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HOUSING CHINA'S EMERGING CLASSES

Competing Interests in a Beijing Suburb

by

Friederike Fleischer

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

The City University of New York

2005

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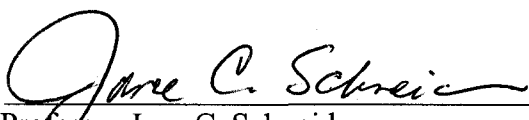
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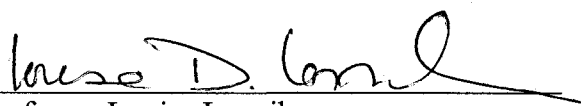
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Graduate Faculty in Anthropology
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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By

Friederike Fleischer

Advisor: Professor Jane C. Schneider

The economic reform program initiated by the Chinese government in 1979 has dramatically transformed Chinese society. Cities, in particular, have been subject to social, economic, and spatial changes that affect the daily life of residents: Land and housing reforms have broken the Mao-era connection between home and workplace; state services and benefits have been cut; and the private economy offers new employment and business opportunities that tempt rural residents to migrate to urban centers. As a result of these processes, urban society is experiencing growing socio-economic and spatial stratifications. These are highly visible in emerging suburbs where new residential and commercial development have been interspersed among pre-reform structures.

This dissertation, which is based on research done between 2001 and 2002, studies the socio-spatial processes and transformations in Wangjing, a suburb in northeastern Beijing. Centered around three main groups of people – young, wealthy couples living in new commercial compounds; state-employees; and migrants, living and/or working in the suburb – I analyze the development of the area as the result of the

interplay of politics, planning, and people. The dissertation provides an ethnographic account of the growing socio-economic differences and sheds light on the different layers of power and influence of residents, the state, and the market. It also studies the diverging values and behaviors that accompany the socio-economic differences among urban residents. In my account of the transformation of suburban space and Chinese peoples' involvement and reaction to it, I argue that the new negotiation and production of space is a highly complex process, influenced by both, state and market forces. I show that the state project of modernization generates a "citizenship of consumption," which grants rights and autonomy to consumers while ostracizing those who lack the financial means to participate in today's consumer culture. In the process of growing class structuration, high-end residential compounds have become a basis for the formation of social status, identity, and habitus. In this manner, the consumption of housing has turned into a reflection of the dynamic processes of social and spatial reconfigurations in contemporary urban China.

To my parents,

Rosemarie and Klaus (in memoriam),

Who did not have the opportunity to pursue higher education,

But who instilled in me the value of learning and a curiosity about the world;

And who, no matter to which part of the globe I traveled,

Never questioned my endeavors,

But always encouraged and supported me unconditionally.

Preface

In 1992, I decided to learn Mandarin because I needed a bigger challenge than simply studying Ethnology. Attending graduate school and writing this dissertation, however, turned out to be a lot more testing than learning Chinese. In many ways I was only able to complete this project because of the wonderful friendship, love, and support that I received from the people who accompanied me on this long journey.

Since I came to the Graduate Center in 1997, many people have profoundly influenced my studies and this project, but no one deserves more credit than my advisor, Professor Jane C. Schneider. Even though our areas of study lie on “opposite sides” of the globe, from the beginning Professor Schneider took a keen interest in my project. Through all these years, she has not only generously offered her advice and critique, but has also inspired me throughout with her immense scholarship, her vast knowledge, her approachability, and willingness to share her insights and thoughts. In addition, I profited greatly from the ever critical and insightful guidance of Professor Michael Blim. Beginning with my first semester, when he taught the core course together with Professor Gerald Creed, Professor Blim caused me to question many of my beliefs, and instilled in me the doubt and curiosity to seek for new answers. Professor Neil Smith opened my eyes to the geographer’s outlook on things, and in this manner has had a great influence on my thinking and, in fact, on this dissertation. My external reader, Professor Li Zhang, Director of the East Asian Studies Program at the University of California in Davis, guided the dissertation writing process with her valuable suggestions. Her scholarship and work have been a great inspiration.

In China, I would like to thank the people of Wangjing who welcomed me into their lives and their houses. This study would not have been possible without their willingness to answer my curious and often surely intrusive questions; their forgiveness of my cultural faux-pas; and their incredible generosity to share with me their experiences, their happiness, and sorrow. I will always feel humbled by their positive outlook on life in the face of the difficulties they have to deal with in their everyday lives. Wang Zhuning and Wei Kaiqiong kindly offered their friendship and hospitality. Yu Changjiang from the Anthropology Department at Beijing University and the researchers from the Sociology Department at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where I was affiliated, provided practical help and scholarly advice whenever I needed it. In addition, over the last six years, Li Ning Ning and her parents have offered their friendship, help, and emotional support, effectively becoming my “Chinese family.” Thanks to Sasha Welland for introducing us. Kari Olson put me in touch with all her Chinese and Western friends in Beijing, which has resulted in many friendships and fruitful conversations. Danning Wang not only generously introduced me to her family and friends in China, but also offered invaluable advice and input whenever I needed it. I very much appreciate the interest she has taken in my research.

Throughout my studies at the Graduate Center, I greatly benefited from the friendship and support of my “cohort.” I would like to especially thank Larissa Honey, Terese Lawinski, Pellegrino Luciano, and Wasi Merkuria who shared with me the anxieties, frenzies, and embarrassments that seem be part of the “process.” Our conversations and bonding significantly contributed to keeping me going when I felt like giving up. Thank you, especially, Pellegrino, for reminding me during our first year,

when my entire world seemed to circle around “race, class, and gender,” to “get a life.” In addition to my cohort, I shared many laughs and wonderful discussions with Laura Kaehler. Laura, Ananya Mukherjea, and I spent the long, unforgettable summer of the year 2000 studying in the library together, and I profited enormously from both their scholarship and spirit.

I would further like to thank our Executive Officer, Professor Louise Lennihan, and our Program Assistant, Ellen DeRiso, who make the impossible possible and keep us all going. I am especially grateful to Ellen who has done everything to accommodate my special needs and requests that have resulted from living abroad during the last four years.

Maria Jacobs, Douglas Ewing, Paul Croser, Bei Zhang, from the Office of International Student, where I worked for two years, offered employment in a pleasant and friendly atmosphere that left me with enough space and time to study whenever I needed to. Thanks to the Department of Anthropology for several grants, which significantly alleviated the financial burden of paying out-of-state tuition fees while living in this wonderful, but expensive city. The Graduate Center generously bestowed me with the Alexander Naclerio Award and the Dissertation Writing Fellowship, and thereby enabled me to concentrate all my forces on writing the dissertation.

