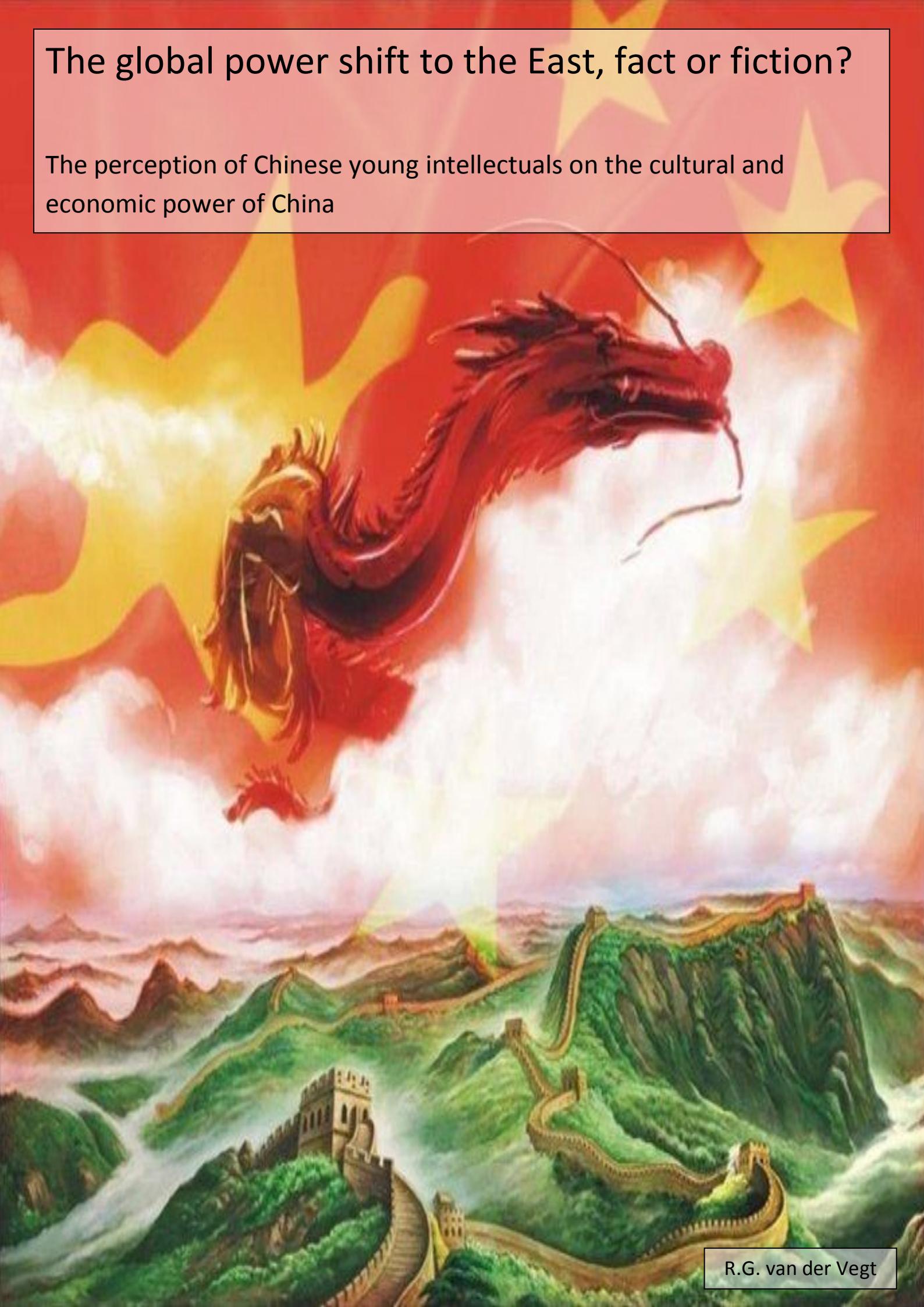


# The global power shift to the East, fact or fiction?

The perception of Chinese young intellectuals on the cultural and economic power of China





**Utrecht University**

This thesis is submitted for the completion of the Master Cultural Anthropology:  
'Multiculturalism in a Comparative Perspective'.

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## **1. Introduction**

Beijing is a city that is intoxicated by the spirit of change. New housing, roads, sports venues, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, shops, broad boulevards, shopping malls, futuristic buildings and subway lines spring up almost weekly. Almost no other megalopolis experienced such an unprecedented change during the last two decades as this fast modernizing city of the country that is soon to lead the world economically. It is a city in the midst of reinventing itself and that feeling of being in permanent flux can be disorientating. While tower blocks dot the skyline, traditional life can still be found in the old hutongs (alleyways) located in the heart of the city. Temples and shopping malls can be found next to each other, as do expensive five-star-restaurants and affordable street food stalls. There are people who follow the traditional Chinese lifestyle and respect Chairman Mao while at the same time the youth might party till late with the newest designer clothes on their body and the latest smartphones in their hands. It is a city of contrasts because the city has transformed itself at a speed few other metropolises could ever hope to match. Thirty years ago people were given coupons in order to buy commodities. Spending was limited to a minimum, something which sounds ridiculous now as the world looks enviously at its growing rates and its fizzing energy.

Yet mainstream thinking in the Western world is filled with negative perspectives when it comes to China both in- and outside the academic world. The view that the West is the dominant power and the East are backward others is deeply embedded in the Western mind. This is because the Western way of living has been and still is being portrayed as the most developed one by governments, economists and the media. Even now, in a world where China is increasingly gaining cultural and economic influence the Western world portrays China as an ‘evil empire’ and a threat to the ‘free world’ (Lary, 2006). Furthermore Chinese people living in China are being portrayed as being unfree and unhappy in the Eurocentric perspective. This inability of the West to understand the rise of China is another point from where one can see how ideologically biased Western observers have become (Mahbubani, 2008: 133).

What is missing in most Western views of the world, including academic debates, is the voice of China and Chinese people. The Chinese government and the media which is controlled by the government portrays the information in the opposite way as the Western governments and media do, they are positive about everything that is going on. According to the newspapers in China there are very few problems, all people in China are benefitting from the reforms and everyone is happy with the developments. Moreover, like China is set in a bad daylight in the Western newspapers, so are the Chinese newspapers increasingly focusing on the economic crisis in the West and opposing it to their own growth to show the superiority of China and the de-Westernization of the world. But how can the views of Western and Chinese media be completely different? Either one or both of them has to be looking at China with an ideological stance. Therefore I am curious how the next generation of China, the Chinese young intellectuals, has experienced these transformations, and how they view the cultural and economic power of China in relation to that of the Western world. Do they agree with one of the views or do they look upon the world in a different way? With this context in mind the following research question has been formulated:

How do Chinese young intellectuals in Beijing perceive the cultural and economic power of China in relation to that of the West?

In order to answer this question I have to provide information about the context of the transformations in Beijing due to its rapid cultural and economical development and information as to how Chinese young intellectuals have perceived this. Will they think favorably about the developments or are the negative thoughts more clearly in their mind? Will they think like the Chinese media or the Western media or do they have a completely different perspective on these issues? It will be interesting to ask them how they have perceived and experienced the rapid transformations because their life must have changed very quickly over the last two or three decades. I have talked with the Chinese young intellectuals about issues ranging from freedom and human rights to the deteriorating air quality.

Another part of this research question is regarding the rising cultural and economic power of China formulated as ‘the shift of global power to the East’ by Mahbubani (2008). This part will be about the differences between China and the Western world and how Chinese young intellectuals perceive the “China threat theories” from the West and the “peaceful rise” of China. Do they think China will be the country to rule the world in the future? Will Chinaization instead of Westernization take place in countries across the globe? A broad range of issues relating to these questions will be explored in this part of my thesis.

In order to collect the necessary information I have conducted fieldwork in Beijing for three months. I have mainly collected the information through informal interviews with Chinese young intellectuals. Usually I sat down with them and had a one-to-one conversation, sometimes I recorded the interviews, sometimes I made notes and at other times I thought headnotes were sufficient. It was easy to find my research participants as everyone in Beijing seems to be interested either to practice their English or to inform a foreigner about China. Also because it is about their own experiences and opinions it was very easy for them to participate in my research. Other data comes from hanging around in the city where I experienced and saw the growth of Beijing myself. Many subway lines and tower blocks are still under construction while many local Beijing people told me they get lost all the time because everything is changing so rapidly. Collected fieldwork data has been cross-referenced with academic theory in order to make an empirical cycle (Tijmstra & Boeije, 2011). More detailed information on the methodology can be found in attachment one.

## **2. From the end of the Mao-era to unprecedented change**

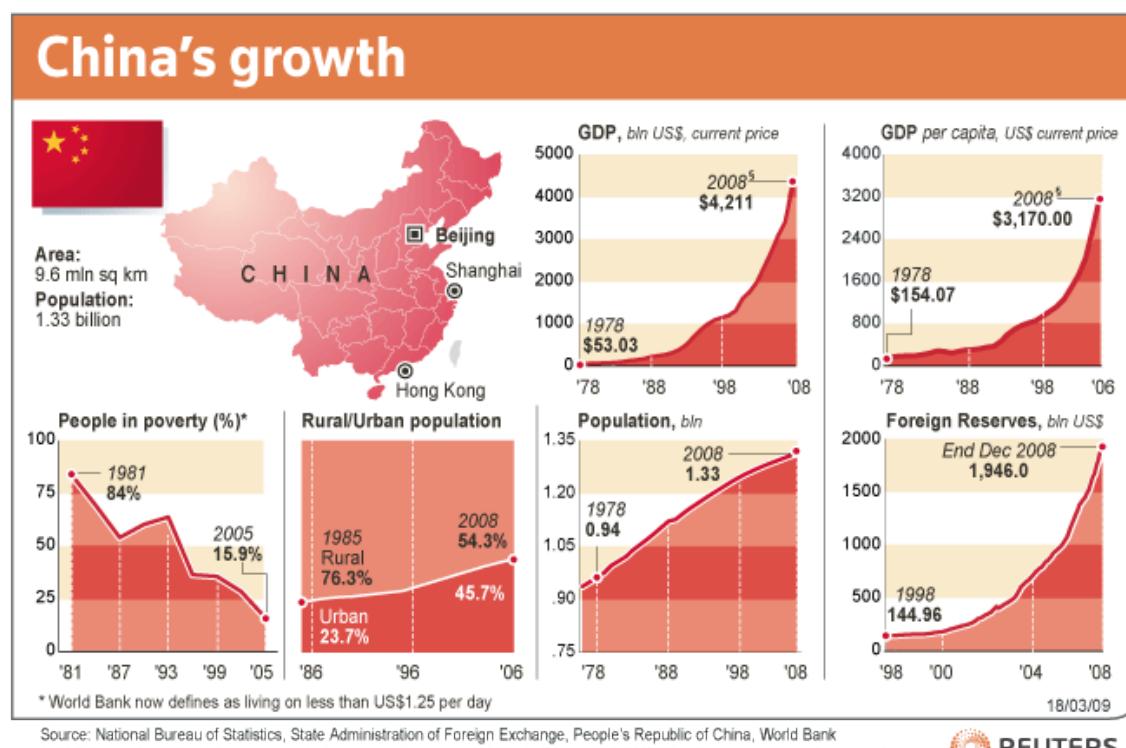
*"When the young Mao Tse-tung agitated for revolution, he found a vivid way to get his point across to an uneducated audience: He picked up a single chopstick and snapped it in two. Then he picked up a handful of chopsticks: They would not break. Thus he showed that so long as everyone stood side by side, no force could withstand the tide of revolution. By gathering together China's scattered, indignant chopsticks, Mao finally was able to ascend Tiananmen on Oct. 1, 1949, and proclaim the foundation of the People's Republic of China; a one-party socialist state controlled by the Communist Party"* (Los Angeles Times, 2011).

