CULTURAL IDENTITY IN URBAN BEIJING

CYCLE OF CHANGE
LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT IN BEIJING

MASTER THESIS AND DOCUMENTARY
‘COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT’, MALMÖ UNIVERSITY
BY ENNO LAUDIG, 2006
Cover-photo: Old houses demolished to make space for new high-rise buildings.
Photographer: Enno Ladwig, 2003

Context: My final project consists of two parts:
   a) This written thesis, and
   b) a 27-minute video documentary.

Combined they are are a partial fulfilment of the Masters in Communication for Development, Malmö University; School of Arts and Communication (K3) in Malmö, Sweden
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1. Introduction

China is fast becoming a dominant world player in economics as well as in politics. In its preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games the central Chinese government is remodelling its capital into a modern metropolis that aspires to be on par with New York, London, Paris or Tokyo. The speed of Beijing's changes is unprecedented; in fact only very few cities in the world have developed at the fast pace that Beijing has changed and transformed in recent years.

Beijing's life used to be very concentrated on the streets. Early mornings before going to work people gathered in parks to celebrate early sports and dances. On markets cabbages, tomatoes and watermelons were sold directly off the trucks right next to barbers that cut customers' hair in the open. People lived in densely populated quarters that consisted of one storied houses with their little courtyards (sihiyuan) and narrow allies (hutong) in which especially the older generation often sat playing cards and chess or cultivated flowers and raised birds. Known to many as the kingdom of the bicycles, Chinas uncountable numbers of black bicycles and transportation rickshas would sometimes cause "bicycle jams" or even accidents between bicycles. Donkeys and horses were also frequently seen pulling goods through the streets.

I experienced this kind of Beijing when I was there for my very first time in January 1988. Soon after, my father was sent out to work for a German/Chinese joint-venture in Beijing so that my mother, my brother and I had the chance to follow. That way I lived in Beijing from 1990 until 1993. During these three and a half years I have seen the city change and develop. I have always kept a close eye on the developments of China, even after my return to Germany in 1993. I also took every opportunity to return to Beijing and tried to keep track of the many changes.
Coming back to China today, it is difficult to recognise the city. Now China\textsuperscript{1} and especially Beijing has an increasing number of cars and traffic jams. Adapting its traffic system, numerous of Beijing's huge cycle paths had to give way to bigger roads and more cars. Simultaneously, several completely new roads and four new underground lines are being build and countless state-of-the-art architecture projects, like Olympic stadiums, higher and higher skyscrapers or the new CCTV-headquarters building are under way. Shopping centres with Nike and Levi's stores rise in place of Beijing's traditional Hutongs, corner shops are increasingly being replaced by 7 Eleven outlets; McDonalds as well as Starbucks compete with Chinese restaurants and tea houses. Ever more high-tech markets, car vendors and language schools are proof of the cities aspirations of being an integral part in today's modern and international world.

In only 15 years the city had changed to an extend that even surprised many experts. Today it is however widely recognised that China will become the major player on the world economy around the year 2020. While we now seem to be aware of the ongoing changes, it took some time to understand what was actually happening. Still, for many people around the world imaginations about Beijing mainly consist of images of the old Beijing. But that Beijing may soon be gone.

\textsuperscript{1} I feel it is necessary to stress that Beijing's uprising is an exceptional development. Big parts of China are still underdeveloped. In such areas, of course, donkeys, horses and bikes are still more usual than cars.
2. The objectives of my project work

With China's recent and quick uprising coming as a surprise for many of 'us' in the so-called western world, the changes and effects of the recent developments must have also been a big surprise for many of those most effected by the change – the Chinese people. Then, at the turn of the century, China's bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing has brought further changes; the winning has finally propelled Beijing's speed of change to previously unknown proportions. Today, the government pushes to finish many projects in time for 2008 and institutionalises the Olympic Games as an excuse for the need to further changes. The structure of the whole city appears to being changed in only a few years. Beijing, originally a city with countless one storey buildings and only a few high-rise buildings is being changed into a city with skyscrapers. Changes that are enforced at this speed, I thought, must have a strong effect on the people's mind.

Such fast changes have surely effected me, in a sense that I was simultaneously shocked and astounded whenever I came back to Beijing. For this project however, I was interested to find out what the locals think and how they describe these changes. I was interested to learn about the effects of such fast changes on Beijing's society and decided to focus on the social effects caused by Beijing’s change of style in today’s city planning and how people refer to them. My key- and research-question of this project work, was thus to investigate the following:

How are the people affected by the city's development and how do they refer to the fast changes? Can the locals still identify with their own city and do they still feel at home?
Alongside this written work, I have also made a 27 minute documentary film which I urge every reader to watch after reading this document.²

The project work and its relevance to Communication Theories

A final project that consists of both, a written text and a documentary film is of course a lot of work. It has also meant that I had to combine two very different types of research methods: Academic research methods for the paper and amended journalistic methods for the documentary film. I will return to what these differences were and how the making of a documentary has influenced my research methods in the methodology section. My research study concentrates on how people express their feelings towards the fast development. The reasons, that make China's fast change possible, are complex. Development projects that have brought changes to other development countries, one however has to admit, have had very little effect on China's situation. This, for once, is not due to the fact that "several development decades have not measured up to expectations" (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 1) but to the fact that China has long denied foreign help in the form of development aid or NGOs. Like other communist countries, China was not interested in development from capitalist countries. The acceptance of such help would have been an indication of one's own weakness - and this, was of course out of the question.

Scholars in the field of development communication - a field which exists with the idea of "the sharing of knowledge aimed at reaching a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned" (Servaes, J. 2002a: 3) - have discussed the term "development" from early on. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, author of the book "Development Theory" names not less than nine different meanings of development over time, some of which are 'catching up', resource management, economic growth/industrialisation, political & social growth/modernisation, ‘enlargement of people's choices’ and structural reform/deregulation (Pieterse, 2001: 7). With such definitions, China's pride did not allow the acceptance of such development from the West, even when in the 1960s a big proportion of the Chinese population was living in hunger and severe poverty.

Instead, in 1978 Deng Xiaoping introduced a number of reforms³ which slowly brought the socialist market economy to China. Towards the 1980s, after decades of isolation, China sought to raise foreign capital and opened their market to foreign companies who agreed to form joint ventures with local businesses. Such regulations have remained in place until today and may be considered to being a different type of development aid as they often required the foreign companies to promise technology transfers towards the Chinese part. By giving foreign companies access to a potentially huge market, China had found a way to learn and earn without officially having to accept development help from the West.

Then came 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall which was an event, that Thomas L. Friedmann later described as 'world-flattening' because "it tipped the balance of power across the world toward those advocating democratic, consensual, free-market-oriented governance, and away from those advocating authoritarian rule with centrally planned economies." (Friedmann, T. 2005: 49)

² For information on how to obtain a copy or where to see the documentary go to http://www.cycleofchange.tv
³ A process with outcomes that have allowed many Chinese to come out of extreme poverty, as the worldbank summarises: "Across China, there were over 400 million fewer people living in extreme poverty in 2001 than 20 years previously. By 2001, China had met the foremost of the Millennium Development Goals — to reduce the 1990 incidence of poverty by half — and it had done so 14 years ahead of the 2015 target date for the developing world as a whole." (http://newsletters.worldbank.org/external/default/main?menuPK=615289&theSitePK=615281&pagePK=64133601&contentMDK=20666648&piPK=64129599 as retrieved on August 9th 2006)
With the end of the Soviet empire globalisation - "the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life" (Servaes, J. 2002a: 71) - became possible on a broader scale and thus gained new momentum.

For China, the violent crackdown of the protests on Tiananmen Square during the summer of 1989 had resulted in debates of the directions of Deng Xiaoping's reforms. Yet, "after the reform its leadership legitimised capitalism as a way of promoting economic growth in the early 1990s, the tide of globalization became irreversible" (Zheng, Y. 2004: 2) With further reforms, and an increased worldwide interdependence of countries, "in a globalised world, the Chinese leadership does not have much of a choice." (Zheng, Y. 2004: 57) Since a radical political reform was out of the question, a more viable alternative was a return "to a willingness to follow the ways of the West selectively as a means of modernising and making Chinese civilisation great again" (Zheng, Y. 2004: 57).

Largely financed through foreign investment money, China now afforded a more aggressive pursuit towards modernisation, which largely, is built on economic growth. China's way of modernisation had become similar to several western modernisation policies of the past, which "first destroy existing social capital for the sake of achieving economic growth, and then by means of social policy seek to rebuild social tissue" (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 127).

China's current path towards modernisation is a top-down method and lacks the participatory approach that today is favoured by most Communication for Development scholars. Currently, those who are at most effected by the change – e.g. the citizens of a major city like Beijing – do not have and never had the chance to give their truly honest consent or disconsent about China's development and thereby truly influence its path of development. Since the developments in China are all strategically planned, the people have a very limited possibility to steer this development. Elections in which to steer the countries politics are non-existent. Instead, every 5 years the Chinese government puts down intentions, aims and goals of what it wants to make happen in the years to come; how the route of the Chinese development should look like – the so-called 5 year plan. Therefore all developments are state controlled and offer almost no possibilities for interventions and say by the locals – or by typical western development organisations as we know them. Only recently has China accepted the work of some unpolitical NGOs that are working on a number of environmental issues.

I chose to do my project work about the developments in Beijing, as I was interested to hear what the people had to say themselves. Existing restrictions to freedom of expression make their ways to speak out more difficult. Here, I found myself in a difficult position, as I attempted to find out about their true thoughts and feelings which they may be afraid to speak about. Therefore, I had to put a lot of thought into how to approach difficult topics in a way that they are not threatening for me, or more importantly, my interviewees. I will return to these doubts in chapters 3 on methodologies and chapter 6 on the field work, where I also write about the obstacles of doing my project work in a country with a different understanding of freedom of speech and censorship.

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4 Only slowly are there some local elections in some provinces which allow little participation in the outcome of political decisions.
The documentary - Why?

In addition to making this research in written form, I decided to make a documentary film. There are a number of reasons for this decision, with one simply being my personal interest in the medium. Furthermore, I was interested in documentary film-making as a form of communication and its possibilities and implications of freedom of speech in the given environment. As a tool for research documentary film-making combines observations with interviews and allows people to publicly talk about a specific topic and to show their point of view to a potentially larger audience. Ethnographers for example have for long made use of the camera as a means to learn about other cultures. In their view the camera may also add a level of reality to the study as it "acts as a catalyst, provoking events, situations and relationships that are revealing precisely because of their typicality. Some have even claimed that the camera can act as the medium of a trance like state whereby the film-maker becomes fully engaged in the lives of the film’s protagonists and thereby achieves an understanding that is inaccessible to those who insist on remaining neutral and distant." (Shrum, W., Duque, R., & Brown, T., 2005).

Making use of a camera in interview situations, especially in conditions where freedom of speech is an issue brings the advantage to being able of precisely looking at every element of communications again and again - even at a later point in time. Unlike audio-recordings, video also allows to taking body-language into account. As a tool for research, a camera itself or documentary making can allow for the "fly on the wall" perspective in which the audience gets the chance to see happenings almost as if they were physically present. This can add layers of reality and gives the audience further possibilities of engaging in the research and judging for themselves, which is sometimes well above the possibilities that written text or audio interviews can offer.

Documentaries are also a great tool for disseminating results: Film- and video-programs have the potential to be seen and understood by a big audience and have thus been regarded to being helpful tools for social change. Because of the effectfulness of film and video in shaping opinions, countless productions worldwide have been made with intentions to raise consciousness, to educate and/or to persuade. I, too, intend my film to raise awareness of how the population of Beijing is coping to live in this fast-changing city. Therefore while it certainly would have been possible to only write about this subject, the power to show, rather than to tell was appealing to me - and will hopefully be thought-provoking to my audience as well.