Santiago Páez contributed the maps which he designed in many hours of painstaking effort and with an incredible dedication to the task.

In the world beyond anthropology I would like to thank my friends in Germany, especially Friederike Brockmann, Berit Fabricius, and Elke Scheffelt, without whom I

would not be where I am today. Here in New York, Ahmet Karagozoglu offered invaluable support, especially during my first two years while living in West Hall. His door was always open for emergency rescues from computer problems, as well as for emotional support. My ex-roommate and friend, Maria Cristina Venditti, keeps reminding me that there are more ways to look at the world than through the lens of academia. Since we first met in West Hall, Veronica C. Hendrick has become my dear friend. I might have “made it” without her companionship and support, but surely a lot less happily and smoothly. Her family generously “adopted” me. Inviting me into their house and hearts, they not only gave me a glimpse of “real American life,” but more importantly, a home away from home. I will never be able to return that gift.

I deeply regret that my father, Klaus Fleischer passed away before I finished my degree, but he has been, and will always be with me regardless. I would like to thank my mother, Rosemarie Fleischer, who has taught me so many things about life that I could never learn in school. It is she who has given me the love and encouragement to dare to follow my dreams.

My husband, Andrés Páez, contributed to this project in many ways, filling me with gratitude beyond words and the dimensions of paper. Andrés not only accompanied me to China for part of my research, but relentlessly encouraged me to keep on going when I was in despair and about to give up, all while he himself had to finish his dissertation. Since my return from the field, Andrés has tirelessly discussed the topic with me, as well as edited and proof-read the dissertation, even though anthropology is not his field. All this, however, pales in comparison to the support, the inspiration, the love, friendship, and happiness he has brought to my life.

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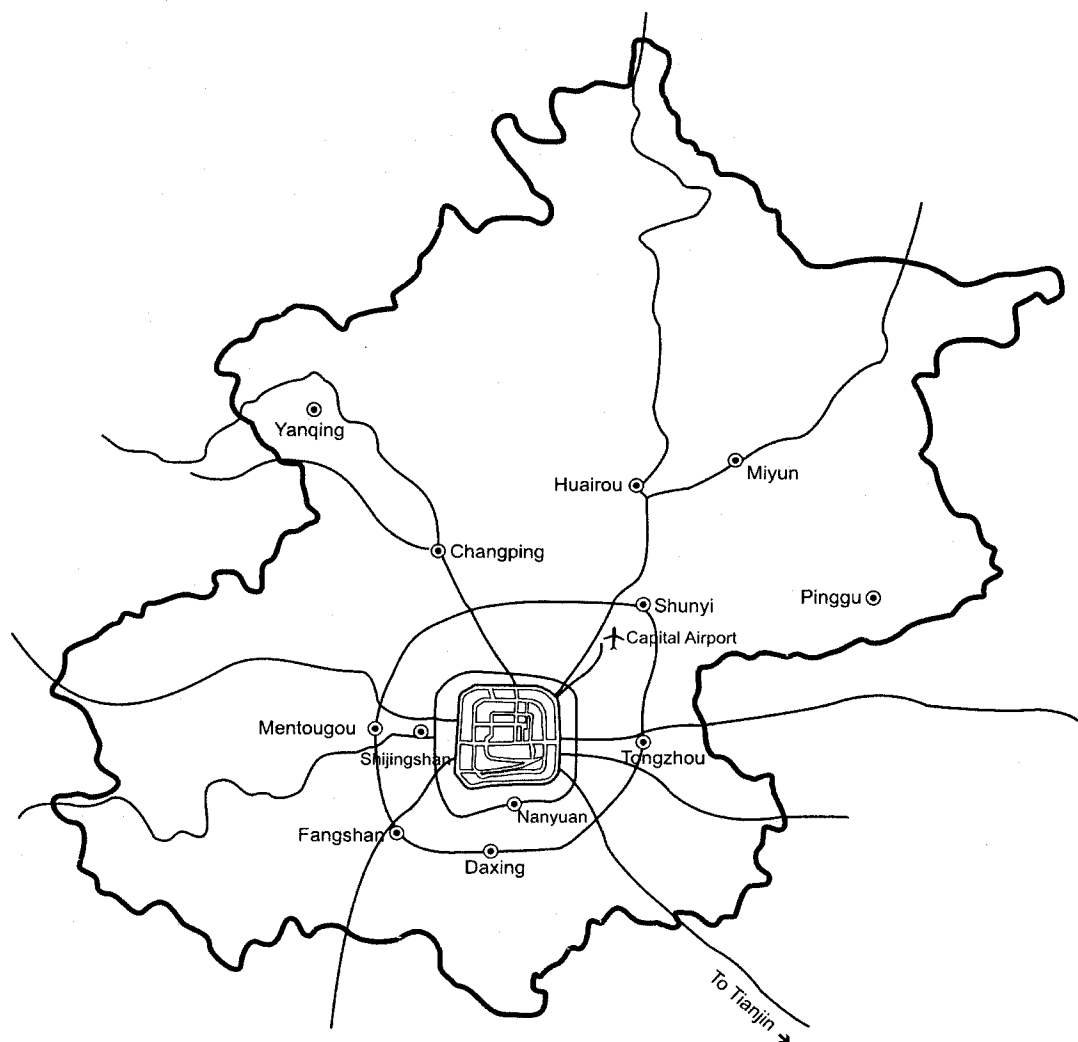
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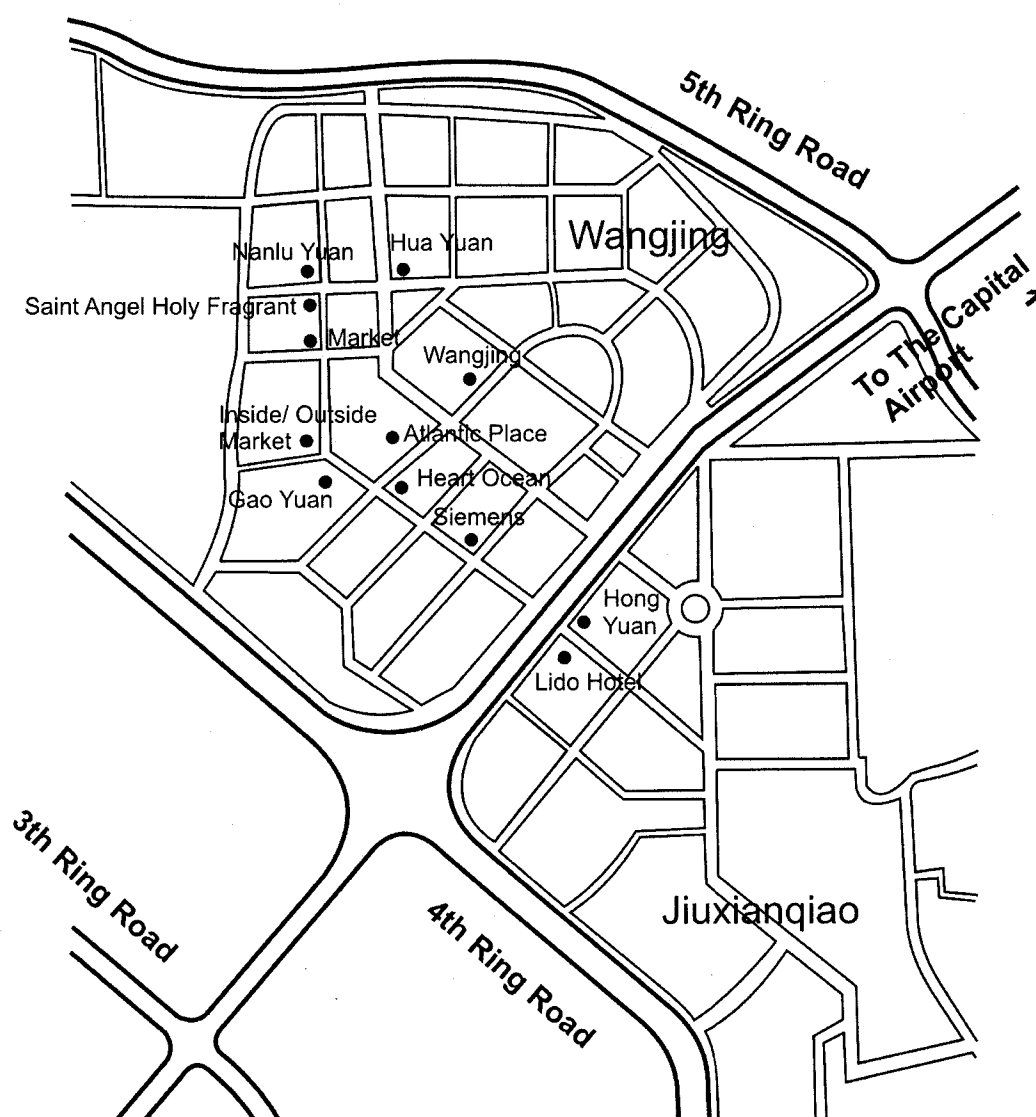
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BEIJING MUNICIPALITY