Chairman Mao then ruled China for 31 years and his policies can be compared to the landscape of the Alps: full of high peaks and dangerous low points. It is because of this ambivalence that Mao and his reign remain a controversial topic of debate with little agreement over his legacy both in China and abroad. He is generally credited and praised with having unified China and ending the previous decades of civil war. He is also credited with having improved the status of women in China and improving literacy, education, health care, providing universal housing and raising life expectancy (Gao, 2008; Ebrey, 2010). In addition, China's population almost doubled during the period of Mao's leadership, from around 550 to over 900 million (Ebrey, 2010). On the other hand, Mao is generally accused of being a dictator who systematically abused human rights. During the Great Leap Forward period of his reign almost the same number of people died in four years during a time of peace -through starvation, forced labour and executions (40 to 70 million) - than the amount of people that were killed in wartime during the Second World War (50 to 70 million) (Fenby, 2008; Rummel, 1991). His supporters nevertheless claim that his policies laid the groundwork for China's later rise to become an economic superpower, while others claim that his policies delayed economic development and that China's economy only underwent its rapid growth after Chairman Mao's policies had been widely abandoned.

But whether he laid the groundwork or not, there is no denying that the policies that he set in place shaped a nation and was the base of what we know of China today. The Great Leap Forward, the Cult of Mao, the Cultural Revolution and the Hundred Flowers Campaign all

created the environment that pushed China towards the situation it was found in at the time of Mao's death in 1976: a political and economic mess.

From then on until 1992 Deng Xiaoping served as the paramount leader of the People's Republic of China. He is considered the architect of China's economic reforms and opening up to the world by developing the so-called "Socialism with Chinese characteristics". This new brand of socialist thinking consists of keeping centralized control and a one-party state while introducing market-based methods of economic growth to revitalise the economy. It is a political strategy used exclusively by China and ever since its implementation China has developed into one of the fastest growing economies in the world for over 30 years while raising the standard of living of hundreds of millions of Chinese. The following graph gives an overview of this growth:



This chapter will review the economic developments from a local perspective. By telling the stories of young Chinese intellectuals growing up in an ever changing environment I want to show how China in general and Beijing in particular have developed during the post-Mao era.

## 2.1 Modernisation & Commercialisation

*On a normal weekday, I am walking in Beijing from Tsinghua University towards Wudaokou subway station on Chengfu road as I am on my way to meet Fang Hua. As I am walking the tall modern buildings on my left-hand side with clean shiny windows catch my eye. I look up to see what kind of buildings this are as I see the coloured letters of Google spelled out on top of the first one. As I walk a little further I see Wenjin Hotel, the Industrial and Commercial bank of China, a Wall Street English office and a Starbucks cafe. It's a huge contrast with the other side of the road that consists of a disordered amassment of tiny shops selling everything from dumplings and bāozis to newspapers, bicycles and bracelets.*

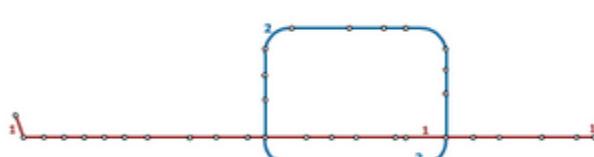
This is Beijing; due to the high speed of development the contrasts in the city are huge. Some parts of the city still have a touch of its past as little communities selling a variety of products can be found at every corner. In the traditional city centre the *hutongs* represent an important historical cultural element of the city. The hutongs are residential neighbourhoods which still form the heart of Old Beijing as it represents the culture of normal Beijing people in contrast to the court elite represented by the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace. During the last two decades however, the old touch of Beijing is disappearing quickly as many hutongs have been demolished in order to build new residential areas, shopping malls, wide boulevards and new roads. The hutongs that have been preserved have been modernized and marketed as a trendy tourist attraction; they have become a commercial venture. The mentioned reason for changing the hutongs is that the old architecture is not safe anymore for a modern city like Beijing, those buildings could collapse at any time and need to be replaced by new ones. But it is not only the hutong area that has been replaced by modern infrastructural projects. Beijing is in a constant flux of change and most of the things one is able to see in the city are in fact newly constructed. But there seems to be no end to its rapid development and this development did have repercussions to Beijing's rich cultural heritage. Zhong Wang, a Chinese university student I met in Beijing who has studied abroad in one of the best universities in the United States of America has told me the following about these rapid developments:

*Everything in Beijing is new, or at least from the last 50 years. Sometimes people tell me that Beijing is at least 850 years old but what can you really see that is that old? The Forbidden City could be described as old but this is just a touristic sight, there is nothing left from ordinary Beijing. Even the hutongs have changed, it is not like it was when I grew up, back then people used to sit outside in front of their house and casually ask people to join them to talk to them and to eat a meat skewer. But now it is commercialised, there is nothing left of the way the hutongs used to be, of the way Beijing used to be. Beijing now is characterized by skyscrapers, shopping malls and other concrete. Most of the old things have either been commercialised or demolished in order to build the new Beijing which is a shame. But on the other hand local people do not object too much because they have become rich because of these developments.*

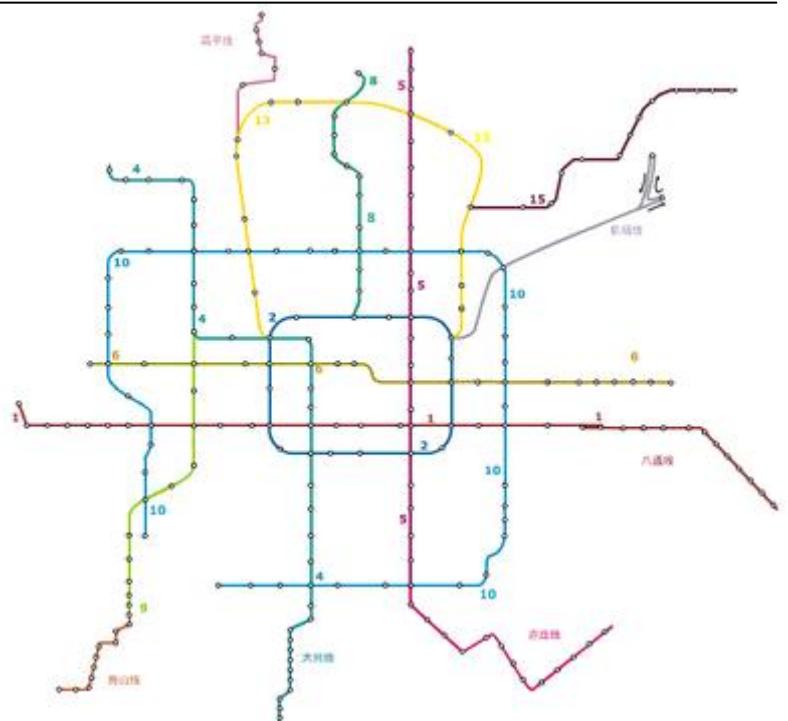
The speed of development has been high since 1980 but ever since the city obtained the rights to host the 2008 Summer Olympics in 2001 the government invested heavily in new facilities and transportation systems and the speed of change became almost fictitious. New hallmarks include the CCTV Tower, the Bird's Nest, Terminal three of the international airport and The New Poly Plaza. Beijing keeps changing as new infrastructure such as shopping malls, subway lines and high-rise apartment buildings spring up almost weekly. In fact, every district of the city has numerous newly-developed multi-story shopping malls with a variety of brands ranging from H&M and Gucci to Peak and NE Tiger, from KFC to Hai Di Lao, and from Starbucks to Happy Lemon. The shopping malls look highly sophisticated and neat on the inside and I learned that most of them have been developed during the last few years. Once I was walking around with a Chinese friend called Lin Lin in a seven-storey shopping mall in Wanshoulu in Western Beijing called CapitaMall Crystal and I asked her when this shopping mall was built as even the escalators still smelled like they were new. She answered that it had opened in the end of September 2012, just like many of the shopping malls have opened within the last five years around Beijing. In fact, the developer of this mall, CapitaMalls, is one of the largest shopping mall developers in Asia with this new mall bringing its total in Beijing to nine. In China the company now has 57 shopping malls in 35 cities, 15 of which are still under construction, which shows the speed of change (CapitaMalls Asia, 2013).

Transportation is another thing that has developed really quickly ever since Beijing obtained the rights to host the Summer Olympics. In 2000 there were only two subway lines and few people used it as it was not really able to get you anywhere. But since 2012 there are 16 subway lines and many travellers each day as it is a very convenient and affordable way to get around the city. It is currently the longest subway system in the world and it ranks third in terms of annual ridership, after those of Tokyo and Seoul (Beijing Subway, 2012). Almost every few months a new subway line is being developed and having seen the planned subway map of 2016<sup>1</sup>, it is probably going to stay like that for a while. But it is not only the subway system that has been developed in terms of public transportation developments. Just a few years ago Beijing used to have really poor buses with solid wooden chairs and highly polluted engines. But now Beijing mainly uses highly developed electric buses for its bus routes. Then for the wider China there has been the development of the high-speed rail service of which there is a train station in Beijing. High-speed rail service has only been introduced in China in 2007 but by 2012 China already had the world's longest high-speed rail network in the world, the world's longest railway line and most daily passengers per day (Railway Technology, 2012; International Railway Journal, 2013). Below is a picture to illustrate the development of the subway system in Beijing.

Beijing subway system in 2000.



Beijing subway system in 2012.



<sup>1</sup> See attachment two.

Although reading about the economic growth in China before going to Beijing gave me an impression that things must have been developed fast, I did not realize the real speed of change until local Beijingers told and showed me themselves. In the beginning of my stay one of my research participants in Beijing offered to show me around in the city and it turned out to be a real eye-opener. Fang Hua, originally from Beijing, moved to Shanghai in 2011 because her job required her to relocate. We met during one of her visits to Beijing and we planned to go to Houhai the next week. Houhai is an area in Beijing famous for its lake and its surrounding district. The area has become known for its nightlife, restaurants, bars and cafes and is surrounded by a variety of hutongs.

*It is 12 February as Fang Hua picks me up in her parents' car, a red Volkswagen Golf, in front of my apartment in Tsinghua University. The temperature outside is still below 0°Celcius as I dress myself warmly with a scarf around my neck, a hat on my head and a pair of gloves around my hands. We greet each other outside of the car before I get inside. Once inside Fang Hua starts driving from my place towards Houhai in inner Beijing, which should take around 30 or 40 minutes as she expects there will not be so many cars on the road during the Spring Festival. The Spring Festival is also referred to as "the greatest human migration" as millions of Chinese go back home to visit their families. On the contrary however, we find out it is awfully busy on the road as I take a look at the different cars while traffic is moving slowly. There are a few cars with a Chinese brand on the road but I mainly see Toyota, Nissan, Volkswagen and Audi. However, the number of people driving a Lexus, BMW or Mercedes cannot be underestimated either. Fang Hua explains me that in the past there were not so many people who owned a car, but now Beijing is one of the worst cities to drive in because of the daily traffic jams. As we are driving I notice it is around the third time already that Fang Hua took the wrong direction as she gets really frustrated. I ask her if she normally takes the subway as she answers me: "I went to Shanghai only two years ago and I visit my parents in Beijing very frequently, but every time there are so many changes which makes it very hard to find the direction for me. In Fact, I don't recognize a lot of directions anymore, that's how fast the city is changing". I was quite surprised by this but soon the next opportunity for amazement presented itself to me. We decided to eat something in another area in Beijing first before going to Houhai as we*

*ended up in Sanlitun during lunch time. Sanlitun blends together entertainment, leisure and world class shopping facilities in buildings separated by alleys, courtyards, lanes and squares. The buildings look very trendy and modern as they consist of a mix of unusual shapes, textures and vibrant colours. It is a clear example of Beijing's cosmopolitan present as Fang Hua tells me this particular area of Sanlitun we currently set foot on did not even exist when she left Beijing two years ago.*

