

Even kneeling, the relatives of the deceased bowed following the rhythm of the percussion and the indications of the Taoist, until, about thirty minutes later, the sound of the sound sanctioned the end of this part of the ritual.

¹² It is a metal candle holder in the shape of a tree, where candles are fixed on each branch. The lighting of the candles that is part of the ritual and is called by the Taoists *fendeng* (divide the light) which is used by the Taoists to purify the altar from the presence of evil spirits (Pregadio 2013).

The musical accompaniment, in this context, always with the use of the 'religious' percussion instruments had the role not only of accompanying the song and the prayer, but also of indicating the bows and the genuflections that had to be realized by the relatives of the deceased. Normally, at this juncture they wear white clothes called *wufu*, but this practice is falling into oblivion. During some observed funerals, even though the organizing agency had brought the clothes for the family, only a few or sometimes nobody wore them. Again, in other cases, everyone has worn them regularly.

RITUAL OF *JIAO CHANG* AND *JIAHE XIYOU*

After about fifteen minutes of a break, which gave the employees time to rearrange the car seats in their place (previously used as a temporary kneel pillow), another ritual began, that of the *jiao chang*. It marks the transfer of the deceased's soul which benefitted from the previous ritual acts where it obtained confessions and penances.

On this occasion it is the *gu* drummer *who* wears the robe of the celebrant. This time it was not the Taoist robe but the orange robe of the Buddhist. The celebrant was holding the *muyu* (wooden fish) and the wand to beat it. On this occasion he did not place himself on a fixed point to recite or sing prayers, but he became part of the ritual action that the family members had to do. This required the presence of two rows of people composed of the relatives of the deceased who, walking around the altar in a circular sense and in the opposite direction of each other, recited a series of prayers. One of the rows was led by the celebrant, the other row was led instead by the eldest daughter of the deceased who was holding a bamboo branch with a strip of white fabric on which was written, in addition to the name of the deceased following text: *jia he xi you* (驾鹤西游), 'fly on the crane to the paradise into the west'. Behind the eldest were walking the other two sons, another male and a female family member carrying a tray with two candles and two burning incenses as sacrificial objects used to transfer the benefits of the prayers to the deceased. The two rows revolved around the altar in opposite directions to each other. The *muyu* was played in a constant and regular way, on which the *erhu* players developed the same pentatonic melodic phrase in a *gongdiao* way, i.e. based on the fifth degree, enriching the musical result from time to time with embellishments and small variations.

At the end of this exchange of benefits, both rows stopped facing the outer altar. In the most central and advanced position there was the eldest daughter of the deceased, always holding the bamboo branch with the prayer addressed to the crane and reciting along with the rest of the relatives and celebrants the prayer of *Jiahe xiyou* with whom the crane is asked to accompany the deceased to the world in the west, which means the paradise.

Finally, everything ends with the *toutong*, the same execution of only percussion that had signaled the beginning of the ritual. At this juncture, there is a clear passage between the religious percussions and those considered to be profane, which with their bursting sound, which again includes the gongs and cymbals, significantly changes the surrounding sound environment and actually creates a feeling of relaxation in the participants preparing for the end of the funeral ritual.

At times, these rituals follow a procession, which however is increasingly rare because in many cases the burial is provided only after the cremation which is instead carried out in a special center immediately after the execution of the aforementioned ritual acts. When there is a procession, the musical formation does not provide for the presence of the *erhu*, but only that of the percussion *xiaogu* (small drum) *xia / da luo* (small and large gong) and the playing of two *suona* (oboes). In some cases, before the procession and the burial, the rituals of penitence and purification are repeated. In some processions, there was also the presence of a western-style brass band.

CONCLUSION

Here should be answered the questions put at the beginning of this article: why are there no Chinese funerals in Milan and are there also musical practices that are used for funeral and rituals in general? What does an absence mean in the musical context of the original and in the landing place? How does it affect the possibility of migrants to easily and cost-effective return to their motherland?

To give answers to these questions, it is first of all necessary to specify that there is not a single decisive factor, but that there are different conditions which, in my opinion, involve the phenomenon of the absence of traditional Chinese funerals in Milan. Among these, transnationalism is one of the main causes.

1) The choice of Chinese migrants in Milan to represent themselves towards the local population and to represent themselves in the place of emigration with musical practices, although they belong to the Chinese music scene, are more institutionalized, and obviously more suited to the diasporic context.

As stressed in earlier writings (Serratore 2018), the musical practices realized by the Wenchengnese migrants of Milan mainly include the musical field of popular music and traditional, vocal, and instrumental music that are particularly representative of China as a nation, and not music that is representative of Wencheng culture in particular,¹³ this highlights the clear will to represent itself as Chinese rather than as a Wenchengnese.