Map 1: Beijing Municipality

WANGJING



Map 3: Wangjing Xincheng, the Research Locale

Introduction: Suburban Lives

1 “The Wealthy Live in the North”

“The west is where the intellectuals live, the east is for the aristocrats, the south is where the poor live, but the wealthy live in the north.”¹ Variations of this saying, which refers to Beijing’s cosmologically inspired city structure in imperial times, were the common answer by young, wealthy residents to my question as to why they had chosen to move to *Wangjing Xincheng* (Wangjing New City), a suburb in the north-east of Beijing.

Planted on practically empty fields, Wangjing lies adjacent to a development zone for electronics factories that was set up in the 1950s in the rural hinterland of Beijing. In the 1990s the locale became one of the hotspots of new residential and commercial development because of its proximity to Beijing’s airport. Designated as an urban special economic zone, it quickly attracted large foreign companies to set up shop. Since the land and housing reforms of the 1990s, the construction of new commercial housing complexes has followed. In recent years, the locale has become especially attractive to young, wealthy Chinese because of its relative proximity and convenient traffic connection to the new CBD (Central Business District) in Beijing’s east. The roughly 14 square kilometer Wangjing suburban zone allegedly is the biggest residential and commercial development area in all Asia, and it is indeed bustling with construction. But besides the newly affluent, Wangjing is also populated by the residents of the remaining state-owned residential complexes, and by migrants from the countryside who are trying to get a share of Bei-

¹ Literally, “*xibian zhu zhishi fenzi; dongbian zhu guizu; nanbian zhu qiong ren; beibian zhu furen*,” or short, “*xi zhi dong gui nan qiong bei fu*.” The traditional saying, however, is “*dong fu xi gui*,” which means “the elite lives in the west, the wealthy in the east”. It is telling that present-day residents adapted the traditional saying to explain their residential choices.

jing's new wealth. As will become evident in this dissertation, Wangjing's emergence is the result of the complicated negotiations between the state project of modernization, the market, and people over space and social organization in present-day China.

Before the Chinese government initiated its economic reform program in 1979, most Chinese urban residents spent their lives within the gated compounds of state-run *danwei* (work units) that provided the necessities of daily life. Working, shopping, dealing with social services and institutions, taking care of children and elders – all this was likely to be organized within the limited spatial orbit of the *danwei*. As part of the reform of the state sector, the regime now encourages people to leave their work units and to find jobs and housing on the free market. Market reforms have thus broken the close connection between home and workplace, and residential differentiation has begun to appear on the intra-urban scale. Land reforms in the late 1980s (re)introduced land prices, with the result that urban fringes, where the cost of land remains lower, have experienced sustained growth, including suburban residential and commercial development.

Since the Chinese government re-ignited the reform process in 1992,² one of its proclaimed tasks has been to generally improve citizens' living and working conditions. The (re)introduction of a private economy has offered new employment and business opportunities with the prospect of financial gains. Evidently, not everybody is able to take advantage of these. On the contrary, unemployment is on the rise in Chinese cities. As a result of the transformations processes, urban society is experiencing growing strati-

² Deng Xiaoping's 1992 "Southern Tour," during which he visited and praised the Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen, brought the reform process back on track. It had been stalled by the withdrawal of FDI and the national enforcement of political control in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre.

fications along socio-economic lines. During the Maoist era, society was far from a socialist ideal of equality. Today, however, differentiation among the population is increasingly based on wage differentials, less on *guanxiwang* (personal networking) and access to power (cf. Davis 2000).