What I experienced that day with Fang Hua resembles the speed of change of Beijing through a personal experience. Even Wudaokou, the area I have been living for three months changed perceptibly over time. In the three months I have been living there I saw the development of a new building for Tsinghua University, the opening of a new KTV Club and a widening of some of the sidewalks located between my apartment and the subway station. But of course the rapid growth rates that China has become known for also have a downside. In the beginning of this section the demolishing and commercialising of old Beijing has already been mentioned. But another thing that is even more serious is the negative effect it has for peoples' health. Beijing is one of the cities in the world where the air is highly polluted. Almost everyone has seen pictures of the smog that terrorise Chinese cities, particularly Beijing. But it is not only the air that is deteriorating; water, food and drinks are under scrutiny too. It is no secret that the cause of China's grim environmental situation is the GDP-oriented pursuit of economic growth. Both the central and the local governments dedicate all their energy to pursuing economic growth instead of focusing on the environment or the quality of life. It is therefore not surprising that large food scandals have been reported from China during the last few years. One of these is for example the 2008 Chinese milk scandal when Chinese baby milk has been contaminated with melamine causing 300.000 victims. Or another recent example is from March 2013, when thousands of dead pigs were found floating in the Huangpu river near Shanghai, a main water source for the city's 23 million residents. I experienced most Chinese citizens are very cautious when it comes to their health, such as when buying food or drinks from the supermarket. Some of them even limit their time outside to a minimum as air quality usually above the level that's healthy as set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). When I asked Zhong Wang, another research participant, about the deteriorating life quality because of the developments he answered me the following:

*In my parents' generation there used to be no pollution but now everything is highly polluted; the air, the water, the food, the drinks. Everything is very bad and this is also the reason why everybody who travels to China suffers from food poisoning, throat problems and many other things. Right now the life expectancy is still going up because the generation that is old now has experienced the huge growth without the pollution. But I think my generation will start to suffer from this in terms of a lower life expectancy, because even though we do not get sick from these things, it will have long-term health effects.*

On the other hand it can be seen as an old but successful way of development to focus on GDP growth while making it polluted first, and to improve the situation afterwards. Think of the development of the Western world in the 1950's and 1960's for example. Both Los Angeles and London used to have a historical struggle with smog as the latter one even went into the history books as the Great Smog of '52 (Davis, Bell and Fletcher, 2002). Just like Beijing in the present, the air in Los Angeles and London in those times was so polluted that it caused effects on the visibility, athletes could not train outdoors, people wore masks to block the polluted air and elderly and young people went to the hospital on a regular basis because of respiratory problems.

Some researchers also argue that the problem is a consequence of globalization and the outsourcing of pollution. The United States and Europe for example, have shut down many polluting industries such as coke plants in their own countries while transferring that production to developing countries such as China. China is still mainly a production country and many factories are opening up in various areas on an almost weekly basis. Volkswagen for example announced in March to open up ten more factories in the coming years, seven of which are in China (The Local, 2013).

The effects of the developments are very ambiguous for the city and its people. But what has China's rapid growth really meant for its people? Have their lives developed as fast as the city has? The next section aims to shed light on these questions.

## 2.2 A growing middle class?

*As the sky is highly polluted on a cold day at the end of February, I am walking towards one of the many huge shopping malls that characterize modern Beijing. On the way I pass a few street vendors who are sticking together in one place and are selling everything from pre-cut pineapples for 10 RMB to bracelets for 15 RMB and iPhone screen protectors for 15 RMB (USD 2.45). I am a little concerned about their standard of living as I walk past their moveable vendor and get close to the entrance of the shopping mall. As I enter the mall the clean marble floors are shining brightly as the lighting on the ceiling illuminates it. Like most of the malls it is designed for people from the upper middle class to the high-end which is highly noticeable due to the high prices they charge for drinks, food, clothes, shoes, bags and jewellery. In my mind I am silently wondering how many Chinese can actually afford the commodities in these places as a group of youngsters walks past me wearing the newest designer clothes and using the latest smartphones.*

The transformations in Beijing have changed peoples' lives significantly, but just like the effects of development for the city, it has ambiguous effects on people too. Some have reaped the benefits of the rapid growth while others are still struggling to survive. It is therefore not uncommon to see huge differences between people such as exemplified above. Poverty reduction and increasing the middle class is a top priority for the Chinese government and they are doing a good job although the numbers have to be viewed in perspective. The number of Chinese people living in absolute poverty, as defined by the World Bank as living on less than USD 1.25 per day, has been reduced from almost 700 million in 1990 to almost 150 million in 2010 (The World Bank, 2013). While this is certainly a great achievement, the number of Chinese people living on less than USD 5 per day is still 900 million, or 68% of the population, in 2010. So even though the country is growing fast, poverty reduction will remain a top priority for the Chinese government for many years to come. However, most of the country's poor are located in the rural regions and the situation in the cities is entirely different. In Beijing the average salary is the highest in all of China with RMB 5000 (equivalent to USD 800) per month. And in a survey released by Boston Consulting Group in 2010, people categorised as middle class and wealthy consumers are

those with a monthly income of over RMB 5000 and the number of people in this category will rise from 250 million people in 2010 to more than 400 million by 2020 (KPMG Report). This is more than the total number of people living in the United States of America, which is 316 million.

Based on the huge differences that currently exist in Chinese society, it is relatively easy to distort the numbers in order to make an argument. But when taking the whole situation in account, it is undeniable that poverty is decreasing and that the middle class is expanding due to the growing economic situation. According to Ulrich Schmitt, an economist of the World Bank, this is because the Chinese government has always made poverty reduction an important goal of national development (China Daily, 2013d). The recently created and expanding middle class has left behind their days of poverty. Due to the transformations in China they do not need to worry about basic survival anymore, they are now able to consume beyond their basic needs. Most of the Chinese however still do not have the same purchasing capacity as most of the Europeans and are not wealthy enough to spend as much as they would like, but generally speaking, they are a strong force in driving consumption. It is because of the middle class that China's economic outlook remains optimistic, even during the recent global financial crisis (Andrew & Jaly, 2012). Economists often look at factors such as investment, monetary supply, capital market, labour costs, exports, domestic demands, creativity, brands and productivity, but as the cornerstone of the economy, the middle class cannot be overlooked (Andrew & Jaly, 2012). Larry Summers has written a paragraph to describe the rise of China that in my opinion really shows the improvement for Chinese people: "They called it the Industrial Revolution because for the first time in all of human history standards of living rose at a rate where there were noticeable changes in standards of living in a human life span- changes of perhaps 50 percent. At current growth rates in China standards of living may rise 100 fold, 10.000 percent within a human life span." (Summers in Mahbubani, 2008: 10). I will now briefly explain how the life of Lu Chu has changed over the years. She is 30 years old, was born and raised in a small village in Zhejiang and came to Beijing in 2003. Her life story confirms the scope of change that is possible in contemporary China.

*I was born and raised in a village in Zhejiang province in a house built by earth. It was a very small place and inside our house we did not have “luxuries” such as a television set, a refrigerator, a gas cooker or a flush toilet. Food also used to be very scarce, there used to be no variety of food but only a few choices. When I was young my life was pretty hard because my parents did not have a lot of money and their salaries were very low. When they just got me for example, they needed to buy the milk at the moment they got the salary. All they were worrying about was to get enough money to buy the milk for me. But the situation for them increased smoothly and since I went to middle school we did not need to worry about the money so much anymore although I was still far behind some others. For example, when I was in middle school I did not know how to use a computer or a mobile phone. I started to learn to use a computer when I started university in my early twenties because I had to learn it for my class. We did not have enough money to afford a computer for private use. But my living standard has definitely become better, and that of my parents too. Since I finished university I found a job in Beijing that pays well and now I have an apartment that contains all kinds of facilities. I also have a computer and a mobile phone now, in fact, these days most people in middle school already know how to use a computer and a mobile phone. My parents have meanwhile bought a house of bricks that is three stories high and which contains the basic facilities too.*

### **2.2.1 Consumption culture**

For me this was an unbelievable story, someone only six years older than me who appears to have the same lifestyle and the same amount of money, has in fact experienced poverty as well. I encountered many more stories like this during my stay in Beijing. But what I saw even more was the consumption culture of today's Chinese people. The emerging middle class has shifted their focus from subsistence to consumption which has become highly visible in Beijing's day to day life. In fact, premier Wen Jiabao made consumers the cornerstone of China's long-term strategy for economic development. He believes that unleashing the power of China's consumers is vital to the future of the world's second biggest economy. Expanding domestic demand is fuelled by enhancing people's ability to consume and by making economic growth more consumption driven (The Telegraph, 2013). For the past three decades China's economy has been largely investment-driven and export-

oriented. The next decade will however be an age of consumer-led growth. Raymond Ma, portfolio manager at Fidelity International, says 'China is on the brink of a new phase of consumer development that the world has never seen before. The foundations for a quantum leap in the volume and quality of consumption are now in place in China. These include pro-consumption government policies, income growth and an under-penetration of consumer goods and services' (South China Morning Post, 2012). In Beijing I could really see there is already a consumption culture in place, just like in most of the Western countries. It seems to have become really embedded in Chinese society to hang out in public places such as cafés, bars, clubs, and even in shopping malls. In fact, there are even a certain number of domestic coffeehouse chains where coffee prices are even higher than in Europe. But these places are still filled with people who want to publicly display their economic power, also known as conspicuous consumption. One is also able to see this kind of spending behaviour in restaurants or when buying clothes, people just want to show they are more affluent than others. This is mainly due to the fact that consumption interrelates with social class. In China it is one's own efforts that achieve success and it is Deng Xiaoping who once said: "Some people should be allowed to get rich before others". Consumerism displays difference through commodities and people are proud to show their wealth, it means they have worked hard and earned it.

### **2.2.2 Income gap**

But the fact remains that there are many people who are still struggling to survive as well. China is one of the countries where the difference between the poor and the rich is very large and this gap even seems to widen during recent years. Even though it is possible to see clear differences in Beijing, the large majority of people seem to live a decent life. But Beijing and a variety of other large cities such as Shanghai, Shenzhen and Chengdu have grown much faster than other areas in China, especially when compared to villages in the countryside. Lu Chu continues: *"Still in my hometown there are many people who are struggling to survive. They are generally just preoccupied with staying alive; to get enough food is their daily task"*. Reviewing the statistic that 68% of the population still lives on less than five USD per day, I can form an image of how hard it is must be. The high income gap is one of the largest problems in contemporary China. The Gini index is commonly used to measure wealth disparity; a Gini coefficient of zero expresses perfect equality (everyone has

an exactly equal income) whereas a Gini coefficient of one expresses maximal inequality (one person has all the income). In 2012 The European Union had a Gini index of 0.31 which means they have a low level of income inequality (Eurostat, 2013). In the same year the Gini coefficient for China was 0.61, which means income inequality is quite high. More shockingly though, this figure was just 0.41 in 2000, which means that the difference between the rich and the poor has become much larger during the last twelve years (Caixin Online, 2012). Moreover it has been investigated that 10 percent of Chinese households held up to 57% of all disposable income. The report further states that the combined incomes of all households in Eastern provinces were about 2.7 times that of the West and the Central regions. This seems to make sense as most of the big cities and the special economic areas are located in the Eastern provinces. On the other hand, they added that it is natural for a fast-developing economy to score high.

However, as a response, The State Council, has issued a 35-point income distribution plan aimed at narrowing the income gap. So at least in theory, Beijing is making an effort to decrease income disparities in the country.