The audience - Whom this is for

I intend to make this work seen by as many people as possible. Since I expect it to be rather difficult to ensure a broadcast of the documentary film, I intend to find as many other possibilities to allow the mainstream audience to see it. The most obvious methods, sending the film to film festivals and documentary competitions are also likely to be the most effective as it builds upon an existing network of institutions with an interest in new productions. Furthermore, should the film be nominated for prizes, this causes an increase in publicity which may raise peoples interest. Therefore I will send the finalised film to documentary and other film-festivals. Attempting to offer my finished film for inclusion in commercially available short film collection DVDs (some of which are published by film festivals) or free magazine DVDs is another - more unlikely - possibility. And then, of course, I will distribute the film as a Quicktime file via the

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5 as described by Crawford, P. In Film as Ethnography (1992: 67)
internet⁶ - a method that along with the film-festivals is most likely going to reach the most people.

But in addition to the mainstream audience, I should perhaps take a closer look at other possible audiences of which there are a few: First of all, I could perhaps argue, that there are at least two different possible mainstream audiences. One, I suggest, would be the general public within Beijing or China; the other the general public from outside China. I think due to their quite different backgrounds and knowledge on the topics it is wise to distinguish between the two groups. I aim that the audiences after having watched the film, feel that they have gained a better understanding of the consequences of fast changes for the people portrayed in the film.

I have already mentioned the possible methods for dissemination of the video outside China. The question of how to disseminate the video inside China is a more difficult issue. Distribution via the internet appears to be the method with the best chance of reaching a big audience within China. Obviously, web-distribution and especially for any other possible method of distribution it very much depends on the outcomes of the film and how responsible authorities rate its content. Should they see no problem with it, then all aforementioned methods of distributing this film will be just as valid within China and might also allow those that have no internet access to see the film. Otherwise dissemination is going to be much harder. Then no film-festival within China will screen the film if it has been banned by the government. Web-sites where the film would be able to be seen are reachable for anyone around the globe until they are added to the list of web-sites that are blocked from any computer within China.

With further thought I should also distinguish a further group from each mainstream audience: The people working in the Communication for Development field. They will most likely watch the film with a different preconception and ideally gain valuable information from the protagonists in the film. For them, the written part of this work will also be of a bigger value than to the mainstream audiences. If it is generally possible to project this example onto other yet similar happenings in other regions around the world, they may additionally also learn about the effects of such fast change on a society. For their work it may ideally mean better possibilities to adjusting their methods to suit the people in similar working environments. Here workshops and congresses offer valuable possibilities to ensure the film is reaching its audience. The film may also be interesting for Beijing's countless expatriates, since it may allow them to better understand the locals thoughts about the changes that many of the expatriates have caused in one way or another. The German School Beijing has already asked for two copies of this film long before it had been finished. And finally online forums and sites such as drumbeat are also very good possibilities to advertise the projects web-site.

With the now finished text and film, I plan to return to Beijing to show it to those interested in the subject and will look for further methods to increase the audience in Beijing.⁷

⁶ see http://www.cycleofchange.tv
⁷ Compare with chapter 7 - Conclusion, Review and Outlook.
3. Methodology

My project work is founded upon the research I conducted during two four-week trips to Beijing, with the first field-trip in February and March 2006 serving the purpose of researching my topic and - similarly important - to learn if it was at all possible to make a project work (including the documentary) in such an environment.

The importance of a research trip

I was at first hesitant to embark on this project as I felt unsure if it was realistic to attempt making such a project work, which also includes a documentary film in China, fearing that I would be subject to too many obstacles and problems. I was worried that the Chinese people would generally be too scared from being interviewed whilst being filmed, or that a camera in places outside tourist areas might cause a lot of attention or trouble. I first needed to find out about these important practicalities before I felt that I could safely begin this project. I thus conducted my research trip first.

As I arrived for my first stay, I started out by updating my general idea of the cities current atmosphere through re-visitings specific places in the city, areas in which I had often been during 'my' earlier Beijing years. I decided to begin the filming process very slowly and at some of the same places I had visited and filmed years earlier. Some of these sequences would enable me to include a sequence of a direct comparison between then and now - with some obvious changes - in the film. I furthermore looked out for special memories about the city and the people such as typical behaviour, atmospheres, smells and sounds. Being right in central Beijing inspired thoughts and ideas as well as it brought back memories of the Beijing I remembered. The longer

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8 Old and new video material is mixed throughout the documentary - a direct comparison of the view from a roof in 1990 and 2006 can be found at minute 7 in the film. Since the old video material was shot with a video 8 camera it looks of a less good quality. Still I have further changed the looks of the old video in post-production to make it easier to distinguish between the old and the new material.
I remembered the old Beijing, the more apparent it became how much the city had changed. The longer I stayed, the more certain I became that this was the topic I wanted to and would work on.

The first research trip allowed me to come across some further inspirations and ideas. More importantly it also enabled me to ease some of my worries about the practicality of making such a project. By taking out the camera on the streets and in hutong-neighbourhoods I started to test possible difficulties when filming in China. Underlying to all filming was my constant bad conscious that, officially, I would have had to obtain a license. However, as tourists are free to film in Beijing, I commenced my filming in the style of a tourist, meaning that for most of my images I would refrain from making use of a tripod. Considering, that at first this seemed the only way to being able to film in Beijing, this was a decision that I had to take, even if it meant shakier, less professional images. I further reduced the public attention towards my filming by not staying in one area for too long, thereby copying the averages tourists tight schedule. I decided to rather come back to one place more often if I felt the need for longer observations. I had become close to being paranoid of causing too much attention.

I soon learned that working tactfully I would encounter relatively few problems. My original worries of being stopped when filming a step aside the touristic paths turned out to be unrealistic. I encountered almost no intervention whatsoever. Very rarely did I catch the eye of a policeman who might have wondered what I was doing, and only once was I kindly asked not to film at a specific spot, a request that I of course succumbed to.

When I returned to Europe after an intensive, yet successful research trip I had come to the conclusion that the project work could be done. I decided to commence the project work in such an environment but had promised myself to only continue doing this project as long as I was sure of not putting anyone at risk. Thus followed the period between the two trips during which I revisited the material I had gathered. I took the time to review and rearrange my interview questions and edited a ca. four minute long trailer version of how my documentary shall look like. I revised my plan of how I could best learn about the peoples true personal feelings. Getting to know an interviewee's true personal feeling is always a difficult task, considering the Chinese political system and their governments understanding of freedom of speech may have made this task even more difficult.

Since the test interviews I conducted during my first field- and research-trip have shown me that the Chinese are often willing to be questioned, I put up a more detailed plan for conducting qualitative research interviews.

Qualitative research

For long, there has been a strong discussion amongst social scientists as to whether qualitative research can at all be objective. In the seventies several researchers and authors have argued that qualitative research is without scientific relevance. As one example, Kvale quotes Kerlingers view that "Scientists are not and cannot be concerned with the individual case. They seek laws, systematic relations, explanation of phenomena. And their results are always statistical." (Kerlinger, 1979 : 270 quoted in Kvale, J. 1996: 67). Today, qualitative research is more widely ac-

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9 An experience shared by Hutcheon, J (2003: 1) " I don't want to sound paranoid, - and please don't turn around - but I think we're being followed."
10 an important promise that I will return to a little later in this document.
11 The trailer can also be found on the website www.cycleofchange.tv
cepted, with qualitative interviews being described as being "a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects' everyday world. Interviews allow the subjects to convey to others their situation from their own perspective and in their own words." (Kvale, J. 1996: 70)

The interviews

My research is largely based on exploratory qualitative research. These interviews took place both inside in private environments as well as in outside places such as parks. When I approached my potential interviewees I always started out by presenting myself and asked them if they minded me asking a few questions about the city and its recent changes. I had previously defined a clear objective with specific interview questions that I wanted answers for. I always made small adjustments to ensure that each interview suited my interviewee, yet they all evolved around a similar set of questions concerning each persons individual experience of change in Beijing in the last 15 years including changes in traffic, housing as well as changes in the mind (such as the way they think about their city and how these thoughts may have changed over time). Each interview falls into a number of categories specified by Steinar Kvale in his book "InterViews". Yet for the most part they evolved around the concept of seeking to find out about personal opinions and attitudes and enabled me to "obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena." (Kvale, S. 1996: 5) Furthermore, "the subjects answers may be extended through a curious, persistent and critical attitude of the interviewer" (Kvale, S. 1996: 133). Since a number of the interviews on the first trip were conducted in English, I was able to do them myself. For the interviews conducted in Chinese language this was a lot more difficult since my personal Chinese language skills are unfortunately only sufficient enough for everyday interactions in Beijing. I can just about communicate on a conversational level. Through taking further Chinese lessons during my field work, my abilities to communicate had, however, improved.

Making use of an unconventional yet surprisingly effective method I was even able to conduct one of my longer in-depth interview in Chinese just by myself. For this method to work I had previously asked my father's former translator - whom I was still in contact with - to translate all my questions into proper Chinese and to write them onto a set of cards. I could then contact my interviewees on my own, meet up with them and begin the interview with the help of the cards. We would communicate using a mixture of our little Chinese and English skills yet were able to commence doing a proper interview as my interviewee would read the questions from the cards and give their answer in Chinese. Unfortunately only sometimes was my Chinese knowledge sufficient enough to understand what they were talking about – for a full picture of the interview I had to wait for the translation which I would organise for a later date.

This was all but ideal. Kvale writes that the interviewer ought to register and interpret "what is said as well as how it is said; he or she must be observant of - and able to interpret - vocalisation, facial expressions, and other bodily gestures." (Kvale, S. 1996: 32) It is furthermore necessary "to listen to the explicit descriptions and meanings as well as to what is said between the lines" (Kvale, S. 1996: 32). Being unable to understand the answers on the spot, it made follow up questions difficult or impossible. While, at least, the interpreters may have been able to listen to

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12 See the annex for a list of asked questions.
what has been said between the lines as I was recording the interview in video and audio, being unable to make use of this information as to ask direct follow up questions was a circumstance that I needed to improve for my second trip.

As my main phase for doing the interviews, the ability to reduce communication problems during my second trip which followed in June and July 2006 seemed to be of greatest importance. I therefore organised help of my befriended sinology student from Germany, Andreas Schultz, who has a much better level of Chinese and was furthermore willing to help me with the interpretation of the interviews. He was able to help me by doing field interpretations during the first week. When I needed help with translations after his return to Germany, I received help from Feng-Mei Heberer whom I met and got to know during my second stay.

Making use of interpreters in interview situations makes it possible to speak to people whom one could have not conversed with otherwise. While it appears to be the only way to hear about their perceptions of a topic, I am aware that the use of interpreters also bears a few risks. Firstly, researchers have to build up a strong trust towards their interpreters and have to feel that these have exactly understood what their research question is aiming at. Such an understanding is vital for the interpreter to be able to question the interviewee appropriately as it allows him to find the most suitable vocabularies for the questions and to hit the right tone. Another problem - one that was especially noticeable in my case - is that the interviewees may not build up a close relationship towards the researcher but feel - if at all - more drawn towards the interpreter. Since it is important to also build up a substantial level of trust between interviewer and interviewee a middleman (the interpreter) can in this terms be counterproductive. Lastly, the biggest risk working with an interpreters is that it easily happens that - intentionally or not - he or she may take over the interview. This happens frequently, since they are the ones to understand the interviewees replies and have the immediate possibilities of asking direct follow up questions. This is useful in instances in which it is better not to interrupt the flow of the interview by first interpreting the answer to the researcher and then coming back to focus on the interviewee. It generally carries the risk however, that the interpreters take over whilst the researcher and original interviewer can lose their power and possibilities of steering the interview towards the elements that he or she feels are important. This is, unfortunately, especially true for interviews which are conducted with intentions for a later use in a documentary film, because both, interviewer and interpreter, in such cases attempt to speak as little as possible with intentions to achieving clean audio-video footage. In contrast to interviews that are recorded for later transcription only, a clean audio track is vital for it to be useable in a documentary. In documentaries, an especially strong trust in the interpreter and his ability to steer the interview into the same direction that oneself would have, is thus an important necessity when conducting interviews with people that one could have not communicated with otherwise.