The contrasts and contradictions between emerging social classes in China are highly visible in expanding suburban areas such as Wangjing. While the centers of cities are under the extreme scrutiny of the official modernization effort which allows only for high-tech development intended to attract foreign investment and tourists, on the expanding edges of the built-up space new suburban growth remains interspersed with pockets of pre-reform structures. Today, urban fringes are dynamic zones where the reconfiguration of space with all its conflicting characteristics becomes apparent. Here, newly wealthy residents live side-by-side with state employees in old residential compounds, and with the growing number of rural migrants in search of work and housing. It is here, in the suburban area, where the emerging socio-economic differentiations of reform-period China come strongest to the fore, where the diverging interests of the various “players” who take part in the reconfiguration of space, meet, and at times, clash.

Residents of the emerging and changing cityscapes have to traverse in-between new and changing layers of power and ideology. Evidently, the continuous and radical restructuring of urban space deeply affects their lives, not only as regards the organization of daily tasks, but also in their experience of the city, and space in general. On-going socio-spatial processes raise questions concerning social structure and community, the function of public and private space, as well as the relation of residents to each other vis-à-vis “the market” and the state/ government.

My dissertation studies the socio-spatial processes and transformations in the emerging suburban Wangjing residential and commercial development zone where I collected data during 14 months of fieldwork. Centered around mainly three groups of people – young, educated, wealthy couples living in new residential complexes; (elderly) danwei residents; and migrants, living and/ or working in Wangjing – I analyze the development of the area as the result of the interplay of politics, planning, and people. Looking at Wangjing's economic and social transformations on the basis of these three groups presents unquestionably a simplification of matters. Social differentiations among the population were certainly more complex. Nonetheless, presenting different age groups, educational backgrounds, and trajectories that connected personal pasts and futures, the sampled people reflected the situation of many Chinese citizens in Beijing today. The three groups embodied realities about what current transformations in urban China mean for the people affected – all the more, as these groups were omnipresent in the city.

Focusing on the three groups, the dissertation specifically addresses the following interrelated questions: How are Wangjing residents affected by the socio-economic and urban transformations? In what way do people and institutions influence the shape and design of this emerging suburban zone? More generally, which role does the state, and which does the market play in the reconfiguration of present-day Chinese urban space? What are the characteristics of emerging socio-economic differentiations between urban residents, and how are these related to the past? How do gender, age, and locality influence stratification processes in reform-period Chinese society? Finally, how do these

differences intertwine with present-day urban transformations, with the state project of modernization, and the new (market) economy?

I explore these questions in the following way. First, I place the production of social space by suburban residents and workers at the center of my ethnographic inquiry. Instead of looking at the migrant population, the new middle class, or the urban poor separately, the study focuses on the interplay of the various “actors” who produce and negotiate the Wangjing suburban space. In this manner, the study illuminates not only one, but different layers of power and influence by residents, the state, and the market. In addition, beginning with the emergence of the research locale in the 1950s, and showing its transformations until the present, this account adds historical depth, showing how present-day processes are in important ways connected to, or even a result of the socialist past. Analyzing the social production of space in this rapidly transforming suburban area of the city, the study can also show how segments of society are differently affected by the socioeconomic changes. Finally, examining the interaction between the three groups and their negotiation of space, it will become apparent how, and along which lines urban population is being stratified.

Second, and connected to the above, this dissertation provides an ethnographic account of the emerging social and economic differences which are beginning to shape Chinese people into socially distinct groups. I discuss to what extent suburban residents have developed group-specific values and behaviors. The study shows that lifestyle and location of residence are becoming markers of social class and status, but also reflect back on citizens’ power in the negotiation of space – a phenomenon new to China.

Third, analyzing the social production of space I pay particular attention to the way women experience these changes. Geographers and urban anthropologists have shown that neighborhood issues not only affect women differently than men, but that women and men assess their importance in different ways. Further, places are reflective of gendered and unequal power relations, and architectural and geographic spatial arrangements reinforce status differences between women and men. Research in China specifically has demonstrated that the reform process and the new life-styles are also distinct experiences for women and men. After the alleged gender equality of the Mao-years, new contradictory role models for women have emerged. New gender ideologies are closely intertwined with the state project of “modernization.” Therefore, while I constantly interacted with, and talked to men and women in the research locale, the majority of the more structured and formal interviews were held with women. This attention is not intended to claim a difference between men and women’s lives, but to shed a particular light on women’s situation in present-day Beijing, as it is shaped by, and in turn affects the transformation of space.

Finally, while I examine the continuing socio-spatial transformation of Wangjing and its relationship with the state and the market, this local analysis is embedded in the larger context of the government’s national modernization project and its effects on Beijing. Anthropological community studies have been criticized for their narrow focus on local life, and their negligence in paying attention to the embeddedness of places in larger social, economic, and historic contexts (cf. Low 1996). Indeed, Beijing, as the capital of China holds a unique political and symbolic position in the Chinese nation. Chinese leaders today are confronted with a number of challenging issues: How should Beijing be

transformed to renew its exemplary position within the country and at the same time to project a representative image to the world? How can citizens be transformed into “modern subjects” who cease to be “supplicants to the state” (Davis and Harrell 1993) but will not challenge the ultimate state power and political control through the Communist Party? After stimulating private initiative in the economic, real estate, and even social sector, now the government worries if indeed it opened a Pandora’s box. Can the market forces set free still be contained or at least regulated? Can the population be kept in check when the private economy offers new choices and alternatives to the state sector regarding employment, resources, services?

With China’s 2001 accession to the WTO and Beijing’s successful bid for the 2008 Olympic Games the question of who controls the city’s, and more broadly, the country’s development, has taken new significance. Now the national and municipal governments find themselves in the double-bind of fulfilling international norms and expectations, while maintaining the special “Chinese characteristics”. There are certain aspects of the urban transformations that do not fit with the government’s vision of high-tech development and large corporate commerce that is to attract foreign investment and tourism, among them: informal in- and outdoor markets where migrants sell low-quality products (among them counterfeits), one-story simple brick houses without private bathrooms, the cottage industries set up by some of the migrant communities, but also soviet-style architecture of the Maoist era and the first generation of low-quality reform period buildings. The result is a struggle between the government vision of a “modern aesthetic” and the reform-period realities of increasing stratification. This negotiation is most visibly played out in the suburban space.