## **2.3 Freedom, human rights and the CCP**

So from what I have discussed so far it is hard to believe that Chinese people are really unhappy with their situation. Or that they feel unfree because of the lack of human rights and the rule of the government. Yet Western literature and media largely lets us believe that, a feature we can call Eurocentrism, a term I hope to refute with this paper. The historic roots of Eurocentrism can be found during the time the West was surpassing China as the strongest power in the world due to the Industrial Revolution (Frank, 1998; Goody; 1996; Hobson 2004; Nederveen Pieterse 2006). Before that the predominant Western perception of the East was favorable. Until about 1800 Europeans were attracted to and sought to learn from many parts of the Orient and particularly from China that was seen as “civilizationally, culturally, politically, socially, economically, and technologically more advanced than any or all of Europe” (Frank, 1998: 1). By the mid-nineteenth century the European minds were reshaped due to the coming of the Industrial Revolution and the beginnings of European colonialism in Asia. The Chinese were now regarded as “a people of eternal standstill” (Frank, 1998: 3). The fact that the social sciences emerged at this time has been instrumental in the engraining of Eurocentrism within social science theories and methods. World history from this point on would be re-written from a Eurocentric perspective and ‘evidence’ would be collected that demonstrated European superiority and uniqueness by contrasting itself with ‘backward’ *others* while disregarding historical facts (Frank, 1998; Goody; 1996; Hobson 2004; Nederveen Pieterse 2006). But what is even more important in creating Eurocentrism among people in the West is the distortion of everyday news that flows into every living room and forms flawed images of other countries. In his new introduction Said informs us that bookstores, radio hosts, tabloids, journals and main news channels are filled with fictions and generalisations in order to stir up “America” or “the West” against the foreign devil (Said, 2003: 3). Media images are an important part of our lives but the problem is that they can be exploited at any time and it is very hard to tell what is real and what is not. The media is often used to validate the line of the government and to impose their view on the world and their people. But this way of thinking is in fact a distortion of reality and in my opinion one of the main reasons we fail to recognize difference and establish respect between cultures.

Mahbubani offers a few perspectives that clearly refute this thought and call for more understanding. He argues that the Chinese are actually happy with their current condition, but because the notion of “human freedom” can have many layers this is hard to understand. For the West freedom is an absolute virtue and the idea that freedom is relative does not exist. But the Chinese people have achieved much greater freedom than they had a few decades ago. In fact, the Chinese people have never enjoyed greater human freedom than in the current era, thus for them the developments are satisfying (Mahbubani, 2008: 133-134). Mahbubani separates three layers of freedom. The first is freedom from want. The basic premise of this freedom is that a human being who cannot feed himself cannot be free. Famine is more damaging to a human being’s freedom than a politically closed society. Famine used to be common in China but due to the rapid growth most people have enough money to eat and have thus never felt freer. The second layer of freedom is freedom of security because the only way to enjoy freedom is to stay alive. China has created a high condition of security so that people can improve the real and practical freedoms in contrast to for example Iraq where the chance of a random death due to a weapon is high. The third layer of freedom is the freedom to choose one’s employment. In the last 30 years people have become free to choose one’s employment for the first time in the history of Chinese civilization (Mahbubani, 2008: 134-136).

Even though these freedoms are not entirely satisfying to describe the situation in China, it at least offers a different perspective from the usual Eurocentric view. I would like to add that under the leadership of Chairman Mao, programs such as household registration, job allocation, distribution of food coupons, and the commune system served to restrict people’s mobility and control their daily life. Meanwhile, official education, media, arts, and literature ensured ideological uniformity. This system of absolute control has transformed a substantial amount ever since. Now people are free to go where they want, buy what they want and say what they like. Even though the CCP does have a firm grip on society, the fact that the number of protests have been rising considerably says something about the extent of freedom in China; people are even free to voice their disconcerns about the government. Viewed from this perspective one can understand that freedom is relative and that China has made huge steps over the last few years that have improved the living conditions of its people considerably. In the eyes of the Chinese they have never felt freer even though they

are living under the rule of the CCP. Although it still needs to be seen in perspective, because as some of the people I spoke to pointed out to me that there is a huge difference between the older and the younger generation. Xi Chen explained it to me most vividly when he said:

*The older generation of Chinese people have the comparison with older times so they feel free as compared to the way it used to be. Also a lot of people in the older generation still believe in Maoism and highly support the government and the country, so they will always say everything is good now. But most people of the young generation have ambiguous thoughts about freedom because on the one hand there is little room to speak negative about the government and the internet is censored. But on the other hand we are used to our situation and we feel free because we can do anything we want like break the traffic rules, smoke on the street and inside cafés, pee on the street and there is even people signing petitions to support the gay marriage. So in fact it is the same as in the US or in Europe. And things are changing too, These days you can also see the blocked websites if you want, all you need to do is buy a VPN connection which is available at very low costs. And we can actually criticize the government on social media such as Weibo, just not face-to-face or in the newspaper. So in fact we can do anything we like; from a political perspective we are not entirely free but from the people's perspective we are.*

### **2.3.1 Human rights**

Another thing that is often depicted in a negative way is the issue concerning human rights in China. According to Professor Andrew J. Nathan (2010), major categories of human rights violations in China that are of central international concern include:

- Imprisonment, arbitrary detention, or forced exile of people who have not used or advocated violence, but whose political beliefs counter those of the government. The victims include democracy movement activists and Tibetans detained for verbally supporting independence.

- Religious repression, including the arrests and beatings of adherents of the autonomous Catholic and Protestant movements; detention of Tibetans for religious practices and state interference in the practice of Islam and Buddhism.
- Violations related to criminal procedure, including lack of procedural safeguards against police abuse, failure to provide fair trials and a lack of independence of the judiciary.
- Torture and abuse of inmates of prisons and labour camps, and imposition of forced labour on inmates. Prominent political prisoners recently or currently mistreated in prison include Wei Jingsheng, Liu Gang, and Xu Wenli; those denied adequate medical care include Chen Ziming and Bao Tong.
- Forced resettlement, suppression of dissent, and violation of labour rights.
- Forced abortion and sterilization as part of population planning practices.

(Nathan, 2010).

But the main reason that China's (or in fact, Asia's) human rights are so often criticized is because there are competing conceptions of human and civil rights. On the one hand the West, that emphasises liberal, cosmopolitan individual freedoms which stress civil and political rights. On the other hand Asia that emphasises communitarian, context-dependent rights which are more likely to stress social and economic rights. Asia therefore stated together, at a summit in Bangkok prior to the UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993 that they would not accept a declaration of human rights that puts the rights of the individual above the needs of society and the right to live in an environment of social and political order (Inoguchi and Newman, 1997). In accordance with this, the PRC has argued that its concept of Asian values is that the welfare of the collective should always transcend the rights of the individual. It is therefore sometimes necessary to force individuals to make sacrifices for the more important needs of society. Because human rights are increasingly discussed in the context of an East-West dichotomy, this increases the tendency to

exaggerate and generalize between right and wrong, while in fact it is just a matter of the economic, cultural and political situation a country finds itself in. A universal one-size-fits-all definition of human rights therefore cannot apply internationally. In order to illustrate this point to the Western reader I could discuss the rapid deterioration in Western societies due to the breakdown of the family, hedonism, excessive individualism, lack of teamwork and ill discipline. Or the fact that racial segregation, crime rates, vandalism and political extremism are increasing rapidly. Or simply the human right violations during the invasion of Iraq, CIA's black sites used for extraordinary rendition programmes or the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. But I think this short enumeration should make it clear enough that human right violations happen everywhere. Usually they are a reflection of different cultural foundations and different practical needs. "Levels of social and economic development and degrees of state consolidation are key factors in human and political rights. The multi-ethnic nature of many East Asian states and the demands of managing the welfare of developing societies dictate certain priorities and an element of authoritarianism, just as they did in the West when it was undergoing a similar phase. In some cases fragmentation is a more pressing concern than human rights, a fact that some human rights commentators in the West fail to understand (Inoguchi and Newman, 1997)". In a country of 1.3 billion people, it is important to keep it together because things could get out of hand quite easily. What would happen if the Chinese government did not interfere in events such as the "Project X" parties that happened all over the Western world a little over a year ago? Or if all minorities in the country would rise against the government? The outcome of those events could be devastating to the country and I think it is best to avoid that kind of social fracture.

A clear example where the welfare of the collective should transcend that of the individual that made worldwide news in 2012 is the 'highway house' in Zhejiang province:



The owners of the house refused to move out and sign an agreement allowing the house to be demolished. Eventually it resulted in the construction of the road around the building. These kinds of ‘forced relocation’ stories have often made the news in Western newspapers to show the negative sides of China’s development. But in fact it is a reflection of different cultural foundations and different practical needs. The house of the individual was in the way of the planned road that should bring development to the society as a whole. Furthermore, I was told that people who are forced to relocate are often the lucky ones as the relocation packages are usually worth three or four times the price of the house. Zhong Wang told me the following to reflect on the issue of forced relocation:

*When I lived in the US during my studies I have seen the negative exceptions get huge news coverage. When a parking lot or a highway gets built people who have to relocate always get a huge amount of money from the government, usually around 15 million Yuan which is worth way more than their house. So if people are not greedy they take this amount and just move to another place which is now easy for them to buy. But if people are greedy and do not accept this offer they cause huge problems for everyone because the project is definitely going through. So in very rare instances you have this house in the middle of the parking lot or in the middle of the highway, but this happens very rarely yet this instances will be portrayed in the news around the West while saying that all the people that moved were forced to move. They are forced to move but they always get a huge amount of money, I am a Beijing local so I personally know many of these people who have been in this situation, and you can trust me on that. Why you think you see so many BMW and Mercedes on the street? People cannot afford those cars with the average Chinese salary, you know that. And there are not so many people who earn so much. It is because of the relocation packages that a lot of people in Beijing got very rich. There are so many misunderstandings in the West about China because they do not understand why things happen differently than in their countries.*

And Zhong Wang was no exception with his statement. I have personally spoken to a variety of people who obtained their wealth thanks to a relocation ‘issue’.

### **2.3.2 Government**

The Chinese government has also received a lot of criticism from the West largely because the system of governing is different from theirs. One should think to what extent it is actually possible to govern a country of 1.3 billion in a democracy similar to that in Western countries. A thing that is usually not mentioned is that the situation has changed a lot over the course of the years already, in current times there is severe competition within the Party. This leads to some bringing others' wrongdoings to light, as political parties do in the West. And while it is true that most of the young Chinese people also want to see a democratic structure, because more competition usually leads to better policies, this is not a main point of concern. People feel free and although they would like to see more democracy in the future, they would like to see other things change first, such as the corruption by government officials. The corruption of government officials is seen as the biggest problem by its people but recently it is changing due to increasing pressure from the young people. Although it is not recommended to talk badly about the government in public or in the newspaper, it is actually allowed to do so on social media such as Weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter. "Although all of the posts are monitored and sometimes posts will be removed, still 75% of the posts about the government is negative", Xi Chen told me. Weibo has become a platform for citizens to voice their concerns, and it has been done so successfully. Wong Yong gave me a good example of this when we were discussing the issue of the government:

*Once there was a local government official on television who came to the meeting in one of the newest Mercedes cars, wore expensive clothes and had a very expensive watch on his wrist. The moment this meeting started, all the young people start to talk about the corruption of this particular official on Weibo because of the fact he owned all of these expensive products. Because it got huge media attention the central government had to do something about it, so in fact for this particular case they fired this person from his post. So now the attitude of government officials is changing, it used to be very bad and they did not have to worry about the newspaper and the people but the young people are forcing them to change.*

In these cases the government interferes because it recognizes that corruption could lead to the end of both the Party and the country (China Daily, 2013c). This is because inequality in China lies at the heart of social unrest and it poses significant risks for the government as it seeks to maintain a grip on power. The CCP has always justified their authoritarian rule because of the strong economic growth, but unless the benefits of economic reform are spread more evenly, dissatisfaction with the Party will grow. This is especially so since it is common thought among Chinese citizens that the rich, especially the ones working for the government, have gathered their wealth through corruption such as illegal land seizures. That is why nice cars and fancy watches have quickly gone from signs of prestige to evidence of corruption which is often expressed in protests and riots. The frequency of “mass incidents,” the official euphemism for protests and riots, has increased from 8,700 incidents in 1993 to over 180,000 incidents in 2010, according to outside estimates (Los Angeles Times, 2011b).