Another potential problem I noticed while viewing my material from my research trip was the fact that I had attempted to interview and film the people just by myself. It was very difficult to maintain an overview of the surrounding whilst filming and concentrating on the quality of the interview as well as the quality of the image. I thus also decided to add yet another person to the crew - befriended cameraman Ove Sander who would allow me to concentrate more on the subject and less on technical and camera considerations. This way I was enabled to be more open towards the interviewees, take more notice of their body language and at the same time have the eye for the surrounding in which a policeman may have caught our sight or less dramatic a possible new interviewee.
The decision to change from working alone to getting extra help was a difficult decision as it bared the risk of also increasing possible difficulties when conducting the field work. Working in a bigger crew, I worried, could raise the likelihood of being noticed by officials. Considering however, that this seemed to be the only way to improve the qualitative research interviews I was willing to risk it and, luckily, it turned out that we never had any real problems or came close to being questioned by police or government officials. I want to stress that even with the addition of helping hands, I remained in charge of this research and was always the one to chose and decide which direction I wanted to follow up.

Each interview was concluded by asking my interviewee for their OK of it to be used in the documentary. I later met up with Vivian Xiao, a Chinese who helped me to do the translation of the interviews. While she listened to the video materials and translated it live, I transcribed her oral translation. I also noted down the video time-code regularly, so that I would at a later point be able to refer the right sections to the right piece of video during post-production at a later stage.

Sampling

In the course of the field work, I conducted 13 interviews of which eight were in-depth interviews. The other interviews were shorter, most often due to the interviewees preference to give short answers only. This was a behaviour which I respected, even if that left me with the interview as short as it was.

With the intention to find a good representation for the view of the Beijing citizens as such, I relied on two sampling methods whilst in the field. During the first of the two trips I predominantly made use of what Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock have described as snowball sampling (Deacon et al 1999:53). Snowball sampling describes the method of finding people through other people; a method that I felt more secure to use at first; in contrast to contacting strangers on the street. Tapping into my small yet still existing Beijing network of mostly international friends I managed to get in touch with a number of interesting Chinese people who mostly were befriended with my friends. This automatically established a much more personal atmosphere and most often meant that we could meet in a much more private environment.

At first, this method seemed more feasible, especially when considering my little knowledge of how people would react to being interviewed and Chinas standpoint on freedom of speech. Only in the later course of the first trip and mostly during the second trip did I apply the method of convenience sampling which is a method where chance and opportunity became the favoured method over deliberate intend (Deacon et al 1999:54). While I at first felt unsure of using such a method, the longer I stayed I realised that such a method could safely be applied. Making use of coincidence moreover insured that I would draw upon a much broader resource of people, whereas the snowball method bared the risk of staying only within one group of people, i.e. amongst those who are in close contact to expatriates.

Sometimes I also picked my interviewees because of their professions. For example, I was once interested to hear what a car-mechanic would have to say about the changes so that I deliberately went into an area where a lot of car-mechanics had opened their businesses and would then commence to pick one of them by opportunity.

13 Please take note of a table that lists interviewees - it is a part of the Annex.
Conducting research for a documentary film

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the research methodology for an academic paper differs to the process of doing research used in a documentary. Whilst the content should remain in the centre of attention for both types, aesthetic as well as technical considerations commonly influence research behaviour in documentary productions. Some methods thus need to be amended to suit the production process of the audio-visual medium.

As an example I would like to point out differences in the process of conducting interviews for research and for documentary film productions. In contrast to research interviews that are conducted for a written analysis and interpretation only, interviews that are additionally recorded for later use in a documentary need to keep a few technical considerations in mind simultaneously. Most obvious, the recording's sound-quality of a qualitative research interview which is meant for a written discussion is less important than that of an interview aimed for later use in a documentary film. As long as the answers are understandable, the researchers will be able to make use of the data. Documentarists however also have to rely on a decent sound-quality to be able to use the material in editing.

Less obvious, yet just as important is that interviews targeted for use in a documentary should ideally consist of proper and complete sentences in which the question should ideally be included in the answer. This is especially important if the interviewer's questions are to be cut out from the final version of the documentary. In his classic text about documentary film-making "Directing the documentary" Michael Rabiger suggests that for best results one must prepare interviewees by telling them that they will have to include the question in their answer (Rabiger, M. 2004:340). As an example, if I asked my interviewee 'Since when have you had a car?' and they answer '1998' their answer would be too short to be used in the editing. Their answer would be much more useful if they had said 'I bought my first car in 1998'. Whilst Rabiger has a point here, I was worried that I would take away a lot of trust by asking them to repeat all the vital information in their answer and opted not to ask them to reply in such a manner. Only in very rare cases did I cases ask my interviewees to rephrase an answer so that it would be easier to be edited.

Furthermore I would like to point out that interviewees tend to be more nervous especially during the beginning of interviews. Documentary filmmakers are therefore advised to reorder their recorded interviews "to start with factual questions and keep the more intimate or emotionally loaded material for later, when the interviewee has become more comfortable" (Rabiger, M. 2004: 342) and thus appears more natural. This is a method that I tried to apply throughout all my interviews and I believe that it has worked nicely for the majority of interviews. This strategy, however, also carried the risk of being stopped or interrupted before one got to the more sensitive parts of the interview thus it added a layer of stress on my side as I was at times worried that we might not get to the key questions but be stopped before. Luckily this did not happen.

Participant observation

Steinar Kvale suggests to consider other forms of qualitative research when one attempts to learn about assumptions of a different culture: "If the research topic concerns more implicit meanings and tacit understandings, like the taken-for-granted assumptions of a group or a culture, then participant observation and field studies of actual behaviour supplemented by informal interviews may give more valid information" (Kvale, J. 1996: 104). One of the alternatives is participant
observation which "can prove to be a highly exciting, challenging and rewarding method" (Han-lsen, A., Cottle, S. Negrine R. & Newnbold, Ch. 1998: 61). According to Hansen et al participant observation has a number of strengths, some of which are: it records and makes the invisible visible; improves upon other methods through triangulation, qualifies or corrects speculative theoretical claims; and provides evidence for the dynamic as well as embedded nature of cultural production (Hansen et al 1998: 43).

Filming a documentary - looking through a camera's eye and interviewing people at the same time can be considered a specific type of participatory observation. My two stays of ca. one month each were, of course, different from a full scale participatory observation. Still, I have been watching and analysing the locals ways of referring to, living with and adapting to the changes in Beijing - even when I was not filming.

My relation to the research topic and the role as a researcher

I undertook this research as a Master student developing my fieldwork study. Whilst coming to China as a foreigner meant that I had the perspective of an outsider, the fact that I had previously lived in Beijing had certainly allowed me to gain knowledge about local customs that other external researchers would not necessarily have had. Living in Beijing almost four years may however have also caused me to lose some elements of what defines an outsider. When I lived in Beijing 15 years ago, was I thus more of an outsider with a local perspective or maybe even a local with a foreign perspective? What am I today, returning to a city in which I am still feeling somewhat at home in many parts of the city?

Maybe it is also important to recall, that I was a child between the ages 12 to 15 when I lived in China. Furthermore, I lived in a compound that was restricted to foreigners and visited the German School Beijing, so that I was never a true local. Therefore, after fifteen years in which I and not only the city itself has changed, it is probably fair to say that I returned as an independent researcher and as an outsider with some local knowledge.

I felt that most Beijingers I contacted appeared to be a lot more open once I had told them that I, too, lived in the city for close to four years and thus proved to them that - at least in some ways - we had something in common which made it easier to establish a closer relationship which in turn enabled me to interview them.
4. Background I
Local and social changes in Beijing

In this chapter I give an overview of previous studies on the subject and commence with a summary of the relevant developments in China and especially Beijing. Chapter 5 will concentrate on the history of documentary film making in China and also feature a section on the difficulties of documentaries in China.

China's and Beijing's history

In under three decades, China has transformed from socialism with Chinese characteristics to capitalism with Chinese characteristics. "The radical changes in post-revolution society and the legacy of Mao stand out as the most important factors affecting China’s current development" writes Pao-yu Ching, member of the China Study Group, a group of scholars that intend to "provide alternative perspectives and assessments on issues pertaining to China - both its revolutionary past and today’s China in the context of globalisation". He continues, "without an understanding of this time period and the legacy it has left, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand the current class struggle taking place in China." Let us thus return to the premises that underlie the changes: China's and Beijing's history.

When China's second prime minister Hua Guofeng also became the chairman of the CPC (Communist Party of China) after Mao Zedong's death, he believed that China needed to reverse the damage of Mao's cultural revolution and favoured a return to Soviet-style industrial planning. Interestingly, he attempted to reverse some of Mao's works at the same time that he issued the "two whatevers" with which he intended to show his believe that Mao's path was right. The

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15 http://www.chinastudygroup.org/index.php?action=front2&type=about_us
16 "Whatever policy originated from Chairman Mao, we must continue to support," and "Whatever directions were given to us from Chairman Mao, we must continue to work on their basis"
CPC officially looked upon Mao as their Great Leader and thus had little room for further reforms and changes. Reforms were far less common and dramatic compared with today.

The official standpoint towards Mao was only slowly changed when the re-emerging Deng Xiaoping questioned the notion of the "two whatevers". Unlike his predecessor, Deng Xiaoping would no longer rule out a policy because it was against Mao's way of thought. In the process of becoming a modern industrial nation Deng Xiaoping considered the accomplishment of reforms more important and was furthermore interested to improve China's relations to the West. He thus named the "four modernisations" in the fields of agriculture, industry, science and technology and the military as the goal of his reforms and coined the Chinese term "opening up and reform" – 开放改革 (Gāigé kāifǎng).

Within a short period much of China's social system had suddenly changed. Farm-workers salaries increased by a threefold in only three years, old socialist values had been dropped and special economic zones started to flourish. With the four modernisations in active development, some Chinese began to demand a fifth modernisation - a political modernisation. A demand that became very evident in the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989.

Interestingly, the student-led protests on Tiananmen Square were sparked by the death of China's former Secretary General Hu Yaobang who died of a heart attack on April 15th. When Li Peng, China's fourth premier, publicly accused the early protesters of intentions to cause disorder, he enraged thousands more and thereby let to an increasing of the situation with thousands of students marching towards Tiananmen Square. The protests quickly evolved into a protest about the regime and its interventions for the transformation of the state. Interestingly, the early students and intellectuals who were demonstrating because they felt that the government's reforms had not gone far enough, were now joined also by urban workers who felt that the reforms had gone too far. With these two, very different groups of people, the movement saw hundred thousands demonstrating on Tiananmen Square of which several hundreds had gone into a hunger strike. By June, the protesters were demanding a free media reform as well as a formal dialogue between the authorities and student-elected representatives. As it is widely known, the government did not succumb to these demands but chose to violently end the protests, killing hundreds.

With some protesters demanding faster changes and others complaining about too fast reforms, the protests clearly show that the population felt the need to be heard. Growing social discrepancies that followed China's introduction to the market economy had caused both sides to speak out when they saw a chance to. In his book "China's New Order" Wang Hui argues, that the 1989 protests were sparked by growing social discrepancies that followed China's introduction of the market economy, the process that resulted from Deng Xiaoping's 1978 economic and political reforms. He writes, "the year 1989 can be regarded as a time of temporary suspension of the process of Chinese market reform […] First, market expansion took the form of coercive intervention by the state, and because of this, the notion of a binary market/state opposition was shattered." (Hui, W. 2003: 116). The Tiananmen protest was originally a move to show the people's

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17 Today officially 70% of Mao Zedong's actions are ranked as good and 30% are admitted to having been bad.
18 which the Chinese government has officially named "political turmoil between spring and summer of 1989".
19 During his time as a secretary General, Hu Yaobang was opposing many of Mao's deeds and has openly called for rapid reforms. Early protesters utilised his death to demand the Chinese government to alter its official (negative) standpoint towards Hu Yaobang.
discomfort about the social discrepancies that the newly inlet market economy had caused, yet it developed into a movement that demanded for a more radical political change towards democratisation.