One of the important ways in which the government has intended to advance the modernization project and its vision of development has been the sustained stimulation and encouragement of consumption. The growing consumerization of society, in turn, has significantly changed Chinese citizens' lives, but also brought a whole new array of products, ideas, and values into the country. Today, differences in consumption power have become a major distinguishing factor in Chinese society. While newly wealthy Chinese travel and consume internationally, for many other citizens "the West" remains an abstract entity. Nonetheless, Chinese society as a whole is increasingly affected by the integration of the country into the international community.

Through the analysis of suburban restructuring and the ongoing negotiation of space, the larger aim of this dissertation is to show local reconfigurations of space and power, as well as the changing relation between state and society in present-day China. My account of the transformation of suburban space and Chinese peoples' involvement and reaction to it challenges a common assumption about transformation processes in formerly communist systems, namely, that the state is receding and being replaced by the market. In contrast, I argue that the new negotiation and production of space cannot be sufficiently explained by the simple process of one replacing the other. State and market forces are actually competing, collaborating, but also working in parallel at times. Ideology, government, the market, and people are all participating in the reconfiguration of space, albeit, with varying outcomes. The dissertation will also show that gender, age, and locality have been neglected in the understanding and interpretation of current restructuring of space. While finding new forms and expressions, these factors continue to

be important aspects of social stratification – positively as well as negatively. In today's production of space, gender, age, and locality intersect in ways that drastically divide population groups.

In what follows, I first describe the research locale in more detail, and then situate the dissertation in the larger fields of Chinese studies and anthropology. Specifically, I discuss the existing literature on urban transformations, social differentiation, and migrants, as well as modernization and gender in China, and indicate where the present dissertation is located therein.

2 China's Urban Reforms

Since 1978, a significant departure has been made from the Maoist economic system towards a socialist market economy, or market economy "with Chinese characteristics." The privatization of collective resources, the opening of the country to foreign investments, and the growing availability of a vast amount of cheap labor, have generated unprecedented economic growth with an average eight percent annual GDP growth rate per year over the past two decades.

The most important foundation for the reform process was the agricultural reforms and the introduction of the household responsibility system at the end of the 1970s, which improved agricultural productivity and the efficiency of labor allocation. Only shortly after, the opening of Special Economic Zones with favorable investment policies, which in the following years were extended to fourteen coastal cities, enabled the influx of foreign investment. The effect of the latter has been that the distribution of the new

wealth and development is very localized, namely concentrated in these same coastal regions and cities.

The reforms dramatically transformed urban spaces. The number of cities in China multiplied, and the formally registered urban population grew to nearly 240 million.³ Changes in the political economy have altered the lines of authority and the flow of resources between the central government and the municipalities (Davis 2000). Many Chinese cities are currently undergoing a concerted effort of reshaping, redesigning, restructuring. The Maoist pattern of relatively undifferentiated urban spaces, with self-sufficient districts that were characterized by residential compounds with standardized buildings, is increasingly vanishing to make way for new city planning which centers around shops, office and residential high rises, and ample roads (cf. Gaubatz 1995).

In Beijing, the white-tiled commercial structures built during the initial years of the reform already started to crumble in the early 1990s and within a few years were followed by a new generation of green-glazed office towers. Now these are being replaced by “globalized” skyscrapers, designed by internationally known architects (cf. Lim 2004). The concomitant virtual explosion of shops, restaurants, and entertainment facilities has enriched and facilitated everyday life.

Formerly a relatively homogenous and undifferentiated city, Beijing today faces growing economic and social differences. The emerging stratification of the populace is increasingly reflected in the city’s changing structure and environment, and it influences residents’ daily lives in different ways. New apartment buildings offer previously un-

³ Chinese statistics regarding “urban residents” are actually confusing. Some include all residents within a municipality, while others count only residents who do not work in agriculture. As Davis (1995) points out, between 1980 and 1990, the number of residents in towns and cities grew from 191 million to 301 million. These numbers, however, include agricultural households. The number cited in the text above, 240 million urban residents, is derived from restricting the count to non-agricultural households.

known luxuries in terms of standards and living space. But at the same time, old houses are being torn down, people (forcefully) evicted and resettled to areas far outside the city proper, and automobile traffic has soared to an almost 12 hour gridlock. For the inhabitants of the city the reorganization of built space is a constant, sometimes jarring fact of life that affects work, housing, commuting, and social interaction.

One of the most profound results of the land and housing reforms in Chinese cities is the increasing separation of workplace and home. Today, “bedroom suburbs” are emerging on the edges of Chinese centers. They consist of high-rise and low-rise buildings, with schools, and some stores, parks or recreational centers; but few of them reach true functional integration. Residents commute to work either in public buses or in shuttle buses provided by their employers since their places of work are beyond bicycle range (Gaubatz 1995; Zhang Tingwei 2001; Zhou and Ma 2000).⁴ Wangjing Xincheng Residential and Commercial Development Zone is one of several such emerging suburbs in Beijing.

3 Wangjing Xincheng – The Research Locale

The reform period changes in the suburban north-east of Beijing have been immense. In the 1990s, due to its proximity to the International Airport, Wangjing experienced the influx of foreign direct investment, and various international businesses established themselves in this newly designated residential and commercial development zone. The electronics company Siemens, for example, inhabits a prominent property, and the Lido

⁴ See Wu and Liu (2000) for a comparative study of suburbanization in China and abroad.

Hotel and Residential Complex offers foreigners a whole range of amenities, from apartments and office space to sports facilities and a shopping center carrying imported produce.

The elevated six-lane Capital Airport Highway, which traverses the suburban zone diagonally, divides it into a newer and an older part. On the eastern side of the highway, at the time of my research, roads were more narrow, and the built-up area denser. There were still several old, state-owned residential compounds strewn over the area which had been built after the 1950s. This was where employees of state-owned companies lived. Many of the old compounds, however, were dominated by a retired population since the younger generation chose, or was forced to move into commercial housing. Nonetheless, since the reform period, some of the state-owned compounds have been improved, and a number of new ones been built.