But generally people are very appreciative of the government because they provide stability for development which is very important. On the other hand it is true that the tension between the people and the government is increasing because the young generation of Chinese people are not happy with their current situation. Next to the corruption by the government they detest unfair income distribution, environmental pollution, poor management of public housing, rising inflation, traffic jams and so on.

This has largely to do with the fact that people have more money now and are able to think about different things. Before the reforms people worried about getting enough money to survive but ever since most people do not have to worry about that anymore, they start to think about other things. So now people want the government to do something about the housing problem, the income gap, the air pollution and these kinds of things. This is also due to the exposure from other countries because China used to be isolated. In recent times however, people have been abroad or at least saw Western countries on TV and have the comparison with other countries, which they did not have before.

### **3. China's rise and its consequences**

Modernization is often interpreted as Westernization by those living in the Western world. But in China one is able to distinguish between modernization and Westernization. The best explanation regarding Westernization I heard during my stay in Beijing probably came from Lixian Wong. What she said is in my opinion very close to the truth and the following paragraph is a recollection of that conversation:

*"When I look around I feel like all the construction is Westernized, there is no uniqueness of Chinese construction anymore. Everywhere you can see Western enterprises and products such as KFC, Starbucks, H&M, Google, Ikea, Volkswagen and L'Oreal. The world is becoming the same; every city looks similar, people eat the same food, wear the same clothes, use the same skin products, drive the same cars, work for the same companies and speak the same language (English). But if you ask how many people in China are really Westernized, I mean think like a Westerner and act like a Westerner, they are just a few".*

From what she says we can see that in terms of products and companies the extent of Westernization is very high. Foreign brands are actually even seen as better products and more high-class products than their Chinese counterparts due to their reputation. Even fast-food chains such as McDonald's and KFC are traditionally seen as high-class restaurants in China due to its global presence and its high prices as compared to Chinese restaurants.

Modernization thus equals Westernization to some extent, mainly because of the technological, economical and scientific advance of the Western world. Mao Zedong once already asserted: "use the past to serve the present, make the foreign serve China". This roughly means that historical and foreign things should be used to improve human habitat and develop the society of China as a whole. Of course Western elements are used to improve the situation in China. Western products are better quality-wise because of years of experience; a degree from one of the best universities will guarantee a good future, the English language is important to communicate with the outside world, and companies and organizations have years of technological and economical advance on China.

But the other part of what Lixian Wong said is that the impact of Westernization is very small when it comes to the cultural and moral values. Although I have to note it used to be larger; American TV shows and Hollywood movies used to be among people's favourite to watch. But over time this has changed, now one of the most popular shows in China is a cartoon about a legendary hero from the Qing dynasty. Although this is just one example, in my opinion the largest extent as to why the impact of Westernization is diminishing is because the influence from two of Asia's other rising economies, Japan and South Korea, is enormous in Beijing. The fact that Japanese and Korean influence is huge on a moral and cultural level but the Western influence is not can be ascribed to 'Chinese cultural imperatives' (Zürcher, 1994). This means that Chinese people can resist Westernization, because their culture is completely different and their room for domestication bigger than cultures who have similar values. These moral values are important because capitalism does not contain them which means that each society can fill in their moral value system themselves. On the other hand the Chinese can not resist the influence from Korea or Japan because their culture is similar and their moral value system almost the same; highly based on Confucianism. They do not contain the cultural values that are necessary for resistance, just like the French are not able to resist the high influence from the United States of America.

This is the reason why Korea in particular has an important moral and cultural impact on China due to its popular television series (K-dramas) and music video's (K-pop). The growth of popularity in South Korean culture is commonly referred to as 'The Korean Wave' or 'Hallyu', a term coined by journalists in Beijing who were stunned by the fast-growing flow of South Korean cultural products (Ravina, 2009). Thus in societal areas such as lifestyle, philosophy and values the Korean cultural influence is larger than that of the West while at the same time Korea and Japan equal the Western world when it comes to modernization in the form of the flow of industry, technology and economics. It can therefore be said that modernization in China does not specifically mean Westernization.

It is this different cultural value system that I want to continue with in a later section, but now that it is established that modernization does not equal Westernization, it is time to look at the rising cultural and economic power of China to see if it will also have a large economic and cultural impact on other societies.

### **3.1 Chinaization**

As China is growing quickly, it is logical to think that they will have a great economic and cultural impact on other societies. After all, Westernization spread across the world because of its technological, economical and scientific advance on other countries. And even though it might not have spread everywhere on a moral and cultural level, its material influence can be seen globally. Korean and Japanese influence also spread after these countries had closed the technological, economical and scientific gap with the Western world and I think China will follow the same trajectory as these two countries. Because as a necessary step for development China has opened up its economy and attracted foreign companies and factories, imported products and copied products. This process can be compared to that of Japan 40 years ago, when they were at a phase of extensive growth due to increasing foreign influence. At this time Japan imported, copied and improved many products in order to develop but in the meantime they forgot about their own culture. Since they have reached a very stable economy with many superior products they have concerned themselves with other things such as cultural revival. Japan realized they had lost a big part of their culture because of its development and they have successfully tried to get it back; now Japanese culture is flourishing again. Japanese influence is easily recognizable in China, so that means their culture is very strong and distinctive.

During the past thirty years China also used many Western best practices and the strategy of importing, imitating and improving in order to develop. In this phase the Westernization became all-embracing but as of recently the Chinese are going back to their Chinese roots. Not only are people now able to see that Chinese products such as cars and mobile phones are increasing in quality every year, but especially from a moral perspective people are turning back to their Confucian roots, with the help of Japan and Korea. Asian traditions and thoughts are very different from those of the Western world and where foreign things were once admired, now Chinese people are trying to get back to the Chinese style and even to export Chinese culture abroad, just like Korea and Japan are doing now. In this sense there is a certain trajectory of de-Westernization going on because this course of action means that these societies modernize and become more confident while they are rejecting the Western

frame of mind and cultural perspectives they have accepted, or been forced to accept, for the past 200 years (Mahbubani, 2008: 7)."

The next section will therefore look at the growing popularity of Chinese brands which not only shows China's cultural and economic power at home and abroad, but also the extent of their cultural revival.

### **3.1.1 Chinese economic influence**

#### **On a local level**

Although products mainly resemble the material perspective, one is able to see a steady increase in the popularity of Chinese products as compared to its Western counterparts. When considering the mobile phone market the iPhone still is the most popular phone in China in terms of purchase desire, although the desire to purchase an iPhone has declined by 12% in just a quarter of a year according to research conducted by TrendForce (TrendForce Press Center, 2012). Although it must be noted that although the iPhone is most popular, its only number seven in terms of actual purchases in the Chinese smartphone market due to its high price and its incompatibility with China's telecom providers (Wang, 2012). Next to that, Nokia, HTC, Blackberry, Motorola and Sony also declined in purchase desire. Chinese brands on the other hand are experiencing rapid growth to the point that these domestic brands are posing a threat to its foreign counterparts in the Chinese market. Xiaomi, Huawei, Lenovo, ZTE, OPPO and MEIZU increased in purchase desire. This is interesting especially since Xiaomi, which has been founded in 2010 and sold its first smartphone in August 2011, is now one of the most popular phones in China. The company predicts that in the end of 2012 its sales will have reached nearly seven million phones and revenue will be at 10 million RMB (New York Times, 2012). Xiaomi has been China's only domestic brand to surpass Nokia and HTC in terms of purchase desire, quickly catching up to Apple and Samsung (TrendForce Press Center, 2012). The South-Korean company Samsung is however by far the largest mobile phone seller in China with a share of 20.8% (Wang, 2012). Next to that it is also the only foreign owned company selling mobile phones that increases its purchase desire (TrendForce Press Center, 2012).

The growing popularity of Chinese brands like Xiaomi shows the cultural and economic power of China to some extent. The fact that Chinese brands are beginning to compete with its foreign counterparts shows that China is following the same trajectory of development as Japan and South-Korea. It also shows that from a technological, economic and scientific perspective they are gaining ground on the Western world. From a moral perspective it becomes clear that Chinese people are trying to get back to the Chinese style which is resembled by the declining popularity of Western products as compared to Chinese ones which are gaining in popularity. We can call this a steady delegitimization of Western power and influence that is visibly happening (Mahbubani, 2008).

### **On a global level**

What I have discussed so far mainly relates to China's domestic changes, but to what extent is China's growing cultural and economical power noticeable to the rest of the world? To start off with economical power; the fact that China is now the second biggest economy in the world and owns about 1.3 trillion USD, or 8%, of the U.S. debt which is around 14 trillion USD is telling. To put that into perspective, Japan also owns around 1.1 trillion USD of the debt of the U.S. but after that comes the U.K. with only 347 billion USD (U.S. Treasury, 2013).

It is therefore clear that economic advantages are moving East, to newly industrializing countries. Asian demographics include young populations, fast rising levels of education, growing technological capabilities and rising levels of development (Nederveen Pieterse, 2006: 66). That is also the reason why thousands of jobs in Western countries have been offshored in search of cheaper labour or better skills. While this has been regarding the low-level jobs at first, it has meanwhile shifted to threaten mid-level jobs. Western factories shut down because their products can be produced cheaper in countries such as China. This has led to massive Chinese exports of American-designed products manufactured in China that are responsible for eliminating jobs in America and Europe. There is a growing concern that jobs that are now leaving the West, may never return (Chanda, 2007: 15).

Furthermore Chinese overseas direct investment has grown considerably over the last few years, especially in Africa and Eastern Europe. Zhai Jun, deputy minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China has said that "economic affairs have been the focal point of Sino-

African cooperation, but we are further strengthening our ties with African countries in building peace and security". China wants to protect its long-term interest in Africa by contributing to their development and unification and this is welcomed by a variety of African nations. Elham Ibrahim, commissioner for infrastructure and energy of the African Union Commission, said that "if we seek to develop our continent, then we need the involvement of China. Especially in my area, infrastructure and energy industry, China should, and could, play a big role" (China Daily, 2013b). Recent projects that China has helped to build in Africa include the convention center of the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a hospital in Luanda, stadiums in Sierra Leone and Benin, a sugarmill and sugarcane farm in Mali and a water supply project in Mauritania. As a result of this cooperation Chinese products have flooded the market in Africa and they are popular because they are much cheaper than goods from Europe and North America (Africa Renewal, 2013). Similarly, over the past years investment in Eastern Europe has also grown because the region is seen as ideal bridgehead for Chinese companies now that Western European nations have been reducing their investment due to the financial crisis. The latest move includes an electric car and bus assembly plant in Bulgaria that should produce 40 to 60 buses per month (China Daily, 2013a). China is currently the world's fourth largest global investor and according to a UN report there is still a huge potential for China to increase the flow of money and increase further up the ladder (United Nations Conference, 2011).