Some researchers like Wang Hui (2003: 84) have considered the 1989 protests a failure. I argue the protest has had the effect that the government was forced to rethink their politics, a notion that Zheng, author of "Globalisation and State transformation in China" shares. He writes, that soon after the violent ending of the protests, "the central leadership debated the direction of the reforms, and the conservative elements in the party especially, the ideologues, who were on the ascendancy, openly questioned the ideological implications of economic reform." (Zheng, Y. 2004: 3). Utilising the visible benefits China had gained from the early stages of globalisation, the communist party however managed to re-legitimise their reform course but simultaneously realised that it needed to put further changes into place; in order to not being subject to further protests the government needed to increase the speed of its reforms. It felt it had to give its people more freedom and thereby chose to slowly let capitalism into the country. From this point onwards, changes appear to have come at an increasing speed. Through the actions that followed "nearly a century of socialist practice came to an end. Two worlds became one: a global-capitalist world." (Hui, W: 2003: 141)

Even though China still is officially a socialist country, this fact is "hardly a barrier to China's economy from quickly joining the globalising process in the arenas of production and trade. [...] In all of its behaviours, including economic, political, and cultural – even in governmental behaviour – China has completely conformed to the dictates of capital and the activities of the market." (Hui, W: 2003: 141)

China's route towards a more open market was already noticeable when the government revised a number of the radical political reform programs of the 1980s into a 'movement for constitutional revision' which included the establishing of the right to private property and legitimisation of "the irrational distribution of property through a legislative process, including the legitimisation of illegal expropriation of public property" (Hui, W: 2003: 81). Urban reform programs like these where launched to address economic inefficiency. They also allowed for different types of public firms to coexist (private, joint stock, foreign joint venture) and brought many loss-making companies to bankruptcy as many subsidies where brought to an end.

Social changes in China

The reforms have furthermore led to several continuous changes which effect the Chinese population in their daily life. "Rapid economic change has fundamentally transformed people’s lifestyles and aspirations" writes Wenfang Tang (2005: 101) and Wang believes that "we must understand the above transformations and their corresponding social manifestations" (Hui, W. 2003: 141) if we aspire to understand today's Chinese intellectual and cultural life as such.

In reply to these changes, the Chinese population and more recognisable the inhabitants of large cities such as Beijing had to deal with new situations that affected them in their daily life. For the first time, fundamental changes in the social structures appeared. These changes happened on multiple levels. Amongst them are changes in work, housing and transportation.

20 Some felt that Deng Xiaopings "socialism with Chinese characteristics” was being replaced by "capitalism with Chinese characteristics”.
21 Hui, W: 2003: 80
Before the recent changes towards a market economy, each urban worker used to belong to a specific work unit - a so called *danwei*. There used to be countless work units in Beijing, with each being in charge of allocating its 'members' with jobs as well as many aspects of the personal life including housing, health care, marriages and births. With the economic reforms the social control of the work units diminished considerably and thus brought more freedom to the urban citizens. "Now once again young lovers could be seen openly expressing their affection for each other, middle-aged people could dress their children in colourful clothes and give birthday parties [...]. For the first time, personal tastes, homebuilding, extracurricular activities and entertainment activities were not tainted by ideological influence" (Lin, J. 1994: 91). In as late as 2003 it became possible to marry or divorce without needing approval from the work unit.

With the economic reform cities were shifted into the focus of China's industrialisation aspirations, which caused increasing numbers of rural Chinese flooding into the cities\(^{22}\). Many had hoped for increased wages and better quality of living. In fact, the number of rural Chinese to flood into the cities were quickly becoming so many, that space became a problem. Between 1949 and 1984 Beijing's population has grown from 1.2 million to over 9 million residents, a result of both internal migration and population growth (Hutcheon, J. 2003: 53). In cities like Beijing, original inhabitants quickly found themselves making a lot of money by renting out rooms to those that quickly became known as the floating population (Zhang, L. 2001: 71).

Most of these rooms were situated in Beijing's traditional neighbourhoods built from as early as the Yuan dynasty onwards (from year 1271) - the so-called hutongs. The word hutong originally only described the characteristic lanes between the typical four one storied houses - the so-called *sihiyuan* - but has now also become synonymous with Beijing's traditional houses and their courtyards.\(^ {23}\) Traditionally, the hutongs were a very social form of living, in which the larger family would be living around a shared courtyard. This, for example, allowed grandparents to watch over their grandchildren, while their sons and daughters were at work. The *sihiyuan* in hutong neighbourhoods have long been the predominant form of living in Beijing.

Yet as the city's population rose even before China's opening up, the hutongs had to be filled with housing extensions to allow further families to move into the already crowded living area. Still, even as the traditional family sphere got more and more mixed, hutongs remained a social place for living. The fact that everyone lived on the same level had the positive effect that neighbours often helped each other after work. "In urban China, traditional single-story housing used to create closely knit neighbourhood communities that were enhanced by the residential councils and neighbourhood committees under local governments. Urban residents once knew everything about their neighbours." (Tang, W. 2005: 101) In 1994 Tan Ying, a doctoral candidate at the Chinese Tsinghua University School of Architecture thought similarly: "Being on ground level, the courtyard house makes it easy for neighbours to associate with each other and help each other after work. No matter how narrow the remaining outdoor space in the yard, there is always room for flowers, birds and goldfish." (Tan, Y. 1994: 4). He continues, "housing in Beijing's traditional neighbourhood communities is low rise, low rent and caters mainly for relatively low income families. Yet the neighbourhood communities are healthy and lively ones which are characteristic of the historic city core, and not the slums that some outsiders may think them to be." (Tan, Y. 1994: 4).

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\(^{22}\)Partly due to the continuing urbanisation in China, from this year 50% of the worlds population will be living in cities.

\(^{23}\)I will therefore will also use "hutong" to describe the traditional houses and that kind of neighbourhoods as such.
The material living-standard in hutongs, however, has been basic. Very small rooms often had to be shared between two or three people, sometimes between a whole family and had limited heating facilities for the cold winters and got very warm during the hot summers. The toilets and washing facilities were generally shared between 20 to 50 people, thus often hundred meters away and have been described of generally being unbearably cold during winters and uncomfortably hot and smelly during summers. Many hutongs are of considerable age, others, however, only look old as they have not been maintained properly due to lack of money and time. Or due to the fact that the owners were holding of investments when they noticed that the government chose to systematically tear down complete hutong neighbourhoods and relocated the inhabitants to newer apartment blocks all over Beijing.

Today, these traditional neighbourhoods are being replaced at a fast rate. In their place new roads, malls, hotels, sport stadiums and modern apartments- and office-blocks are being built. When another hutong neighbourhood has to go to make way for a planned new construction the government generally contracts a firm that talks to the owners of the hutongs and offers them a newer more modern flat at the outskirts of Beijing or alternatively negotiates a compensation so that the hutong owners may look for a suitable apartment themselves. Considering the standard and size of the hutong the compensation in many cases is a surprisingly high sum of money. Yet it rarely is enough for the hutong owners to buy an apartment in the same area, so people will have to move out of the city centre. "The city planners say Beijing's density is twice that of a typical city in a developed country and they aim to halve the density to around 400 people per hectare" (Hutcheon, J. 2003: 59). Countless new apartment blocks in ten new suburbs will therefore be built a good distance from the city; offices and even more luxurious apartments in turn will be built in the city centre.

When the hutong neighbourhoods were to be destroyed, many Hutong-inhabitants had got used to living in a hutong and were thus happy to move into a new apartment building - even if that one was far from the city centre. Others, however, do not see the value in moving out of the city-centre and thus intend to stay in their hutongs. In order to persuade these hutong owners to change their minds construction workers generally begin by tearing down all the neighbouring empty old houses. Those living nearby in the remaining hutongs are left to live more and more uncomfortable amidst a desert of rubble. As a last resort the contracted company will slowly offer them more money to persuade them to move. There are also reports about other methods to ensure the move of unwilling owners which include physical and psychological methods. As a consequence, in most cases the government succeeds to relocate the people and pursues the construction of modern office blocks or the like. It is, after all a top-down approach to development.

As the city develops from a predominantly horizontal living sphere to a vertical one, with high rise buildings, social structures have to adapt. How do the people cope with these changes? Now as the population of the hutongs are being moved to more modern apartments, for many people the quality of living is being increased at least from a technical standpoint. The new apartments generally have more space (often three times as much or more), a modern kitchen and a private toilet – which for many was most important as it was a sign of independence. Many new apartments are also equipped with proper radiators and air-conditions.

At the same time that the living standard increased technically, moving into apartment blocks also changed the social life as whole sociably functioning neighbourhoods are separated and moved into newer areas. Until now a substantial part of their life took place on the streets: All the interpersonal communication that happened as they were sitting in the shadow of a tree in the
hutong lanes just outside their house or when buying the vegetables at the small corner-store will be changed as they move into more private apartments. In the new apartment blocks no one will unexpectedly meet people on their way to the washrooms any longer. Such social implications are often overlooked.

The Chinese and especially the population of Beijing had and have to adapt their life to the new situations. To understand this transition, I feel it is important to recall that the Chinese society has gone or is in the process of going from a socialist society to that of a competitive market society in a rather short period of time.

Through the economical successes triggered by the open door policy the Chinese population got more and more wealthy, so that people started to buy television sets, until "in the 1980s there was no material device that symbolised prosperity more than television". (Lull, J. 1991: 16) As described by James Lull in his book "China turned on", with an increased audience, the number of operating media of all types grew as well. "Journalists, broadcasters, and filmmakers developed more sophisticated and professional work styles, enjoyed more autonomy and critical freedom, and created far more intriguing and relevant products than ever before" (Lull, J. 1991: 18).

James Lull further analysed how the Chinese consume television and how the media in general effects the Chinese society. He gives a knowledgeable account of the historical background of the media in China as well as the relevance and difficulties of mass communication research in China. At various points in his book, James Lull stresses the difficulties of communication research in China and I can understand that it must have been a lot more difficult at the time. For my case, the increased number of Television productions in Beijing, a number that has dramatically increased since the book went into publication, has helped me in my making of a documentary film. Today, television crews filming are not a rare occurrence any longer, which may have helped since the people are more to camera crews and interviews. Still, of course, foreigners interviewing Chinese remains a less common situation as I will point out in the next chapter.
5. Background II

Documentary making in China

"Documentary is that rare medium in which the common person takes on large, important issues and shakes up society" writes Michael Rabiger in "Directing the documentary" (Rabiger, M. 2004: 3). He continues "Documentary always seems concerned with uncovering further dimension to actuality and at the same time implying social criticism. (Rabiger, M. 2004: 4) With these few lines Rabiger neatly summarises the objectives of documentary film-making that are difficult to achieve anywhere. Considering the Chinese political system and their rules of freedom of speech, however, make documentary film-making in and on China appear very difficult.

Documentaries and other productions in China

In China documentaries have a little shorter history, as restrictions or a constant need for often difficult government approvals have caused true documentaries to be a rare form in China till recently. Until the 1990s documentaries have rather been scripted lectures with talking-heads that most often evolved around predominantly non-political topics - or they were unbalanced and served the purpose of propaganda. "Chinese people rely on television more than any other media source for news. Television news in China, however, is much different from that in most Western nations. For the most part, news is not meant to be objective" (1991: 84) writes Lull, J. in his book on his research on the meaning of television in China.

In more recent years the combination of newer, easier accessible technology and the opening up of China has caused an increased interest and output in video documentaries, some of which also touched more delicate topics. Now documentaries in China would "often involve the filmmakers living with their poor, marginalised subjects for an extended period of time" (Leary, Ch. 2003). As an early example, Chinese documentary maker Gao Guodong filmed the stories of a fisherman's family in China's Northeast Liaoning Province. His outcome, the documentary The sand...
and the sea (1991), was the first Chinese program to win the Asian Broadcasting Union award and was hence recognised internationally.