On the western side of the Capital Airport Highway, new development started on practically empty land. Around a few older compounds, roads were spread out in generous widths, and apartment complexes, surrounded by walls, gated, and guarded by security, invaded the fields. At the edge of the older part, in 2002 some streets were still lined by one-story make shift buildings that had sprung up during the reform period and which housed venues of all sorts: occasional book and clothing stores, various bakeries, telecommunications offices, one or two banks, and a wide array of restaurants – from fast food to specialty locales.

Scattered throughout the area were left-over islands of the one-floor, brown brick *pingfang* (single story) houses that had been typical of the countryside. These were usually comprised of only one room, had outside kitchenettes and no private bathrooms.

Huddled together, and accessible only through a labyrinth of small dirt paths, these used to be the houses of the agricultural population within the Beijing municipality. Now migrants to the city found temporary accommodation in them. The areas were often in unsanitary conditions; as they were bound to be torn down in the near future, the city seemed to have given up on the provision of services such as garbage collection, for example. Around several of these islands of pingfang houses were in- and outside markets where the migrants and low-income urban residents bought and sold everything they needed for life: clothes, fresh produce, fruit, herbs, books, household wares, electrical appliances, and so forth. Products were generally cheap and the quality is low.

On the edge of the recently finished loop of ample streets, which marked the area's future expansion, one could get an idea of how the locale had looked before the blitz of development. Here, a narrow dirt road ran between rows of old buildings. On the left were apartment blocks from the 1950s that had once belonged to a state-owned company. Now they were run down and obviously not taken care of, but nonetheless occupied. On the other side of the road, a maze of abandoned small factories and neglected enterprise lots were mixed with pingfang houses, some of which had been turned into shops and restaurants. Along the road, piles of garbage rotted in the sun, and a small, open canal was the only sewage system. The back-alley stank horribly as soon as the temperatures rose in spring. This was the poorest and most dilapidated part of the entire suburban zone.

In 2002, Wangjing was bustling with construction. Towered over by cranes, on some days one suffocated from the clouds of dust that hung above ever new rising complexes. Over the course of my research, the neighborhood constantly changed: a row of

one-story shops disappeared from one day to the other, a market hall was razed overnight, and new fences were put up around yet another construction site. Throughout the 14 months of my research around Wangjing, I experienced the destruction of 5 areas of small shops and pingfang houses, the razing of two outside markets, and the rise of about seven new apartment complexes, as well as two supermarkets, which, both in style and in price, clearly aimed at a wealthier clientele. The future dimension of the zone could be seen by the pattern of roads, half of which led only into empty fields for the time being. At the very edge of this planned zone, however, the production facilities of several multinational companies had already been built, as well as the campus of an as yet un-inaugurated gigantic new high school.

The new residential compounds that dominated Wangjing varied greatly in quality and price. They were, however, all in the upper middle to higher price category and therefore out of reach for most Chinese people. Residents belonged to the new class of “chuppies” – Chinese urban professionals. Only one big new complex, Hua Yuan, built by the educational ministry, provided housing outside the real estate market for state employees in the educational sector. Wangjing New City, the complex that gave the area its name, was a mid-priced development, at least in real estate market terms. The most upscale, finished development in the area at the time of my research was Atlantic Place where apartments had initially sold for a minimum of RMB 4,000 (US\$ 500) per square meter. By the end of my research, it was about to be superseded and overtaken in price by several projected new complexes which had set up sales offices in the Wangjing neighborhood.

A bus ride on one of the diagonally outspreading roads, behind the recently finished northern part of the Fifth Ring Road, brings one to the countryside, where little villages were strewn along the route. This was where many of the workers – waitresses and cooks in restaurants, and the sales people from the cheap markets who did not have a Beijing residence permit (*hukou*) – receded while the city grew. Here they found accommodation when the pingfang houses, formerly engulfed, were razed. At the same time, the original population, who in the past used to be farmers, today usually commutes to the city where they work.

Emerging from this description we can see various “players,” that is, groups of people, institutions, and factors, which are involved in the production of the emerging suburban space Wangjing Xincheng: a younger, wealthy generation, who lives in newly constructed residential complexes; residents of state-owned compounds; and diverse groups of migrants who work and settle in the neighborhood. Significant influence on this space, however, is also exerted by the national and local governments, and the market, which is represented in part by real estate companies and investors.

In the analysis of these different factors in the production of space, one also has to take into account the new ideologies of consumption, of a “modern society,” of quality of living and self-realization. In addition, new socio-spatial transformation processes do not happen on “an empty sheet of paper.” How are they influenced by history, changing conceptions of city planning, and the politics of the pre-reform era? These are the layers which have to be considered in the examination of present-day urban reconfigurations of space and society.

4 Theoretical Background

4.1 Urban Transformations

Urban transformations in China have generated a great deal of research interest. My investigation was majorly influenced by Deborah Davis' work on urban spaces (Davis et al. 1995) and on the consumer revolution in urban China (Davis 2000). A co-edited collection, the former explores how the character of city life changed after political and economic restructuring intensified in 1984, and how this change affected the creation of new physical, economic, and cultural spaces in urban China. The volume focuses on the impact of increased commercialization and reduced state power on the urban form, social life, the arts, voluntary organizations, the economy, and the government in urban areas. In *The Consumer Revolution* (2000), Davis in turn takes up this thread to explore the interpersonal consequences of rapid commercialization of Chinese society. The book shows that capitalism has brought urban Chinese both a higher material standard of living and new freedoms to create a private life beyond the control of the state.

Having myself observed the enormous reconfigurations of the cityscape in Beijing since 1993, I was especially struck by the way the spatial transformations affect people's lives. The studies cited above provide intriguing analyses of new urban phenomena, and some of them also examine changes in the city structure itself. My interest, however, was in the reform-period *production* of space by the various new and old "players" – the state, "the market," ideologies, and variously situated people.

Spatial changes in reform-period China themselves have been widely examined. Besides the emergence of an urban land market (e.g. Xie et. al 2002), for example, the details of the housing reforms have attracted significant attention (see Li 2003; Wang

2001; Ye 1987; Zhong and Hays 1996; Zhu 2000). Generally, though, most research has focused on structural changes and general trends (e.g. Gaubatz 1995, 1999; Logan 2002; Tang and Parish 2000; Wu 1996, 1998; Wu and Yeh 1997). Among these studies, political scientist Wenfang Tang and sociologist William L. Parish's analysis of several high-quality surveys conducted by Chinese social scientists, stands out for offering data on key aspects of contemporary urban Chinese life. Nonetheless, while providing valuable insights, the above studies remain very theoretical, either focusing on overall structural aspects of the transformations, or using generalized statistics for their conclusions.