The last thing I want to discuss regarding economic influence is 'land grabbing'. It refers to a nation that acquires areas of land in developing nations to grow food or other commodities for their own people because of the fear of food scarcity in the future (TNI Agrarian Justice Programme, 2012). Land grabbing does however involve more than that, such as the capturing of power to control land and other resources like water, minerals or forests, in order to control the benefits of its use (TNI Agrarian Justice Programme, 2012). This kind of investment represents profitable opportunities to governments and private investors alike. However, it does usually come with significant social and environmental impacts for the country whose land is 'grabbed', such as their food security, political stability and access to resources (Oviedo, 2011). The full scope of its implications is however beyond the scope of this paper. What I want to make clear is that China is among the countries that grabbed the most land to secure their future resources. They have secured 3.5 million hectares of land in

foreign countries, most notably in the Philippines. With this amount they are second, just behind the U.K. with 3.6 million hectares. Other countries with large amount of land grabs include the U.S. with 2.7 million hectares, India with 2 million hectares, South-Korea with 1.5 million hectares and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, South-Africa, Malaysia and Singapore all with approximately 1.1 million hectares each (Circle of Blue, 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

### **3.1.2 Chinese cultural influence**

So by now it should be clear that economically speaking, China's influence has grown considerably over the last few years. But it does not stop there, because it also gained enormous cultural influence in a variety of aspects. The first and foremost one is probably related to the Chinese language which is studied by more and more people on a worldwide scale. Confucius Institutes, which are dedicated to teach Chinese to non-Chinese speakers, are popping up everywhere in the world and are growing quite fast. In fact, the project of non-profit public institutions that should promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries only began in 2004. Since then, there have been 322 Confucius Institutes established in 96 countries. In addition, over 250 institutions from over 50 countries, including the best universities in the world, have expressed their wishes to establish a Confucius classroom (Confucius Institute/Classroom, 2013). This means more and more people are learning Chinese language and Chinese culture.

The second aspect is regarding the rise of non-Western led forms of entertainment. American television is one of the most famous and popular around the world and in its own country. But as of recently a Chinese tv-drama called 'The Legend of Zhen Huan' has received interest from several cable channels in the US to air an English-language version of the show. Cao Ping, the producer of the show, has said that "we have not decided which channel will show the English version in the US, but the collaboration will not be limited to American channels. We want it to be global". What is interesting is that the story centers on the schemes between Emperor Yongzheng's concubines in the imperial palace during the Qing Dynasty. That means the tv-series is a traditional one, displaying Chinese culture to the rest of the world, or at least, in the US, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan, where it will definitely air soon (China Daily, 2013e).

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<sup>2</sup> A map showing the main countries that buy and sell land can be found in attachment three.

The third aspect is relating Chinese people themselves, which are probably the largest display of Chinese culture because they embody it. There are many Chinese citizens going abroad every year to study, start a business or to find a job. As a result Western people are increasingly in touch with Chinese people, even in their own countries. This could create more understanding between the two cultures, particularly in the Western world.

But how does the Western world respond to the rising cultural and economic power of China? The West has been the only civilization carrying the burden of advancing human knowledge and wealth. As of today, it can share this responsibility (Mahbubani, 2008: 102). The next section will show how the Western world thinks about sharing that responsibility.

### **3.2 China threat**

As Chinese influence has been growing steadily over the last two decades, Western pre-eminence and particularly US hegemony have been declining. Many have therefore concluded that the rise of China presents a threat because the rise of a second major power in the world would destabilize the US-led Western international system. Universal values have been synonymous with Western hegemony for the past 200 years and these countries have claimed themselves to be the authoritative judge of good and bad. Westernization is still seen as universality by most people in the West and the rise of China has dealt a major blow to these values (Wang Yiwei, 2007). World leaders have realized the era of homogeneity is now over and it is clear that globalization is no longer synonymous with Westernization or Americanization. Wang Yiwei wrote that: “In the past, a sneeze on Wall Street was followed by a downturn in world markets. But in February 2007, Chinese stocks fell sharply and Wall Street responded with its steepest decline in several years. In this way, the whirlpool of globalization is no longer spinning in one direction”. It is clear we have now entered a world characterized by diversity in cultural, political and economical forms.

But this new world is not yet accepted by the West which has developed three versions of the “China threat” thesis, each criticizing another aspect of China. One theory sees China’s behaviour as an expression of its strategic culture, one sees it as a function of its regime type, and one sees it as a product of its relative power (Jeffery, 2009). Supporters of the first argument view the Chinese government as a modern dynasty with an inflexible strategic culture that dominates its foreign policy and makes Chinese leaders unable to establish relationships of equality with other states. On this view China’s neighbours can only be tributaries or enemies, compromises are hardly possible and force is used quickly to put down perceived challenges to its hegemony (Johnston, 1998). Proponents of the second argument focus more on politics than on culture and have the idea that autocratic regimes like that of China are by itself more war prone than liberal democracies (Maersheimer, 2010). Adherents of the third argument focus on whether China’s power is growing or diminishing. And because it is clear that China is rising, they argue that it will challenge the existing international order, aiming to refashion it to better suit Chinese interests (Maersheimer, 2010). All arguments however come down on the lead argument that

Chinese values are different than Western ones which are seen as the universal values by the leaders in those countries.

According to Lary (2006) China has been portrayed as an ‘evil empire’ and a ‘threat to the free world’ due to a combination of *orientalism* and *anti-communism*. ‘Orientalism’ means that the *orient* (a term that encompassed the Middle East in particular and Asia in general) is a racist construction. According to Said, Western scholars have portrayed people of the *orient* in a demeaning and uncivilized way by describing them as backward cultures that were in need of enlightenment from the West (Said, 1978). Although Said was talking about the past in his book, in the contemporary world it has not changed that much. The assumption today still is that China can only be understood by Westerners and that China has gone off track and in reality wants to be like the West by incorporating the values of democracy, capitalism and Christianity (Lary, 2006: 6-7). These assumptions are based on the imagined superiority of the West through which the *other* is instantly seen as backward and inferior. As Said has argued: “there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation” (Said, 2003: 4). According to Lary (2006: 7) the first type of knowledge has not yet emerged in the fields of politics, economics and media where *orientalism* is still alive. World leaders, economists and the media in the West are confused over what China really wants. This confusion seems to be based on the fact that China has embraced capitalism without democracy whereas it is deeply embedded in the Western mind that capitalism and democracy should go hand in hand (Lary, 2006: 7).

On top of that the confidence crisis in the West due to their financial crisis makes it difficult to view China’s economic and political emergence objectively (Daokui Li in INSEAD Knowledge, 2012). This becomes particularly clear when analyzing the conflict regarding the Chinese world’s leading telecommunication equipment maker Huawei. The company inspires fear in the West, particularly the US because they are afraid that Huawei is collaborating with the Chinese government in order to exploit its networks so that China can spy and wage cyberwar on the West during peacetime and that the network can be shut down during wartime. Australia and the United States have already banned Huawei from

bidding for commercial contracts and urged domestic suppliers not to deal with the company (The Economist, 2012). The U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has published a report on the matter stating that: "China has the means, opportunity and motive to use telecommunications companies for malicious purposes (Rogers and Ruppersberger, 2012: 10). It further states that Huawei "cannot be trusted to be free of foreign state influence and thus pose a security threat to the United States and to our systems (Rogers and Ruppersberger, 2012: 53)." In addition, Mike Rogers, the Chairman of this committee, stated: "If I were an American company today and you are looking at Huawei, I would find another vendor if you care about your intellectual property, if you care about your consumers' privacy, and if you care about the national security of the United States of America (CBS News, 2012)". Thus the country that has invented free-market economics and is still pushing other countries to open up is now restricting foreign companies from entering its own market. This seems very contradicting and Dough Guthrie, dean of the George Washington University Business School, argues in the Washington Post that in some way the rise of foreign competition must have hit a nerve for Americans. They have always thought they were the number one economy and that China only supplied cheap labor but now that it is clear China does a lot more than that people have become scared (Washington Post, 2012). There are many other instances in which it becomes clear that the United States does not accept its decline in being a world leader, such as President Barack Obama himself blocking an order for a Chinese firm to acquire four wind farm projects near a US naval facility in Oregon in October 2012 (BBC News, 2012).

Viewed from this perspective the 'China threat' is both related to the misconceptions regarding China's different value-system as well as to competition purposes. The 'China threat' theories may well be a political strategy of the West to maintain power and to limit China and Chinese firms. But what does China think about the threats coming their way and what is their response?

### **3.3 Soft power, peaceful rise**

China responds to the threats with a so-called ‘soft power’ strategy. Joseph Nye defines power as the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants, and that can be accomplished in three main ways: by coercion, payment, or attraction. Nye therefore defines soft power as the “ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion or payment.” (Nye, 1990: 166). Hard power on the other hand is understood as military power or the use of economic sanctions. Soft power of a country basically consists out of three resources which according to Nye are: its culture, its political values and its foreign policies (Nye in Foreign Policy, 2013). Ideally they should reinforce each other but culture is probably the most important source of soft power as it can be an export product by itself, but also make a country more attractive to tourists, students, and investors, while making trade and diplomacy more easier to happen. Also, it is often produced by civil society and not by the government, as opposed to the other two resources. As Lee Kuan Yew, the founding prime minister of Singapore put it, “soft power is achieved only when other nations admire and/or want to emulate aspects of that nation’s civilization” (The Straits Times, 1996). Soft power can rebrand a nation which has been demonstrated in exceptional cases such as that of South Korea. According to the New Yorker: ”The Korean Wave” (or “Hallyu”) has erased South Korea’s regional reputation as a brutish emerging industrial nation where everything smelled of garlic and kimchi, and replaced it with images of prosperous, cosmopolitan life (The Guardian, 2013). It’s K-dramas and K-pop hits such as Gangnam Style have significantly transformed the popularity of the country.

For a rising power like China whose growing economic and military power have received a counter reaction from other nations, a smart soft power strategy should contribute to making China look less frightening and alien, a process South Korea has achieved. But China’s softpower is led by the government and according to Nye attention is scarce and depends on credibility. Government propaganda is not credible (Nye, 2003). China nevertheless has tried to implement a softpower strategy by spending billions of dollars into the movie industry, the culture promoting Confucius Institutes and the foreign language newsmedia CCTV. China’s softpower can therefore more likely be reviewed in terms of its

foreign policy, because its cultural appeal that should spring from individuals, the private sector, and civil society, falls behind.

China's foreign policy has become one of "peaceful rising" in order to show the world that they are not going to do any harm. According to Lee Kuan Yew, the problem of contemporary China is convincing the world that they are serious about a "peaceful rise". That is why they have worked out this theory, to assure America and the world that they are going to play by the rules (Lee Kuan Yew, 2008). The strategy for a peaceful rise is one of the three grand strategies of the Chinese government in which they strive to improve China's relations with all countries in the world. According to Zheng Bijian, Chair of the China Institute for Reform and Development, China will "transcend the traditional ways for great powers to emerge, as well as the Cold War mentality that defined international relations along ideological lines. [...] Instead, China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries of the world" (Bijian, 2005). Furthermore, advocates of China's rise emphasize the opportunities that arise due to the process of opening up; a new huge emerging market (China's population) becomes available to the rest of the world, which provides opportunities –rather than threats- for the international community. The Chinese rise for example resulted in a significant increase in imports from ASEAN countries, Japan, India, US and the EU (Bijian, 2005). Thus in contrast to what is often said, China does not seek hegemony but it "advocates a new international political and economic order, one that can be achieved through incremental reforms and the democratization of international relations". (Bijian, 2005).

This foreign policy is a huge step forward from Mao's Chinese foreign policy which was often framed in controversial and unappealing terms in an attempt to export revolution to the Third World. But as far as cultural attractiveness is concerned, China admits it is not strong in marketing its cultural products even though it has great resources (Gill and Huang, 2013).

### **3.4 View of Chinese young intellectuals**

Interestingly enough, Chinese people hold a very different view than both the Western world and the Chinese authorities when it comes to the rising cultural and economic power of China. There are roughly four interrelated aspects that contribute to their view, those aspects will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### **3.4.1 Western concept**

The first is that Chinese young intellectuals consider concepts such as ‘the global power shift to the East’ as predominantly Western ideas. In a question for my research I referred to the well-known statistic predicted in the West (by organizations such as the IMF and the OECD) that China’s economy will surpass that of the US in terms of GDP before 2020. In almost all cases they responded to this statement saying: “really, who predicted that?” or “I doubt this statistic is very accurate”. At first I was shocked by their responses because such statistics, next to China’s economic growth rates, should speak for itself. But then I found some more evidence on this subject, as a 2006 report of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs revealed that while 61 percent of US citizens believe that Chinese GDP will surpass US GDP within the next 20 years, only 30 percent of Chinese citizens hold this view (Chicago Council Report, 2006: 34). In the words of Wang Yiwei, Assistant Dean and Associate Professor at the Fudan University Institute: “The ‘China threat theory’ has proliferated across the globe, while Chinese people remain bewildered as to why their country is suddenly the cause for so much international concern (Wang Yiwei, 2007)”. This brings us directly to the next aspect regarding the view of Chinese citizens on the rise of China.