While newer documentaries like Along the railway (Tie lu yan xian; Du Haibin, 2001) now begin addressing critical topics like the impact of recent social changes in China for the traditional working class and migrant workers, these topics have long been touched rather by fictitious films than by documentaries. As an example I would like to name Beijing director Ning Ying and her fictional trilogy on Beijing (For Fun/Zhao Le; 1993, On the Beat/Min jing gu shi; 1995 and I love Beijing/Xiari nuanyangyang; 2000) which stands out especially. In I love Beijing, she portrays a Beijing taxi-driver who feels at unease in his fast changing home-city. Whilst working, he gets into contact with people from all different backgrounds, experiences trouble with the authorities and struggles as he tries to understand the city as it changes and attempts to build up his own life in this fast changing world. The film picks up a number of issues of modern Beijing. For example by depicting a businessman learning English in the back of the taxi Ning Ying gives reference to the international and business oriented Beijing; discussions in a taxi-company reveal the taxi drivers dependence on future traffic laws. Further, by showing how a poor father and his son take a taxi, but are unable to pay Ning Ying highlights the problem of the mass migration of the rural population. Mainly by showing a good selection of typical yet diverse images of today’s Beijing director Ning Ying cleverly depicts the latest developments in Beijing and passes judgements about the ongoing processes in a subtle yet effective way. The film inexplicitly questions the cities fast change in a way that it may have been difficult to do in a factual documentary.

During my second trip to Beijing I was lucky to get into closer contact with a few students of the Beijing Film School. Each year the school educates about 300 students in all parts of the film production process. It is one of several places where students can learn about film and cinema in Beijing. When I met up with them to watch some of the films they had made, one of these productions was a short documentary about a specific hutong neighbourhood and its deconstruction. To my surprise, this topic appeared to be one that was not seldomly chosen amongst the film students. In a lot of cases however, these films were only made for university purposes and were made without the intention of a public release. Likewise, Li Jia, one of my newly won Chinese friends from the Beijing Film School surprised me by saying that I was the only external whom he had shown his short documentary to. He told me that he still prefers not to show this film at film festivals or other public showings because, as he argued, he was no longer satisfied with the films cinematic style. I wonder if he may also have considered the topic too delicate for a broad release. He did not reply but said that he now favours drama over documentaries.

When I met him again days later, he told me that he had written a fictional script that he hoped he would soon be directing for the Chinese Television CCTV. The TV station was officially considering if his script was what the audience wanted to see. It may have simultaneously been submitted for approval by the relevant government agency. The story of the script was set in a hutong-neighbourhood which was about to be deconstructed in favour of the construction for modern flats. The story would focus on the life of one specific family, who were happy where they lived. They had a dog. As they were told to leave their hutong and move to a modern flat situated a bit more to the outskirts of Beijing the family was just as happy to move into more modern flats. Once they had moved, it was only through the behaviour of the dog that they took notice of the disadvantages of apartment complexes. They for themselves started to miss the hutong-life. I found it very interesting to hear about this script, which to me is yet another story,
in which social conflict is pointed out in a subtle way. Unfortunately, Li Jia has recently informed me that the script had not been passed. In an e-mail he send me on August 9th 2006 he explained that his idea was officially seen as not being dramatic enough. Instead, he was proposed to do a different story about a blind girl who was going to die but had the strong will to "see" the Flag-rising on Tiananmen square. He denied the offer and now prefers to make a personal film about his grandfather instead; "It has no commercial interest but is just for myself - so I can control everything", he wrote.

When it appeared to me that more Chinese were choosing fictional stories to describe and show social conflicts I came across one documentary that was very much about today's Beijing and especially relevant to my project. It was only after I had started my own project that I had the chance to watch *The concrete revolution*. I was surprised how openly director Xiaolu Gao addressed topics such as the destruction of hutongs, migration workers, unpaid workers wages or censorship. In her portrait on modern Beijing, she focuses on the city's countless construction workers who often come from small villages in hope for a better life in the bigger cities. Xiaolu Gao lets them talk about personal experiences, financial desperation but also hopes as today's Beijing is being constructed. For me, this film was of special interest as director Xiaolu Gao made a number of references to her own past – a method that I thought utilising for my own film even before seeing this film.

**Documentaries and other productions on China**

Most of the documentaries in China also concentrate on issues on China. This section on documentaries on China, however, is devoted to those documentaries that are made by non-Chinese production-companies. I feel the need to distinguish between local production companies and production companies from abroad, as each have a very different point of departure. Local productions may have fewer problems with language, whereas the 'foreign eye' of international production companies causes its crews to see occurrences with a different preconceptions - thus causing them to notice things differently than a local crew might do. International teams are also less restricted once the production enters the post-production phase as they often are no longer reliant on Chinese authorities. Being in the field, however, their different appearance may cause increased awareness of the ongoing intrusion and may alter replies and situations differently than they may have turned out under a local production crew.

The production *China in the red* is an international documentary about current China which I found to be especially interesting. *China in the red* is Sue William's attempt to make a film about today's China, which shall reduce American prejudices against the Chinese. By showing individual cases of families and their daily-life problems in which workers are worried to lose their jobs or where parents are hoping that their children will be accepted to university, William's manages to show that the Chinese are not that different to the documentaries expected audience. This documentary, which was professionally planned, funded, filmed and edited over the course of four years is one of the best documentaries on modern China I have seen in a long time. For many, it may disprove prejudices but open new perspectives on modern China.

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24 The flag-rising on Tiananmen square is a daily ceremony at which the Chinese Flag is risen and the Chinese national anthem is played. It still attracts several hundred visitors every day and still is utilised to showing the power of the Chinese government.


26 Its production cost was officially stated at being over one million US $. 
Most other foreign documentaries about today's China are produced in a much shorter period and for a fraction of the cost. With China becoming a major economical power and with the approach of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the international interest in producing and seeing documentaries about China is bound to increase. As an example, I would like to point out the four part television series "China Rises", an international co-production between the New York Times, the Discovery Times, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, ZDF, France 5 and S4C. It explains its interest in China by China's most extraordinary economic, social and political transformation of our time. The four documentary films want to show both sides of the recent changes - those who profit and those who lose out due to the changes. Another series, a 7-part documentary about how modern Beijing is seen through the eyes of Americans, *Beijing today*\(^\text{27}\), is currently in production.

With several international production companies opening up production offices in China, more and more crews begin to produce pieces about China. These numbers are bound to increase further for the 2008 Olympics when for example the ZDF (Second German Television) plans to send 60 journalists equipped with 30 cameras just to cover the events aside the Olympic Games. If each country decides to send just as many and if they all get accredited, the sight of a foreign television team may soon be an everyday occurrence on Beijing's streets\(^\text{28}\).

Interestingly, still only very few international production companies, which have opened distinct offices in China have started their local business with the intentions to produce predominantly for the Chinese market. In most cases, international television channels have opened local dependencies mostly producing explicitly for their mother channel. Only in rare cases do international production companies produce a program specifically for the Chinese market. There are a few exceptions and I would like to point out the Environmental Education Media Project for China (EEMPC). EEMPC is an NGO which attempts to raise Chinese environmental consciousness through local audio-visual productions and by translating international production to Chinese, so that they can then be shown on the Chinese Television. Since their start in 1997 the EEMPC has made and distributed documentaries concerning poverty alleviation as well as human migration in China or energy problems in Mongolia.

The challenges of my project on China

In China, where the media is tightly state controlled, individuals taking up important issues, uncovering further dimensions to actuality with the intentions to shake up society whilst implying social criticism, to pick Rabigers words, may not exactly be what the government wants to see. Yet, as I have shown above, countless documentaries that include interviews are being made in China on a regular basis. The challenges in producing a documentary in and on China are huge and not only found in government restrictions.\(^\text{29}\)

Still, government restrictions are the most obvious obstacles. Professional filming in Beijing requires a film-permit. It is fair to mention, that many other countries, including countries in Europe, have similar regulations for professional productions. To my surprise, journalists who

\(^{27}\) http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/e20026/f6.htm

\(^{28}\) A recent article published in the German "Der Spiegel" suggests that 20.000 journalists are expected to come to China for the period of the Olympic Games. Whilst China promised journalists unlimited journalistic freedom during the Olympic Games, the article points towards several problems that currently still exist. http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,430417,00.html

\(^{29}\) Further possible obstacles include - amongst other things - the smaller network of film-production companies and difficulties in being supplied with film-funding aids.
are working for Beijing offices of international television stations, film on Beijing's streets without the need for further legitimisation as long as they have been officially accredited to work in China. Once they are producing documentary projects or news-reports for international TV-stations outside Beijing they, however, need to seek approval of the Waiban, the Foreign Affairs Office. Jane Hutcheon describes this process in her book about her years as an Australian news correspondent in a changing China. "Spontaneity is firmly discouraged. Written application are required to interview officials or visit state entities like a construction site. For reporting beyond Beijing, foreign journalists are asked to apply to the Foreign Affairs Office (FAO), Waiban (pronounced 'Why Ban'), because officials could ban us, and frequently did." (Hutcheon, J. 2003: 13). The idea behind the FAO is of course to control the media output on China, so that, according to Hutcheon, unfavourable reports on China were often banned whilst a 'better' or 'more interesting village' was proposed from the Chinese sides.

Whether a topic is banned/redirected or not, depends on its content. Recently, China has been more relaxed about a number of topics that once were taboo (such as traffic problems or environment issues). Other topics (such as politics or Falun gong), however, remain delicate or taboo. Currently only students short films are exempted from the need to apply for an official approval; a circumstance that does not set them free to cover otherwise delicate topics. In recent years there have, however, been increasing numbers of artists who have begun to cover more delicate social issues in their exhibitions. Simultaneously, increasing numbers of underground video producers have started to raise such issues.

For me, such a legitimisation could have made the filming less stressful as it would have relieved me of the worry of being caught. Since an accreditation is already difficult to obtain for professional journalists (as only a limited number of journalists are invited to be present and reporting in Beijing) private entities - like I have been - have even more difficulties to obtain such a license. Additionally, becoming accredited is a lengthy and expensive process in which one has to send a detailed plan of action and a description of the expected outcome to the Chinese authorities. I was worried that my application would fail after taking a long time, and I worried further that they may simultaneously be putting my name onto a possible watch-list, which they might keep. I hence opted not to apply and decided to film pretending to be a tourist. After all, my project does not serve any financial motivation but is the work of a student.
6. The field work

In this central part of the written work I take a look at the findings of the field work. This part thus contains both, findings as to how people react to the fast changes as well as my findings of how it was possible to utilise a documentary as a tool for research. Let me stress once more that I urge all readers of this work to also become the audience of the documentary.

Both works draw upon my personal observations whilst in the field, as well as on countless informal conversations with the people I met. Most importantly, however, a lot of my findings are based on several in-depth interviews and a number of shorter interviews. In this written piece of work I will summarise the essence of how the people I interviewed experienced and lived with the changes that surround them. I attempt to draw my own conclusions. Afterwards I will review how my interviewees replied to my interview questions and the fact that they were being filmed.

The process of the interviews

Whilst in the field I have taken and video-recorded thirteen interviews. Ten of these interviews were individual ones, the remaining 3 were group interviews. In these group interviews I have generally focused on one person whilst another present person might, at times, add a thought of his/her own. I have thus interviewed 15 people; eleven men and four women. The men were in the age-range between 29 and 86 years, the women were in between 45 years to 67 years old. Seven of my interviews were organised meetings, which were previously planned and agreed upon. The other six interviews were with people that I met and contacted spontaneously on the streets as I was walking through the city. In most cases I small-talked with them first, slowly approaching a point where I felt comfortable to ask them if they felt it was OK for me to interview them.

I have adapted each interview from my standard list of questions to suit each individual interviewees background, situation and profession, but have always begun asking my interviewees...
questions, which would lead them to tell me what they had been doing or working with fifteen years ago. I then asked them to describe their current work, thus provoking them to generally speak about the personal changes that occurred during the same period. Most of my interviewees answered these questions without hesitation and - as expected - for most their personal situation had changed dramatically. The pursuit towards a better life is conspicuous in the changes of many of my interviewees lives. Their personal economic improvements, most said, were most noticeable to them. Of course many Chinese are still poor, even if most have come out of extreme poverty. The citizens of Beijing, however, have had an especially noticeably increase in wages so that some of my interviewees stated that they could now effort to buy more things even though food may have become more expensive. The taxi driver I interviewed, for example, claimed that 15 years ago he had only earned about 20 yuan each month. He stated that back then even if the food was cheap he could not afford to buy anything else. Today, in contrast, he said, his wages had gone up significantly that even though things have become more expensive he can now go shopping for other things as well. He said: "I can buy anything that I want here in Beijing, now. I am able to buy a car - but I couldn’t have thought about that 15 years ago".