More recent anthropological studies of China have looked at changing social relations, state power, gender relations, and cultural politics (e.g., Anagnost 1997; Brownell 1995; Ikels 1996; Tang and Parish 2000; Yang 1994, 1999). Nonetheless, as Zhang (2001) has pointed out, the role of space in shaping these social and political processes remains for the most part neglected. Cultural geographers, on the other hand, have shown that space is not neutral but constructed within and out of social relationships, historical circumstances, politics, economies, and interests. It is charged with meaning (cf. Harvey 1989, 1990; Massey 1994; Soja 1989). Henri Lefebvre (1991) pointed to the way that real, lived social space is produced by concrete human practices and serves as a powerful tool in shaping people's thoughts and actions. The space in which we live is formed by us while at the same time our daily lives are structured and influenced by the space we live in. What is missing in the aforementioned accounts of China's spatial transformations are the personal views, individual impressions, and thoughts of urban residents regarding the current changes and an assessment of their participation in them.

My research therefore aimed at connecting the theoretical/ structural insights of the above-mentioned investigations with the personal views, opinions, and feelings of urban residents. How do Chinese urbanites experience the structural changes of the cities, and how are they affected by the privatization of the housing system? What are their views on issues connected to housing and location of residence? How do urbanites choose their homes today, and how much choice do they have in the process to start with? How are residents' lives affected by the breaking of the close connection between homes and workplaces? And how do they negotiate these changes? What are the consequences of their actions for the production of space?

4.2 Emerging Socioeconomic Groups

Current transformations in the urban landscape and in the economy depend significantly on the millions of migrant workers that arrive daily in the urban centers in search of a share of the new wealth. With the reforms in the agricultural sector, vast numbers of rural laborers became redundant. Since post-reform labor policies are geared toward liberalism, market mechanisms are replacing state planning in hiring and firing, as well as setting wage scales. The growing Special Economic Zones, with their foreign investment-sparked economic growth, and an emerging service sector in the cities offered the rural population new employment opportunities, especially since previous migration restrictions were eased. In 1990, the Population Census recorded about 72.5 million rural labor migrants (Tan 1997). Prime migration destinations were the coastal areas and large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai.

Possessing little education or capital to start some kind of small business, most migrants rely on selling their labor. Temporary employment can be found in construction, restaurants, factories, but also as domestic employees. Other migrants ride transportation bicycles or collect garbage – menial jobs that the city population is increasingly less willing to do. These jobs are usually not regulated, and workers have few ways to enforce their rights. Newspapers reports about construction workers who fail to be paid, and about the abuse of domestic workers and restaurant employees, are surging.

Much has been written about the new phenomenon of labor migration. While generally more men than women migrate, migrant women have received special attention in various studies. Female workers in Special Economic Zones are one of the recurrent subjects of investigation (e.g. Lee 1998). Other studies (e.g. Dutton 1998; Lietsch 1995; Shi n.d.; Sun 1998), have looked into the new phenomenon of female domestic employees, *baomu*, most of whom are rural women from all over China. A second strain of research has delved into the emergence of peasant enclaves in bigger cities, such as “Xinjiang” and “Zhejiang” villages in Beijing (e.g. Ma and Xiang 1998; Wu 2002; Zhang 2001).

One theme that connects these studies is the character of the migration which is described. Through kinship and local ties, migrant men and women are channeled into new places and occupations. Migrants are, however, importantly divided by class, and regional and occupational differences. Besides the relatively organized migrant population, for example, there is a growing “floating population” (*liudong renkou*, the official term for migrants) which is increasingly settled in the cities. Sometimes married locally, they rarely, if ever, return to their places of origin. Many of these migrants are entangled

only minimally in networks of either kinship or native-place. While such connections might initially bring them to the city, they do not necessarily result in consistent, strong ties which lead to common settlement or work. These “settled migrants,” instead, form new relations of support that are urban-based. This part of the migrant population, or better, this new part of the urban population, remains understudied.

Since I encountered a number of settled migrants living and/ or working in the research area, questions emerged as regards their participation and position in present-day urban restructuring. How are settled migrants confronting everyday life in the city? How are they organizing their residential and working lives, given that the continuous lack of an urban residence permit restricts their access to various resources and facilities, ranging from housing to health services? Researching these migrants’ lives in the context of the suburban development zone offers a perspective on the *interaction* between emerging socio-economic groups, a topic which has been not been sufficiently studied in the urban Chinese context.

In their important research on Chinese families during the 1980s, Davis and Harrell (1993) found a resurgence of pre-communist rituals, ceremonies, and family behavior. The authors warned, however, against interpreting these traditional practices as a “step backwards,” a return to pre-Maoist conditions. Davis and Harrell concluded instead that these practices are a response to the post-Mao political economy. Further, since state policies do not force homogeneity any longer, the scholars observed a general tendency for Chinese families to adapt their marital, parental, and welfare strategies to specific local economic conditions. As a result, there was no uniform pattern of family forms and

behaviors, but a “variegated mosaic,” which demonstrated the “adaptation of basic principles to differing conditions” (ibid.: 21).

More than 15 years after this investigation, however, I observed that Chinese people increasingly *do* develop specific behaviors according to their income-group, and in addition, the urban landscape begins to be structured along socio-economic lines. Therefore, an important aspect of analysis is the emergence of class and residential segregation.

One of the most inspiring contributions to the study of class-formation remains E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966), in which he understands “class” not as a “structure” or “category,” but as “a *historical* phenomenon,” a joining of “a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness.” It is “something which in fact happens (and can be shown to happen) in human relationships” (ibid.: 8). Therefore, class is not a “thing,” but always a historical relationship of unity and difference: uniting one class as against another class or classes (Storey 1993:57).

Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. [Thompson 1966:8 – 9]

The common experience of class “is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily” (ibid.: 9). But class consciousness is not determined in this way: “Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition” (Thompson 1966:10). For Thompson, class is

“a social and cultural formation, arising from processes which can be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable historical period” (ibid.: 11).

It is this kind of *process* of historical class formation that is important in the context of China, where socio-economic differences in the population are growing, but are far from definite, or clearly defined. As Zhang (2004) points out, Thompson’s study also illustrates the fact that class is not only formed in and through relations of production, but also “through the spheres of consumption, family, and community life” (ibid.: 1). The present study of an emerging neighborhood is therefore going to shed light on the processes of class formation in the daily interaction of people and groups in suburban Beijing.