#### **3.4.2 Confucianism**

The second point has to do with the fact that China is still highly influenced by Confucianism. First of all it is promoted by the government as they are advocating for social harmony and the teaching of filial piety (respect for one’s parents and ancestors) in schools. But next to that Confucianism is also promoted by many intellectuals, NGO’s, and from generation to generation. As Lei Chen once told me: *“Confucianism is carried over from generation to generation. I get influences from parents and they got it from my grandparents so it will never vanish”*. Many intellectuals believe Confucianism should have even more influence in

society and the government because it can be used as a moral system that holds people together and provides a sense of social responsibility (Chinadialogue, 2012). Social harmony is one of the key values of Confucianism and it means peace, diversity and promoting harmonious relations. These relations include relations between family members, in society, within a country, between countries and between humans and the environment. So from this perspective the ‘peaceful rise’ is actually based in Chinese culture instead of it being a political strategy. During my fieldwork period in Beijing I heard many comments about the influence of Confucianism and the culturally influenced ‘peaceful rise’ of China, one of them by Lei Chen:

*In the Chinese way of thinking the peaceful rise is real. In Chinese culture we like to be peaceful with our neighbours and we are really hospitable to foreigners. There is an old saying that means we should treat our guests well which is: ‘where there is a friend who comes from far, how pleasant is that’. So the peaceful rise in the eyes of most of the Chinese is real, not a cover-up or something. But of course the Western world is worried about the rise of China and as a consequence think it is a cover-up.*

Confucianism also is closed and inward looking. This means it is of less value what the neighbours are doing but one should focus on their own problems. Even though China is growing fast economically, it still has many internal problems to solve. This brings us to the third point.

### **3.4.3 Internal problems**

The many internal problems of China is also the reason why Henry Kissinger stated that China will not dominate the world. He believes that China will be preoccupied with enormous domestic problems which are reinforced due to the fact that the coastal regions are at the level of advanced countries while the interior regions are underdeveloped (Kissinger in INSEAD Knowledge, 2012). China still has to cope with issues like poverty, its education standard, environmental issues, health concerns, high income gap, corruption from the government, demographic challenges and disputes with its neighbours. And the average Chinese citizen in Beijing knows about these issues and its repercussions. A statement by Xi Fung is telling for the story: “*China is growing fast but we still have so many*

*problems. It will take a long time before we are like Europe or the US because you have two developed parts while we have one reasonably developed part and one undeveloped part".* So even though China is surpassing the West in terms of GDP, the internal problems in China is one of the reasons the Chinese young intellectuals do not believe in a global power shift anytime soon. From this perspective the irony of the 'China threat' also becomes clear. While political leaders in the West are busy debating as to how they should accommodate the perceived China threat, political leaders in China are busy debating as to how they should solve their internal threats.

### **3.4.4 Inexportable culture**

The fourth point is regarding the cultural power of China. Chinese young intellectuals are aware that more people are interested in China, that its products flourish overseas and that more people are learning the language, but nevertheless they believe China will never have the cultural power of the West. According to them this has to do with two points; point one is that the Confucian values dictate that one should focus on their own problems. Point two is because they believe their culture is inexportable. It is very common to talk about Chinese culture in the way Fang Hua described it to me:

*For China it is hard to show their cultural power overseas because its culture goes back for thousands of years and will need too much explanation in order to be implemented elsewhere. And also it is and has always been self-sustainable; just look at the Chinatowns for example, they are everywhere but nobody minds about them. Furthermore language is one of the most important vehicles to exert cultural power overseas but even though China is developing Confucius Institutes all over the globe and more people are learning Chinese, I do not think it will ever become the world's first language because it is generally too hard to learn for people as compared to English. On the other hand Americanization is much more easy to achieve because they have no history and just a few products such as McDonalds, KFC and Coca-Cola that show their cultural power overseas.*

### **3.5 Complex Chinese attitudes**

By now it has thus become clear that Chinese citizens have very complex attitudes towards its country's development and its rise. Although it is clear that many Beijingers reap the benefits of China's growth, they are also seeing its side effects. The contrasts in the city between rich and poor, old and young, developed and undeveloped, clean and polluted have become huge as a consequence of China's rapid economic development. Each of these contrasts will be discussed in light of everything discussed so far.

In the contrast between old and young one is able to see many things. On page four in chapter one, Zhong Wang already said that everything in Beijing is new and that the city is nowhere near the way it used to be. While he was referring to the modernisation and commercialisation of the city, this also extends to the people in Beijing. The large majority of people in the streets are young people aged below 40. I always wondered where the older people were, until I found out many of them are playing cards, mahjong or Chinese chess together in the otherwise quiet parks and temples. Due to the fast transformations the gap between the old and the new generation is really large which provides an insight as to how China has changed on a moral level. While the older generation still seem to have a community oriented lifestyle, the younger generation is very individualistic. In my opinion this is due to the social consequences of development such as increasing work pressure, longer working hours and the pressure to achieve in a fast paced urban environment. Especially the pressure to achieve is enormously high on the current youth in Beijing and this is affecting their behaviour in a great way. During my fieldwork in Beijing I was often told that they envy the Western lifestyle which they associate with an open-mind, politeness and carefree lifestyle. The fact that I went to China to undertake research appealed to them and somehow I could not understand this mindset as I thought they should be able to do the same. But the pressure from society is just more than I could imagine. Once Song Yi told me the following:

*Our life is very different than before because now when I meet my friends all we talk about is our jobs, when to get married, when to buy a car, when to buy an apartment and how to save more money. I don't want to talk about these kinds of topics every*

*time so I tell my friends that they should enjoy their lives, yet they are just thinking about money all the time. As a result you can see that people are changing because everyone is turning very selfish; they don't care about other people's feelings or about the family, just about money. But this pressure is not coming from the government or from abroad or something, just from fellow people, they can't seem to escape this thought.*

When I heard this I was shocked but I decided to ask a lot of other Chinese young intellectuals how they thought about their happiness and almost all of them agreed on the statement made by Song Yi. There are even people who think that the current youth is less free than their previous generation because of the busy lifestyle that people are 'forced into'. The consequence of this change is the loss of traditional Chinese culture and the shift from a community oriented society to an individualistic society.

Another contrast that has emerged due to the high speed of development is the difference between developed and undeveloped parts in the city and the connected discrepancy between the rich and the poor. On page three in chapter one I was walking from my apartment towards Wudaokou subway station while I saw tall modern office buildings from Google and ICBC on my left, and tiny shops selling everything from dumplings to bracelets on my right. It is a common sight in China and I have already discussed that the GINI-coefficient in China has been rising during the last few years. For Chinese citizens this has hit a nerve, especially with the corruption scandals of the government getting increasingly more media exposure. On top of that prices have been increasing but the salaries have not risen an equal amount which still makes a hard life for most Chinese citizens. There are few young people that see a chance to buy a house due to the high prices combined with the low salaries.

On top of that the rapid developments have led to enormous health problems in the form of pollution and food safety. On page seven and eight in chapter one I talked about the lack of focus on the environment and the quality of life resulting in large food scandals and other forms of pollution in food, drinks, water and air. Chinese young intellectuals are well aware of these kinds of problems in their country. And this domestic discomfort paired with an increasingly hostile international community that criticizes everything from China's

development strategies to its political policies has negated the benefits of development in their minds. As one of my informants, called Hao Lei has so illustratingly said:

*"People have been lifted out of poverty and switched their minds from staying alive to other issues such as the air pollution and the income gap. This is a logical consequence of development; once your standard of living is improved you will have more to concern yourself with or to worry or complain about".*

In my opinion this statement captures it nicely because it shows that a lot of Chinese young intellectuals in Beijing have improved their lives significantly. But at the same time sacrifices have been made for the development of the city and people want these sacrifices to be improved now. Furthermore it is in line with this chapter that has shown that even though China is rising and its economic and cultural influence is growing on a worldwide scale, there is no such thing as a 'global power shift to the East' just yet. The many internal problems that are a cause for domestic discomfort with many Chinese citizens is one of the main reasons for that. China still has to cope with many issues and raise many more people out of poverty before it can even call itself a middle class country. Because like my Chinese research participants, I also think that if 68% of the population is still living on less than USD 5 per day, there is a long way to go before such as a power shift should actually take place. Its lack of overseas power can furthermore be ascribed to its inward-looking Confucian based culture and its lack of soft power potential. All these aspects make that Chinese citizens perceive the cultural and economic power of China very different from the way we perceive it in the Western world. But this paper should have at least made clear that China is no backwater of a country anymore and that it has developed very rapidly. Neither is there a reason to fear China because its system of governing and value system is different than that in the West. Instead, we should look at China with respect and as a land of opportunity. A nation that has transformed significantly since the Mao-era in a way that is beneficial for the country, its citizens, and the rest of the World.

## **4. Conclusion**

This thesis has been about the perception of Chinese young intellectuals regarding the cultural and economic power of China in relation to that of the West. Their perception is important because mainstream thinking in the Western world is filled with negative perspectives when it comes to China both in- and outside the academic world. On the other hand, the Chinese government and the media which is controlled by the government portrays the information in the opposite way as its Western equivalents; they are positive about everything that is going on. But what has been missing is the voice of Chinese people. They should be the experts on the changes in their country and this thesis has attempted to show their view on China in order to create more understanding and respect between cultures. Let us therefore turn back to the original research question:

*How do Chinese young intellectuals in Beijing perceive the cultural and economic power of China in relation to that of the West now that global power is shifting to the East?*

In the first chapter I have deeply elaborated on how China in general and Beijing in particular have developed itself during the last three decades and how Chinese young intellectuals have experienced these developments. Furthermore their experience have been contrasted with mainstream Western thought. This has resulted in an image of unprecedented change in Beijing ever since the end of the Mao-era. Beijing has transformed from a small city characterized by rich cultural heritage in a megalopolis defined by skyscrapers, shopping malls, broad boulevards and subway lines. Residents of the city sometimes can not find the way in their own city due to the speed of change but at the same time this has had its repercussions. The disappearing of old Beijing together with the city's deteriorating health quality due to high forms of pollution both in the air and its food is one of them. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor is another, even though the number of people defined as middle class has been rising too. Another problem is the corruption by government officials. Contrary to popular Western thought, this is the main concern of Chinese citizens when it comes to the government. Otherwise they tend to be quite appreciative of the government even though they are consistently portrayed negatively in the West. This has to do with other perceptions on notions such as freedom and human

rights. China emphasises social and economic rights in contrast to the emphasis on civil and political rights in the Western world. It is thus a lack of understanding that leads to a lack of respect between cultures.

The second chapter has discussed the rising cultural and economic power of China and the response of the Western world towards this rise. Furthermore it has shown how Chinese young intellectuals perceive the rising cultural and economic power of China. This has revealed that modernization does not mean Westernization, but rather that the influence of Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and China is expanding on a global level too. As a result China owns 8% of US debt, Chinese products have improved every year, its overseas direct investment has grown considerably and it is among the largest 'land grabbers'. Furthermore Chinese language is getting more popular, Chinese tv-dramas are starting to get international attention and Chinese people are to be found almost everywhere in the world. Because of this steady influence on both an economic and a cultural level, many in the West have concluded that the rise of China presents a threat. On a political level China responds that its rise is 'peaceful' in order to show that they are not going to do any harm. And although its soft power does not have the desirable effect of making China more attractive, its foreign policy surely is a step forward from that of Chairman Mao. Worldwide China has thus become the cause for much international concern but its citizens do not understand why. They think the 'global power shift to the East' is a Western concept and China does not think this way because of its inward-looking culture that is still highly based on Confucianism. Furthermore they see China's culture as inexportable. But most importantly, its many internal problems are the reason a global power shift is not going to happen anytime soon.