Early on in my interviews I sought to get a description of the changes in Beijing. What did Beijing look like 15 years ago? Without exception, everyone I interviewed described the city's development to being big, great or fast. Interestingly, in describing the changes some of my interviewees were making use of claims and wordings often used in propaganda such as "opening up and reform" or they referred to the official claim used to advertise the 2008 Olympic Games – "New Beijing, great Olympics". Their use of such official claims may be taken as an indicator that those who did so, may have only been reiterating what they have heard rather than describing their own perceptions of the city's change. Such a behaviour ought to be especially taken into consideration when looking at their answers on questions that aimed not only to get them to describe the changes but also to more openly talk about personal feelings.

Comparing today's Beijing with the Beijing of 15 years ago shows how extensively the city has developed. Some of my interviewees have suggested that its change is strong enough to make it impossible for returning visitors to recognise the city. Interestingly, such remarks were not only made by the older generations but also by younger Chinese. Currently, countless construction sites conducting further changes are a reminder as to how Beijing still changes and how it has changed so much in a relatively short period.

My interviewees described the old Beijing as less developed, less comfortable. A frequently used word to describe Beijing's recent changes was 'convenience'. For most, further changes in their personal lives, with the strongest changes appearing in housing and people's living conditions has made life 'more convenient' as many have put it. The people's housing situation is probably the most important factor for how their perception towards a city changes. I did therefore feel the need to concentrate on the changes in people's housing situations.

30 Official documentation of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Commerce claims that in 2005-2006 "The annual average disposable income of urban residents increased by 10.4 percent, 3.3 percentage points more than that of the Ninth Five-year Plan. […] The average personal expenditures of urban residents rose by 9.9 percent over that of 2003 to 12,200 yuan." (Zhao, L. 2005: 16)

31 To portray the fast-moving changes in Beijing Xiaolu Gao's documentary "Concrete Revolution" begins by reciting a famous Chinese story: One morning an old man left his home to buy a newspaper. On his way to the news-stand he was surprised to see new houses all the way. As he arrived at where the news-stand had once stood he took notice that it, too was gone. The old man sadly returned to his home only to find it already being replaced by a new house as he arrived.
Out of my interviewees at least six used to live in hutongs 15 years ago, with the others living in a so-called pingfang. A pingfang could at best be described as a six-storied apartment-block which holds basic apartments. Within the last few years, eight of my interviewees have moved to a more modern apartment building, most of which are newly built high rise buildings on the outskirts of the city. Only three of my interviewees remained living in a hutong; two of these live in those areas in which the hutongs are going to remain. Interestingly, according to an article published on the official governmental web-site of Beijing "hutongs still house about half of Beijing's population -- about seven million people living along roadways which, if strung out, would rival the length of the Great Wall." Unfortunately, the article is missing a date of publication. Today, continuing hutong deconstructions make such a claim appear very unlikely.

For those that had moved to more modern apartments, the size of their living space has increased significantly. Living in a hutong often meant a whole family was sharing one or two small rooms. Flats in older apartment-blocks, built mostly in the 1980s (pingfang-apartments) were just over 50 square meters in size. In contrast, newly built modern apartments measure now often over 150 square meters. Furthermore all interviewees living in new apartments expressed that modern kitchens, modern radiators and a personal toilet and bathroom have also improved their quality of living. Some of them now also own air-conditioners.

The improvements of living conditions in hutongs are less dramatic. A women living in a hutong in the Dongshisitiao-neighbourhood expressed "Beijing has changed a lot. But our hutong has been saved, so it didn’t change at all. The only change is that they renewed water-pipes and the electricity network. Now each family has its own fuse-box. And they have refurbished the public toilets. But we are still using the public toilets. We don’t have toilets in our homes." She shares a room of circa ten square meters with her husband and expressed that she liked the neighbourhood she lives in, because it is situated in the downtown area and because it feels more natural to live in a hutong. Still, she mentioned, that with enough money she would consider to buy a more convenient modern apartment but expected that she would have to move out of town to be able to pay for it.

The situation was very similar in another hutong-neighbourhood in which I met a pensioner who had lived there with his wife for 60 years. They were living in one of the last remaining hutong-neighbourhoods near Tiananmen square and the Forbidden City. In our conversation they told me that they did not know if the government had plans to tear down their hutong-neighbourhood as well. Due to its close distance to the Forbidden City and the government buildings they expected that the construction of new high-rise buildings was unlikely. With expectations to stay, they improved the living quality themselves and redecorated their hutong. They also bought a new air-condition to make it more comfortable in the hot summers. Both mention that their contact to neighbours had unfortunately changed. "All our neighbours are new now. We don't talk to them very often. Before, if you needed help, everyone who lived in the same yard were trying their best to help you. Now it is different. Now everybody lives on their own. They don't care much about others." With the once well-working social network no longer intact, they admitted that they would also like to move to a new apartment. Their pension, however, was too little to allow them to, and after having lived in central Beijing for their whole life a possible new apartment would also have to be in central Beijing, they said.

32 http://www.ebeijing.gov.cn/HomeBj/Hutong/LiHutong/t156914.htm
When I asked my interviewees about their feeling towards the downscaled numbers of hutong-neighbourhoods their answers turned out to be less homogeneous. Interestingly, those living in hutongs appeared to be interested in moving to more convenient apartments whilst many of those living in such apartments saw the need to save the hutong culture. In many short conversations as well as in the longer interviews, many answered circumventive, often focusing on the better quality of living in modern apartments. A taxi-driver I interviewed seemed to try to find an understanding for why the government is taking them away. "We can do nothing about it because the government needs the land. [...] they need it to build new roads so they [the hutongs] have to go" he said, but was simultaneously convinced that "they won’t let all of them go, the government will keep some good ones to remember for our kids and also for the tourists." Some other interviewees, however, have more openly expressed their concern of losing Beijing’s culture. A car mechanic I interviewed said that the reducing number of hutongs is not good "because the hutongs are the elements of Beijing's tradition. The city should keep those hutongs. It is not good now". Possibly with intentions to put his criticism on the government into perspective, he right after expressed that the general changes in Beijing are good.

Only one of my interviewees, Zhang, directly accused the government of making a big mistake by tearing down too many hutong neighbourhoods. He worries that the destruction of hutongs in Beijing may have already caused the city to lose its soul. In an attempt to save hutong-neighbourhoods for later generations, Zhang has organised a group of activists who now take photographs of different hutong-neighbourhoods and publishes them on a web-site33. He said "Beijing has a long history and most of its history has happened in the hutong - not only in the forbidden city. [...] But it is a pity. Most of them have gone. Nobody thinks about to save them [...] But one day people will regret that, because they destroyed everything." I met Zhang on a Sunday morning as he met with other photographers in a hutong-neighbourhood that has largely remained unchanged. Its future was unclear, as it was situated far away from the hutongs that the government has decided to save for future generations and the tourists. Those living in the area had no idea about their future.

I suspected that Zhang and the other activists had chosen to take their pictures in this neighbourhood because they might have had insider information. Zhang, however, stated they did not know anything about government plans. The government on the other hand knows about Zhangs web-site. That day, this became especially obvious when a police-bus closely followed the group that was walking through the hutong taking pictures. This time they did not try to stop the group. Still, in our interview Zhang openly showed his discomfort with their actions. "We are trying to protect the hutong culture and these people are trying to stop us and give us a lot of troubles. They think we are traitors. If they work for the government and if they don't do anything the way they should do…. why are they still doing this job? Who are they? I hate them." But he too, put his criticism into perspective by stating that there are maybe only a few people like that. "But only a few can have very bad influence. Most people really want to do good things in the government but they don’t have the power or the right to do so. It is a pity."

Recently, the Chinese government has begun to preserve some of Beijing’s hutongs. In another article published on the governmental web-site "Beijing International" the protection of hutongs

33 The projects web-site can be found at www.oldbeijing.net
has been declared an urgent priority. A few central hutong-neighbourhoods situated around a lake and near Beijing's ancient drum and bell-towers are now being protected and refurbished. In the last few years, this area has, however, increasingly become the area for Beijing's nightlife. Most of the original owners have sold their hutongs many of which have then been turned into tourist-shops, bars and clubs. To Zhang, this area has nothing to do with the real hutong culture and is not a sign of the governments will to protect the hutong culture. He worries that "in 15 years hutongs will become a museum where a big bunch of fake guys are living in the traditional hutongs. You will have to buy tickets to visit them. How horrible that could be. The government protects a lot of things and puts them into a museum. That is what protect means to them. That is something I really don't want to see." I would not be surprised, if such a museum will be opened even before the Olympic Games.

The hutongs of the Hohai area - Beijing's new area for nightlife - have already been made up for the tourists. Currently, there is at least one original owner left: an 86 year old man has lived there for over 60 years. He has seen this area change. In a conversation he told me that the pedestrian footpath, now being used by countless tourists, once used to be a small ditch. He admitted that the music of the clubs has been a problem to their sleep, but said that he didn't mind the passing tourists. He said, he did not want to leave that area because he knows everyone around but would know nobody in the new place. I wondered if he expected all of Beijing's hutongs to look like this tourist street in the future. He avoided giving a direct answer but said "Of course, everything will change before the Olympics".

To me it seemed as if he did not mind the changes as long as he could stay were he was. In fact, I felt that many of my interviewees were busy adapting to the changes and making use of new found chances and never substantially thought whether the changes to their city were good or bad. When I compared what they were doing today and what they had been working with 15 years ago, it became apparent that everyone of my interviewees has adapted and often built upon new possibilities that are now available to them. The Chinese are masters in adapting to new situations. The old man in the tourist area added some money to his pension by collecting rubbish left by the tourists, the car-repairman was lucky having started a business with many potential customers and my father's former interpreter, Zheng, has become a very successful business man who is now in charge of two companies trading with the US and Australia. By these examples I do not mean to say that all Chinese are benefiting from the changes, however I am suggesting that many have welcomed the changes as new opportunities to improve their lives. In looking for similar chances, many have been too busy searching, to substantially questioning the recent changes.

Challenges to the Chinese cultural identity

The continuous and extensive changes all over the city cause a lot of the people's experiences or shared collective memories of typical elements that allow people to identify with Beijing to being challenged, reduced or altered. The Chinese cultural identity is changed. Typical hutong neighbourhoods are vanishing whilst modern high rise buildings start to form a Beijing skyline.

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34 Surprisingly, the article gives an estimate of 600 hutongs that are being destroyed each year. Considering its publication on a governmental web-site this number has to be taken with caution. Interestingly, the article simultaneously gives an excuse for the destruction of such a high number: the old hutongs reportedly now are in a "very bad condition".

35 In fact, the newly opened Capital Museum has devoted a whole storey to Beijing's hutong culture.

In addition to the visible changes of the city, peoples values have changed. "Today, to become rich has become the feverish pursuit of many from the top to the grassroots. From despising money people have come to adore it. The desire to live a better life has been reinforced by evidences that a higher standard of living may be achievable." (Lin, J. 1994: 134). Within only a couple of years capitalist elements have replaced the socialist way of thinking leading people to search for ways to profit from the recent developments.

In China's transition from a form of socialism that denied the people the right of private property to its recent form that pushes people to aim for private property "the public mood has experienced a great leap forward toward the very material consumption that Mao tried to fight during the Cultural Revolution. Further, the volatility of public mood is also fuelled by the massive restructuring of social interest during market reform, paired with the decline of central planning." (Tang, W. 2005: 195). Such a change prompts many people to wonder how to live and what to believe in, after all, the "changes in urban life since the mid-1980s have been everything but gradual" (Tang, W. 2005: 195). The question if people could identify with such a fast changing city was not at all a question of high priority. I realised that my question if the people could still identify with their city may rather be a Western or European way of thinking where people are rich and free enough to consider options of moving to another city or even country. Many of the Chinese I asked did not understand what my question was aiming at or seemed to reduce my question of being able to identify with a city to satisfaction. They were happy to live in Beijing, all said. "After all, it is the capital", replied one, "whatever you do, it is very convenient here. Like doing business".