2) The choice to return home to spend their old age or return in case of illness, the Chinese proverb *yeluo-guigen* 'Autumn leaves fall back to the roots' is executed.

In this case the Chinese migrants of Milan, at least the first generations, plan to return home when they reach a certain age, this applies even in case of serious health problems. It is often to hear the elderly say '*yeluo-guigen* 叶落归根' to justify their definitive returning home.

3) Considering what has been said, musicians and various specialists of funeral rituals have the possibility to work in the motherland and therefore do not see a need to emigrate, thus being responsible for the absence of these traditional musical formations in Milan.

During fieldwork experiences it was clear that people in Wencheng were able to understand that many young inhabitants have chosen the path of emigration to improve their economic conditions. For some of them this also means having the opportunity to get married. In fact, to be able to marry a young Wenchengnese, she must own at least one house and a car, and besides this it is necessary for him to pay the *pingli* (bride price) to the family of his future wife. In many cases, those who do not have these characteristics cannot actually marry.

In the case of the funeral, musicians manage to have a discrete income in this historical period, thanks to the money that comes to Wencheng from the diaspora. This means achieving a sufficient economic level to be able to marry and be able to live normally in Wencheng without the need to emigrate and therefore not being present in the landing place, which is Milan.

These elements have meant that in Milan, in addition to the absence of traditional Chinese funeral rituals, there is also a partial absence of musicians who can perform a funeral ritual. Therefore, local music of Wencheng is missing considering that these musical formations are also used for other types of performances such as puppet shows and the dragon parade during the Chinese New Year. In fact, as is evident on the occasion of the Chinese New Year in Milan, the dragon parade is accompanied by a musical group that, although playing percussion of Chinese origin, is completely consisting of Italians.

The situation described above is particularly different compared to the Chinese community of Milan with the Chinese communities of the oldest diasporic settlements, such as those in Southeast Asia (Tan 2016) and those in the United States of America (Sun Crowder 2000) where the communities have recreated in their landing territory musical possibilities for the rituals that are very similar to those that they left in the motherland and at the same time those communities use the funeral ritual to represent their identity as the diaspora.

Funerals offer a family the opportunity to demonstrate duty, devotion, and honor to the deceased and to enhance the status of the family. In this respect the impression made by the funeral and the opinions of the observers become consequential. In San Francisco, this duty is often demonstrated in Chinatown's public areas, where peers from clan and regional associations, neighbors, and visitors can visually assess the level of funeral tribute. [...] Chinese band playing Chinese funeral music with traditional instruments will be in the procession. (Sun Crowder 2000: 259)

Milan today has a completely different situation due to some characteristics of the Chinese community of Milan such as the fact that it is a commercial diaspora (Cohen 1997) and the fact that it was formed in a rather recent period (since the eighties and then at the turn of globalization). This makes in my opinion the Chinese community of Milan a privileged study subject for the observation of these new types of diasporas. What is evident is that the transnational approach that the community has provided since its early development has

¹³ In this case, dividing 'national' (China) musical practices and 'local' musical practices (Wencheng).

acquired greater elasticity and dynamism over time. The distances, times, and costs of travel between the landing place and the motherland have been cut down to such an extent that they have allowed the migrants to delegate some aspects of their life into the motherland and others in the place of immigration. Surely one of the most obvious aspects of this transnationality is represented by the transnational meanings that these migrants have given funeral rituals and related musical practices.

Dividing the musical practices into two categories, on the basis of their functions, i.e. music as necessity and music as an identity representation (Giuriati 1996), we can state that in this the music of funeral rituals, can be understood being 'music as necessity' and has been assigned to the place of origin, while other musical practices are mostly used as a rather national identity representation in the landing place where the diaspora represents this nationality.

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APPENDIX



FIGURE 1: Italian musicians in Milan accompany the Lion and Dragon dance during the 2015 Chinese New Year parade in Via Paolo Sarpi.



FIGURE 2: Musical group *chuida* while accompanying on the [from left to right] *xiaoluo*, *bo*, *dalu* and *suona* the dragon parade for the Chinese New Year 2016 in Wencheng.



FIGURE 3 Shop of religious objects owned by a lay Daoist. The banners carry the characters of 文成县三教用品店 - *wencheng xian san jiao yongpindian* (Wencheng County, shop of articles of use for the three teachings). The explicit presence of the three teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) in the sign shows the religious eclecticism of the Wenchengnese.



FIGURE 4: Some musical instruments used for the ritual in Wencheng 2015.



FIGURE 5: Moment of prayer and penance. On the altar you can see the '*shudeng*' (tree of light).



FIGURE 6: Toutong Performance.