Bringing the two chapters together I am able to say that even though Beijing has been growing very rapidly and many Beijingers have benefited from that, people are also seeing the side effects of that growth. Increasing international attention that depicts China in a negative way and which highlights its problems and uncertainties have certainly had an impact on the way they view their country. Problems concerning poverty, the standard of education, the environment, health, the high income gap, the corruption from the government, the demographic challenges and disputes with its neighbours have become a

source for domestic discomfort. At the same time a changing mindset on a moral level leads to a pressurizing competitive environment that is increasingly focused on the individual. For Chinese young intellectuals life therefore seems to have become harder than before; a domestic discomfort that has made the ‘global power shift to the east’ inconceivable. According to Chinese young intellectuals global power will stay in the Western world for a long time to come, mainly because China still has many internal problems to solve, but also because the country has an inward-looking culture that is highly based on Confucianism which makes its culture inexportable.

It is thus interesting to see that the cultural and economic power of China is perceived very differently by Chinese young intellectuals than in the Western world. Issues that usually reach the headlines and academic papers are of less concern to its citizens, who think about entirely different things. And although it seems they are predominantly negative, it is important to note that their parents are a lot more satisfied because they have seen the comparison from the Mao-era until contemporary times, and they are very appreciative of the government because of this. The new generation however, wants to see more improvements. And even though they are critical of their country, they admit that they still feel relatively satisfied. It is just that their increasing welfare level has led them to think about other aspects in life, aspects previous generations have never been able to think of.

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## **6. Appendices**

### Attachment 1: Methodology

First of all I would like to point out that it is a common misconception that anthropologists are only interested in indigenous people and/or Third World countries. During my study I have seen that we regularly downplay ourselves to that role and as such are alienating ourselves from other disciplines in the social sciences. There have been anthropologists that have undertaken research within highly developed urban zones, or within Wall Street, but they are still very few as compared to those researching indigenous people and/or Third World countries. In my opinion anthropology as a whole should broaden their academic scope because it is highly suitable for current issues within developed countries. This research is an attempt to show that anthropology and its research methods are a good fit for an urban environment like Beijing, a city with 20 million inhabitants.

Secondly I would like to add that many anthropologists have become preoccupied with discourse analysis. Instead of analyzing the designed research question, the focus changes to describing different theoretical concepts, discursive practices, and their coherences and/or inconsistencies. Instead of taking this road, I paid particular attention to the stories people had to tell me, the observations being done, and their underlying implications. In order to show an attractive alternative, this research has therefore become mainly descriptive.

In order to achieve a reliable answer on my research question, I have conducted qualitative anthropological research. This has enabled me to sketch a rich empirical image and to give personal and local examples of global processes. The most valuable research methods have been *informal interviews* and *informal conversations* with my main research participants. The informal conversations have taken place at any time I was spending time with my research participants during my three-month fieldwork period in Beijing. The informal interviews were a good way to obtain specific information that would not always come up during informal conversations. Moreover it proved to be a good way to ask more deeply about issues that I first heard about in informal conversations.

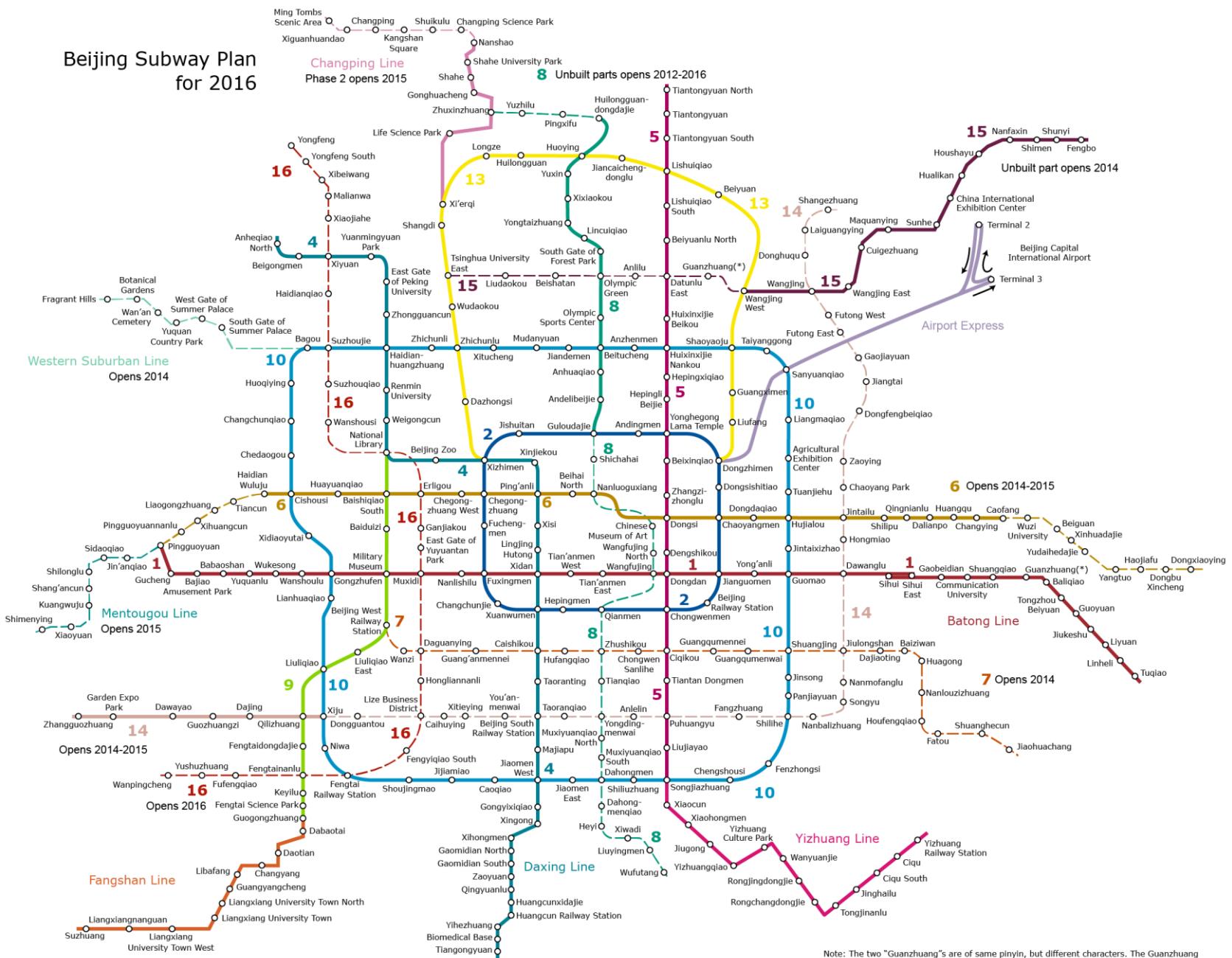
Next to these two methods, *participant observation* has also been used to obtain information, although in my case I would prefer to emphasize the *being there*, and *hanging around* part because in this way I found out what issues were of concern and what is happening on a daily basis. The emphasis has been on being there, and hanging around instead of on participant observation because observations about the speed of development in the city and the way people treat each other on the streets and on the roads has been of more value to my research than taking part in my research participants' activities per se. Through this combination of talking about the situation and observing the situation myself, data triangulation has taken place which increases the reliability of the data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 101-102). At a later stage the collected fieldwork data has also been cross-referenced with academic theory in order to make an empirical cycle that increases the reliability of the data (Tijmstra & Boeije, 2011).

During my fieldwork I always disclosed my role as a researcher and therefore applied to the rules of *informed consent* (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 89). By emphasizing I am a student who is interested to talk about China for my research it has been easy for people to provide me with information. I however did not always tell my exact research topic to my research participants but communicated it in a more general way. Usually I said I am doing research about the developments within China or between the differences between China and the West. I chose to tell them something general because my research participants might transform their answers according to my research question. Throughout my research I have been careful with personal and sensitive information. To respect the privacy of my research participants, all names that are used in this thesis are fictitious. And although I used a tape recorder in most interviews in order not to miss any information, I always asked prior to doing so and to my surprise almost nobody has objected to it.

Most people I spoke with have been very willing to provide me with information, sometimes they even came with research suggestions because they believe it is a good thing if Western scholars write the truth about China. Most of my research participants believe the Chinese government is highly concerned by how the West thinks about them, so if a Chinese scholar writes about something that has to change they will not care about it, but if someone in the West noticed the same, then it is of high concern. Therefore I believe that my role as a

researcher has been very important. Chinese people in general like to inform foreigners about their country and although they tend to emphasize the negative aspects because they want to see changes, generally the results of informal conversations and interviews do not differentiate too much from one another.

## Attachment 2: Beijing subway plan for 2016.



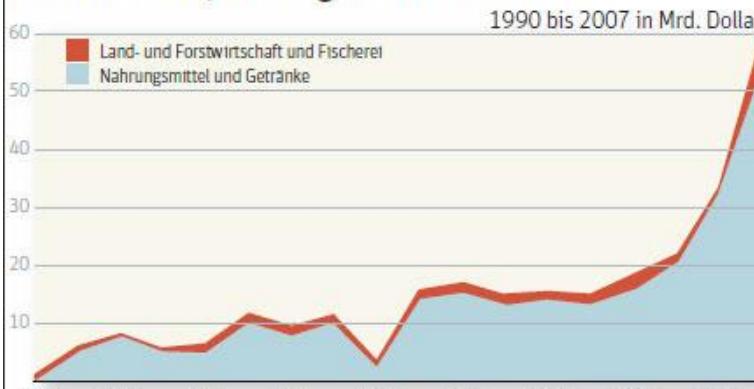
Note: The two "Guanzhuang"s are of same pinyin, but different characters. The Guanzhuang of Line 15 is "关庄" (simplified) or "關莊" (traditional), while the Guanzhuang of Batong Line is "管庄" (simplified) or "管莊" (traditional).

## Fokus Landnahme – verschärfter Kampf um Ressourcen

Seit der Nahrungsmittelkrise 2008 hat weltweit ein Wettkampf von Staaten und Privatinvestoren um Land eingesetzt, das – oft über Tarngesellschaften – gekauft oder gepachtet wird. Bei diesem „neuen Kolonialismus“ geht es um Ressourcensicherung – Nahrung, Energieproduktion, Wasser –, aber auch um Spekulation.



### Ausländische Direktinvestitionen in Landwirtschaft, Nahrungsmittel und Getränke



### Transparenz, Nachhaltigkeit, Menschenrechte

Experten fordern die Durchsetzung weltweit anerkannter Regeln, damit die Potenziale von Investitionen in Land möglichst vielen Menschen zugute kommen:

1. Transparente Vertragsverhandlungen unter Einbeziehung der Landbevölkerung.
2. Anerkennung bestehender, auch nichtformaler Rechte, vor allem auch indigener Gruppen.

3. Wer Land verliert, soll mit einer gleichwertigen Lebensgrundlage entschädigt werden.
4. Investitionen in Land sollen in Strategien zur Armutsrückbildung der Zielländer eingebunden sein.
5. Ökonomische, soziale und ökologische Nachhaltigkeit.
6. Menschenrecht auf Nahrung: Ernährungssicherheit in den Zielländern hat Vorrang vor jeder anderen Nutzung der Flächen (etwa Anbau von Energiepflanzen).



DER STANDARD