Zhang, was the only one who was openly concerned about Beijing's identity and worried that Beijing was currently being changed to look like New York. "If we want to change Beijing to New York we have to wait for 50 years, but if we want to change New York to Beijing they have to wait 5000 years. It's crazy. Now Beijing is closer to being New York." As another example how the old culture was lost, he told me that he used to live in a hutong ally called 'Lian Guang DaJie' - a reference to an old inhabitant of that hutong-neighbourhood. Recently, the government tore down hutongs to widen the street and changed its name into what would translate to 'big cities street'. "That is tacky and stupid. It is made up by someone without a culture. Every of Beijing’s hutong names has a cultural meaning. Now they are just building plazas and gardens that have nothing to do with the old culture", Zhang said.

Whilst some of my interviewees, who also saw a need for the protection of the hutongs referred to the Hohai-area as a good government action, Zhang remained the only interviewee unconvinced that such action could save Beijing's original identity. He said he was ashamed of losing his culture. "If the government will keep destroying the hutongs, in 15 years Beijing will not exist anymore. Maybe in 3 years, maybe in 5 years, maybe in 10 years... Maybe it does not exist anymore today."

Filming in some of the hutong neighbourhoods that have remained unchanged until now, I was at times confronted with the people's discomfort. More than once, was I asked why I was filming their old houses instead of the new high rise buildings that were being constructed just across the street. Those, they told me, were much more interesting objects. This, argues Oscar Hemer in the

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37 On a sidenote: It was clearly noticeable that my interview was not his first, Zhang was used to talking to researchers and the media. At the beginning of the interview, his reply was long and seemed automated. I managed to get him to answer in a more personal way the longer we talked and the more I asked him more direct and personal questions.
booklet "Historic cities in development" is a very normal behaviour. "Instead of being proud of their cultural heritage, people in developing countries tend to be disinterested or even ashamed of it. Old derelict buildings and environments are associated with backwardness and poverty and seen as obstacles to the desired modern development." (Hemer, O. 2004: 5).

In Beijing such a behaviour, it seems, is an indication that many people in hutongs no longer identify themselves with their houses. Now that Beijing is in a transition, it appears that those still living in the hutongs prefer not to identify with their traditional housing or the old values any longer. Asked about the strongest changes in Beijing one of my interviewees interestingly did not state any outer changes to the city but replied, that the people had changed. "The people are getting colder. Before we were all like a big family, but it is different now. Now most people just care about money. It is not as good as before." Such a change in peoples minds, I argue, was to a large degree caused by Chinas changes towards a "capitalism with Chinese characteristics". Many Chinese have begun to request a new identity in which dwellings have been replaced by modern apartments and the bicycle by a car.

Interestingly, at least once during the interviews most of my interviewees brought up the topic of the Olympic Games. It became obvious that the games had become of major importance to most of them. With the exception of Zhang all my interviewees expressed that they were happy about the Olympic Games and many saw them as a reason for the fast development in Beijing. I asked the taxi-driver if he believed that Beijing had developed just as fast was it not going to hold the Olympic Games in 2008. He replied that Beijing would still have developed, but doubted that it would have been at the same speed. I had the feeling that in Beijing many of the ongoing developments - including the tearing down of the hutongs - were justified in the necessary preparations for the Games in 2008. At many places around the city I found billboards praising the Olympic games with wordings (2008 sets the stage of our biggest dream) that I had heard some of my interviewees reiterate. One of my interviewees made an interesting distinction when he tried to answer what the Olympic Games mean to him. He replied that he believes that the Olympic Games are good for the development of Beijing as a city, but he wondered what they mean to the citizens. When I asked my interviewees what they believe to be doing in the future, none could foresee their lives beyond the Olympic Games, which can be seen as a further sign for the level of importance the games have to them. I wonder what will happen once the Olympic Games are over. How will the Chinese reflect on the drastic changes then?

Censorship and the peoples will and way to talk

In China talking to the media has for long caused discomfort to many. Many Chinese fear to say something that may be banned or disliked by the Chinese government, thus they often tend to self-censor whatever they say. Jane Hutcheon shares a story of people's worries to communicate when a camera was present. She attempted to interview a couple that frequently danced on a street in central Beijing. According to Hutcheon the couple originally appeared willing to be interviewed at first but quickly backed out as someone in the crowd around them warned them from talking to the media, shouting 'Remember the Italian!'. Hutcheon reports that the Italian was filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni who made the documentary "Zhongguo" (China) in 1973. The Chinese government found that his film portrayed a cruel and backward picture of the

38 Pao-yu Ching, amongst others
39 Their reiteration can be seen as a sign that they are not speaking what they are thinking but rather what they have been told.
country whilst Antonioni presented himself as a friend of China. Hutcheon describes how 'remember the Italian' became embedded in her brain. "Every Chinese person, middle-aged and older, was going to 'Remember the Italian' before they opened their souls to me." (Hutcheon, J. 2003: p. 32)

Personally, during my fieldwork I never found anyone openly remembering the Italian, I have, however, felt people's worries to talk to me. As I have pointed out in the section 3 on Methodology, I started all my interviews with a short presentation of myself as I approached my interviewees. I told them who I was and that I was currently in Beijing to look at how Beijing has changed. I also told them that I had previously lived in the city for more than three years, which, as it appeared was a powerful method to establish a level of trust. To some this was prove of my long interest in their city, to a few others it also meant that I had experienced Beijing before them if they had moved to Beijing within the last 15 years, as in the case of the car repairman. I welcomed the possibility of using this advantage to built up trust since a higher level of trust sets the prerequisite for being allowed to conduct interviews and allows for more honest answers in the interview situations.

Before leaving for my first trip, I was concerned that the people's fear to talk to the media would be deeply rooted in the society and it would be a rare occasion to find a person willing to talk. I worried that it would be a lot easier to get people into trouble than to get them in front of a camera. During my first research-field-trip in February/March 2006 I conducted a number of test interviews in which I had the chance to put my interview questions to the test. While I had expected that many Chinese would be at unease to talk in front of a camera, I was surprised to learn the opposite. To my surprise most of the Chinese appeared unafraid of speaking to me or in front of a camera. Most were surprisingly talkative. Only very few people appeared afraid and preferred not to be interviewed.

Interestingly, the fact that people were being filmed rarely worried them. If at all, it was the interview that put them at unease. I encountered such a behaviour a little more often during my second trip - my main production phase. I believe this is due to my changed method of contacting people. As described in the methodology section during trip one I had only contacted people through people I knew. That way I only met up with them in their free-time and at places that they chose. I most likely got in touch with a very different group of people, a group that in most cases spoke English and probably is more used to closer contact with foreigners. Furthermore, I was working alone during trip one. During my second trip, however, I was working in a little crew and chose to directly contact people on the street, often whilst they were working. Amongst the people I contacted on the street were also those who lived a very simple life and those who were not used to being contacted by foreigners.

For an example, I approached a family working in an area of Hutongs that were being torn down. Their job was to disassemble brick walls and to prepare the bricks for recycling. I wanted to hear what they were thinking about their job and the developments in the city. I was allowed to film them when they were working or when they were taking their brakes. When I approached them with my camera asking questions, however, they would smile and wave into the camera but would not reply to my questions. Only when I went away interviewing someone else who was less worried about being interviewed and then came back to the family after having finished the other interview would they begin to give short, uncritical answers. Generally, however, they stayed reserved and our interaction remained a short conversation.
One other day during the second trip one of my interviewees got close to ‘remembering the Italian’, to make use of Hutcheon’s words. That day I contacted an old man in a park. He sat on a bench and was playing on a very typical traditional Chinese music instrument. As I approached him to talk about Beijing’s changes, we quickly attracted the interest of a small group of Chinese. The old man patiently answered all my questions. His replies were very positive towards the changes and he stated that they were only possible because China had a government that was able to improve things. Even though he expressively found all the changes to be strong improvements to the city and even though he expressed that they had to thank the good government for improving the city a few bystanders were warning him to speak to me. They reminded him that he may be published on the front-page of a newspaper and the government would know. A women sitting next to him because she was singing to his playing, however, waved them off and believed it to be no problem. As I asked the old man at the end of the interview if he felt comfortable with me using this material he blocked off. He felt it was OK that I interviewed him, but it would be too much for me to use the material in public viewings. His worry to somehow appear in the wrong way (e.g. criticising the government) was suddenly clearly present. This was especially interesting in this case, considering that the old man had no room for criticism but rather missed no chance in praising the changes and the government.

I only got the OK to use the material as I reiterated that I will only make use of it outside China. Suddenly, they no longer had a problem with it. This interview remained the only one in which the interviewed became worried about the contents being published in China. In other interviews, however, I had the feeling that my interviewee did not tell me their complete feelings. In many other situations, my interviewees were good in twisting questions or by answering in a way that they would avoid to argue against the governments actions and methods. I, too, felt what others have called self-censorship. Self-censorship appears to be common at all levels in China writes Stephanie Griest, a journalist who once worked for the China Daily. In her book "Around the bloc" she reports how her Chinese colleagues dealt with the difficulty of knowing what they could write and publish. "For the most part, my colleagues instinctively knew what would and wouldn’t fly with the Censor Board. It was practically a motto with them, and they grinned when they said it: ‘There is no censorship in China. We self-censor.’” (Griest, 2004: 200).

I was thus not denied a short interview when I asked some individuals in Beijing, but nevertheless did not learn about their true feelings. As one example, I would like to point out the interview with the old man who now lives in a hutong-area that has been refurbished for tourists. When I asked him if he feels that one day all the hutongs in Beijing will look like this tourist Hutong area, he only replied that there surely will be a lot of changes before the Olympics. It became clear that he did not want to answer the question and chose to reply circumventive. This self-censorship was a very common practice. At times I tried to push them to answer by rephrasing or reiterating the question, but most of the times it would not get me any further.

Therefore I was more surprised during two interviews in which my interviewees were a lot more open in their criticism against the government. One of these cases is Zhang and his anger against the government for stopping him and his groups from taking photos of the Hutongs. As I have mentioned before, with reference to the government he even said "I hate them". In another interview, a former Hutong inhabitant described the poor peoples situation and their struggle to find affordable flats. He, too, was very critical towards the government and even said that I should not let him talk too much about politics. As he nevertheless gave an insight to his thoughts on the
government he turned around every now and then. This may have been due to the fact that he intended to check if officials or police were near, or simply, because his family was waiting a little further down the road. He was very open about not being able to talk about that topic too much - which in itself shows his opposing view on the government.

Both, he and Zhang, took good care to put their criticism into perspective by also raising good points of recent developments or by stating that "most in the government are good people, but they don’t have the power to do the good things". I felt, it was apparent that they did so in order to reduce the strengths of their previous argument and to show their "support" for the government.

After returning home

At the end of this project work I was both, happy and somewhat surprised that I succeeded in filming in Beijing without any bigger problems. Neither was I stopped by officials or police nor were my interviewees contacted by officials. As described above, some of my interviewees have reacted with some reservation when I intended to interview and film them. In the end however, I managed to conclude with my documentary film and embarked on the long process of the editing of the film.
7. Conclusion, Review & Outlook

In this chapter I would like to review my research process as such, give a conclusion and point out a direction of where I plan to go from here. Then I also consider and name a few research project alternatives, which may be interesting to study for the future and finally name a few ideas of different approaches on how to do a documentary about the changes in Beijing.

When I began to consider possible final project options, I instantly knew which project I favoured the most. At first I did not dare to embark on my favourite choice however, because of doubts of being able to deal with possible obstacles. In retrospect I am happy that I chose this project. The changes in Beijing and their effects on the population had for long caught my interest. Being able to analyse how people still feel at home in this constantly changing city was very appealing to me, considering that some Beijing citizens and I might share a few memories and experiences of the old Beijing.

Through my research I learned about some feelings of my interviewees and found it possible to project this outcome on the Beijing population as such. All of the people I interviewed noticed and described the changes. Without exception every one was effected by the changes whilst only a very few saw risks. A few were worried that a more international Beijing meant that more rich people were moving into the city, whilst the poor people had to go. Interestingly, my question if the people still felt able to identify with their city was at first not understood by most. I felt that they have never previously asked themselves such a question. Most Chinese seemed to rather rate the developments in Beijing as a chance for also achieving a better personal life. To many of them, it appeared, a city in which people can live comfortably, is a city they can identify with. And Beijing, they said, is getting more comfortable and more convenient all the time. And with it comes freedom and a greater personal mobility.

As I began thinking about this project, I presumed that the drastic changes in the cities traffic to many would be of greatest importance. Yet as it turned out during my research these changes may have been the most obvious changes for me, the returning visitor, but were only secondary...
to the Chinese citizens. They were much more concerned with changes in housing or their personal financial situation. For most of my interviewees their living situations had changed so dramatically, that the other changes in Beijing such as those in transportation were noticed, yet were only of secondary importance.

With only 15 interviewees in a large city with a population of over 7.5 million people\(^\text{40}\) spread out over ca. 18,000 square kilometres one may question objectivity. In a city as diverse as Beijing, one could therefore question if my approach to find out about the true feelings of Beijing’s citizens has proven to be successful. One can thus ask if such a relatively small number of interviewees compared to Beijing’s huge population can truly mirror the general thought of a whole city or if it is at all possible to depict a commonly shared view and understanding of such a complex matter.

Maybe, for a future project, it would be more sensitive to focus less on the overall population of Beijing and more on those belonging to a specific group such as those of a specific hutong neighbourhood that is about to give way to deconstruction workers. Or those living in the Hohai area, the hutong neighbourhood that has been preserved but is more and more turning into Beijing’s nightlife area. As another possibility, it may be interesting to focus on specific older or younger generations. While such a sample may have allowed for a more exact depiction, it would have obviously portrayed only the view of the chosen group.

My aim, however, was to portray a shared view of all Beijing citizens. With intentions to limit my sample I have restricted myself by area in a way in which I concentrated only on those living in Beijing's city centre\(^\text{41}\). This still is a huge population for which one could argue I should have considered to make use of quantitative methods such as a survey. I did consider it, but have opted against such a method for four reasons: First I found it difficult to find a way with which I could have handed out surveys to a representative group of people all without risking to be noticed and questioned by police. Secondly, I expected that many Chinese would prefer not to answer a social survey conducted - especially one handed out by a foreigner. A survey seems more official and is less personal and do thus miss the possibility of assessing body language. Furthermore, surveys can be filled out without providing a means of for assessing if a reply had possibly been altered or self-censored. I would have had less 'control' to see if their answers are honest, and would not have had the possibility to convince possible interviewees/respondents with charm or trust.

I thus believe that my research - the interviews combined with my experiences, observations and conversations - has been able to give a (visual) impression about how the citizens of Beijing are personally effected. The gained information, I hope, is valuable to those working in the field of Development communication. Furthermore I hope the information will be valuable and interesting to those interested in China and more specifically Beijing.

For future projects about a changing Beijing several different studies may be interesting to research. First, it would be interesting to use the same approach I used now - but after the Olympic Games. How will the Chinese reflect on the changes, once the Olympics are not the goal any

\(^{40}\) Beijing's urban area. Additionally Beijing is currently the home to ca. one million construction workers with temporary permits, as well as a big proportion of China's so-called floating population, a term that describes all those travelling through China's provinces and cities in search for work. Beijing thus houses people of all backgrounds and different social stands.

\(^{41}\) by which I mean inside the third ring.
longer? Such a research could be undertaken a year after the Olympics and would offer possibilities for interesting answers.

Alternatively, it would be interesting to conduct research which does not to focus on the perception of Beijing's citizens towards the recent changes, but to instead focus on the views of people who live in villages around Beijing. Surely, Beijing’s neighbours, towns like Miyun and Tanshan have themselves felt the changes and have been transformed to become cities. Other places, like several villages just out of Beijing however, have not changed so substantially. How do they view a growing city such as Beijing and how does it affect their lifestyle and future? Another field of research could be to find Beijingers living abroad and to interview them about their feelings towards the cities changes. The advantage of interviewing them is their reduced dependency on the Chinese government which may cause them to give more honest answers, the down-side however may be, that they have themselves not seen a lot of these changes happen, and may not be so effected by the changes - due to their position abroad or because they belong to the upper class and are thus not directly effected by e.g. changes in hutong neighbourhoods. Additionally depending on how long they have been abroad, they have gained an outsiders perspective or may have even lost the connection to the city.

Likewise, I have a new idea for an interesting documentary on the changes of Beijing for which one would need to find a Beijing raised Chinese citizen who has now been living abroad and has not been back to Beijing in many years. Once a protagonist willing to participate was found, one would jointly travel to Beijing and depict the changes from his point of view. Such an approach, I believe, allows for a visual and very personal account.

Now, I will also begin the process of producing a DVD and other media masters, with which I will apply at a number of film-festivals throughout the world. Also, a web-site where the film is advertised will be reachable at http://www.cycleofchange.tv soon.

I plan to return to China in spring 2007. I look forward to showing my interviewees what the outcome of my work looks like. I will also provide other interested parties, such as the German School Beijing, with copies of my work and will keep my eyes open for possible ways of showing this film to a bigger audience within China. For that I will need to edit a version that excludes the interview which has not received the clearance to be shown in China. I am positive that the film would also work without loosing too much, if that interview is cut out.

Places, such as the Beijing Goethe Institute or other similar institutions, may be a valuable source of information and may be able to get me in contact with further places and groups of people who may be interested to read, hear and see my outcomes.

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42 Admittedly, finding such a person will be a long and difficult process - especially because of China's policy that allows free travel was only introduced a few years ago.

43 http://www.dspeking.net.cn
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8. Annex

List of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Job/description</th>
<th>Living situation now</th>
<th>Living situation earlier</th>
<th>Type of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zheng, Peijian, 39 years</td>
<td>Business man</td>
<td>Modern apartment at 4th ring</td>
<td>Older appartment (pingfang)</td>
<td>substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu, Tony, 44 years</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Modern apartment in central Beijing</td>
<td>Older appartment (pingfang)</td>
<td>substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu, 51 years</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
<td>Modern apartment outside 4th ring road</td>
<td>Older appartment (pingfang)</td>
<td>substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li, 40 years</td>
<td>Drummer</td>
<td>Older apartment (pingfang) central</td>
<td>Hutong (central)</td>
<td>substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang, 33 years</td>
<td>Hutong-activist</td>
<td>Older apartment (pingfang) outside 4th ring road</td>
<td>Hutong (central)</td>
<td>substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiao, Lu, 53 years</td>
<td>Women in Hutong</td>
<td>Hutong (saved) in central Beijing</td>
<td>Same Hutong</td>
<td>substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68 &amp; 73 years</td>
<td>Couple in Hutong</td>
<td>Hutong near Tiananmen (future unknown)</td>
<td>Same Hutong</td>
<td>long conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years</td>
<td>&quot;Brother&quot;</td>
<td>New apartment outside 4th ring road</td>
<td>Hutong (central)</td>
<td>long conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen Wei 28 years</td>
<td>Car mechanic</td>
<td>New apartment</td>
<td>Hutong</td>
<td>substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86 years</td>
<td>Old man in park playing instrument</td>
<td>New apartment</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Substantial to be used outside China only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 60 years</td>
<td>Group in park</td>
<td>New apartment</td>
<td>(Pingfang)</td>
<td>conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 years</td>
<td>Bicycle Shop owner</td>
<td>Older appartment</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Shorter interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 years</td>
<td>Old man in hutong - Tourist area</td>
<td>Hutong near hohai</td>
<td>Same hutong</td>
<td>Shorter interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a list of people that I had important conversations and interviews with. It also shows their current and previous living conditions.
List of interview questions

- What did you do 15 years ago?
- What are you doing today?
- What do you think has changed in Beijing in the last 15 years?
- Why is it that Beijing has changed (so much)?
- Can you describe Beijing 15 years ago. How did it look?
- Obviously there are changes in traffic. What do you say about these changes?
- Where are all the bicycles?
- Do you ride the bicycle?
- Do you use your bike less often today?
- Do you want to buy a car/When did you buy your first car and what did it feel like?
- With all the traffic jams one could argue it is faster to go by bike. What do you think?
- I heard some young Beijingers say riding the bike is "uncool". Do you think that?
- Do you think the bicycles will ever come back in the big numbers?
- What are the most important changes in Beijing to you?
- There are big developments in housing. What is your standpoint on this?
- How did you live 15 years ago? How do you live today?
- Do you think that the Hutongs are getting less? Will they all be gone soon?
- So more and more Chinese will move into flats (like yours)? How will this change their social stand?
- With these fast changes, do you think that people still feel at home in Beijing?
- Can you still identify with this city?
- (How) is it possible to adapt to these fast changes?
- Do you feel you live a better life than 15 years ago?
- Are you happier today? (Why?)
- How have the changes changed you?
- Tell me about the moment you noticed that Beijing had changed? (When was that?)
- What do you think you will be doing in 15 years?
- How will Beijing look in 15 years?

Documentary Production: Technical Equipment and Project Budget

The documentary was shot on a new Sony HVR-A1E digital video camera that supports High Definition Video (HDV). I chose to buy this camera as it is very small yet at the same time offers a high picture quality, a number of manual settings and professional audio-connections - a prerequisite for good quality audio during interviews. After some testing I decided to film in DVCAM thus opting against the HDV format which offers a better picture quality only to those equipped with very modern television sets but has the disadvantage of still potentially causing more trouble in post-production. The post-production of the film was done using the Final Cut Studio package. I have invested in such a system in the past months and therefore already owned a system including enough hard drive space.

I had budgeted a total of about 3000€ for this project. This relatively low figure was only possible due to the facts, that I was not calculating the cost of my previously bought technical equipment of ca. 2300€ for the Camera, ca. 2500€ for the Powerbook with enough hard disk space and RAM and 1000€ for the editing software. Furthermore, all of my friends help along the way as well as my personal work of this project remained - of course - unpaid. I would like to stress that this figure would hence be much higher on a commercial project.
For a very rough budget, I did calculate with the following:

- Two travel trips to Beijing: 750€ each = 1400€ total
- Living in Beijing: ca. 70€/week = 320€ for six weeks
- Food in Beijing: 50€/week = 300€ for six weeks
- Local transportation + the buying of a bicycle = 200€
- Communication: 40€
- Services: translation, interpreters, assistance: 500€
- Camera extras / tapes, etc. = 120€
- Post-production extras: 120€

**Local supervisor**

I also used my first trip to get back into contact with John D. Liu whom I roughly know from the time when I was living in Beijing. John D. Liu is a documentary filmmaker who has been living in Beijing for many years and who is now heavily engaged in making films about environmental issues in China. He is also the founder of the NGO EEMPC (Environmental Education Media Project China) and has agreed to be my local project supervisor.\(^44\) When I returned for my second field trip to commence the research work we met again. He provided me with a few contact details of people interesting to my project. More importantly, however, his experience in media-productions in China mixed with his big network of people and his English and Chinese language skills have made him a backup I could rely on, had I got into any type of difficult position such as trouble with police or government officials.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank a number of people who have helped me in many ways to being able to write this Master Thesis:

A big "thank you" goes to all my interviewees for taking their time to answer my questions; everyone who helped me whilst in the field in Beijing; my supervisor Florencia Enghel who has done a great job in reading several drafts and guiding me in the right directions; my local supervisor, John D. Liu; my lecturers and teachers at Malmö University, as well as my fellow students many of whom have helped me with tips and discussions along the way; and last, but not least, a big thanks to Deike Canzler as well as my family who have encouraged and supported me at all stages.

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