Social relationships and people’s conceptions of the world are shaped by, and inscribed in spatial organization. Bourdieu’s study of the Kabyle household (1990) has shown this for the domestic realm. More illuminating in the present context, however, is Mike Davis’ study of Los Angeles (1992). Davis demonstrates how spatial organization is loaded with sociopolitical meanings and that it plays a prominent role in the structuring of class relations and class consciousness. In fact, architectural styles and the spatial layout of buildings, streets, and public spaces help maintain power relations and social domination. But Soja (1989:81) also points to the reverse effect, namely that space and political organization of space not only express social relationships but in turn also shape them. It is in this context that emerging socio-spatial segregation in Chinese urban space becomes significant. What is the effect of the growing number of “zones of affluence,” the new residential compounds in which people with similar economic means are grouped together, on the overall city structure and on the shape of the suburban space

itself? How is the fact that Wangjing is emerging as a middle- to upscale residential neighborhood connected to the overall socio-spatial reconfiguration of Beijing and the country? What makes its attractiveness, and who determines this new space's social status? And, in turn, how does living in the new suburban environment impinge on people's lives?

In the context of class formation, the official discourse and state ideology propagated in the mass media also become important. In official and urban discourse, migrants, for example, are presented as a homogenous, inferior group that needs to be civilized and transformed by higher moral codes set by permanent urban residents (Zhang 2001). Peasantry and the countryside in official discourse are usually regarded as lagging behind the nation's march to modernity (Cohen 1993, Zhang 2001). But questions of "civilization" also affect the registered urban population when municipal government campaigns target residents' public behavior with new rules and regulations. Men taking off their shirts in the blistering summer heat of the city, people strolling at night through the old narrow alleys in their pajamas, or elderly men taking ice baths in the city lakes – all of these are customs that have been criticized or even forbidden as "un-modern" behaviors. As Anagnost (1997) points out, the readying of the Chinese population for participation in global capitalism has taken place through a state-initiated civilizing process aimed at remaking subjectivities into those appropriate for a disciplined, efficient work force. "Modernity,"⁵ in fact, has become the new government legitimation for public surveillance and control.

⁵ Throughout the dissertation I use the words "modernization," "modernity," and "modern" as somewhat empty markers of the state project of transformation and development of the country. This project is centered around reforming the economy in terms of marketization, an emphasis on efficiency and the genera-

In addition, environmental issues, such as “green space” (*lǜdi, lǜhua*) and “clean air” (*kongqi, qingkong*), are also increasingly important discursive keywords which in many ways influence new middle- and upper class urban residents’ residential choices. In turn, they are employed by real estate companies and advertising agencies to promote consumption of commercial housing. Intensifying this trend are public and indeed academic discussions of the appropriate lifestyle for the different, emerging socio-economic groups.

4.3 Transformations and Gender Relations

Scholarship on post-socialist transformations in Russia and Eastern Europe has shown the uncertainties that arise in these rapidly changing societies. The new realities are far more complex than “the market” replacing “the retreating state.” In their analysis of post-socialist urban changes in Moscow, Pavlovskaya and Hanson (2001), for example, show that the void of former state services is filled by domestic labor, not by a private sector. Household, or “in-home,” labor replaces market consumption, and instead of a monetized economic system what emerges is a “non-monetary market economy”. These transformations result in class and gender changes in the household and in the larger economy. In tandem with the post-Soviet tendency to valorize patriarchy, these changes work to the detriment of women, and especially women with dependent children (*ibid.*). These findings point to a third issue of present-day transformations in China: the renegotiation of gender relations, and the articulation of gender, and gender roles, in the new social circumstances.

tion of wealth, and improvement of living standards. The terms are weighted down by the enormous debate of what exactly “modernity” is, but here I will steer free of a more detailed discussion.

Gender formations and relations in China have attracted a significant amount of research, which has analyzed women's position in imperial, Maoist, and reform times. While it is impossible to generalize for such a vast country, there is a consensus that among the variations and local specificities, women in imperial times held a significantly inferior position to men. So much so that the liberation of women became a core issue for reformers at the beginning of the 20th century. Women's position was indeed likened to the position of the Chinese nation oppressed by imperial Western powers, with the liberation of the one – women – seen as the key to the liberation of the other – the Chinese nation-state (cf. Duara 1998; Elvin 1984; Yang 1999).

The liberation movement begun in the 1930s by the Communists “inherited” this agenda. Nonetheless, in reality gender was quickly subsumed by class politics as the main concern of the revolutionaries. The Chinese communist regime fully embraced Engels' notion that it was participation in social production that would liberate women and result in gender equality. But continuing gender ideologies left women with the double burden of wage labor and household work (cf. Andors 1983; Davin 1976; Gilmartin 1993; Hooper 1984; Yang 1999; Wolf 1985).

In the reform period, gender relations and ideologies are being renegotiated. Considered “surplus labor,” more women than men are laid-off in the state sector (Summerfield 1994), while public debates have suggested that women return home as a solution to the growing unemployment problem in China (Wang Zheng 2000). At the same time, new distinctly gendered occupations in the service sector have emerged (Zhang Zhen 2000), and the sexualized woman, spurred by the early 20th century bout of capitalism⁶

⁶ Especially in the treaty ports Shanghai, Guangzhou, Qingdao, and Tianjin.

and erased by Mao-era revolutionary class-discourse, has returned in mass-media representations, while booming women's magazines have created a culture of domesticity (Hooper 1998).

The wide array of research on women in contemporary China is highly illuminating. For me, however, the question arises as to how women, within the context of the contradictory new gender realities and ideologies, are affected by present-day spatial reconfigurations. Until now, space and gender have not been treated together except in terms of an emerging public sphere where women find new liberties and opportunities (e.g. Yang 1999). On the contrary, the interaction of reconfigured physical space and gender ideologies has been widely neglected.

Social and gender relations are often implicated in the transformations of space itself. According to Massey (1994), particular ways of thinking about space and place are tied, both directly and indirectly, to particular social constructions of gender relations. Places are never static or empty concepts, but reflective of gendered and unequal power relations. Moreover, architectural and geographic spatial arrangements have reinforced status differences between women and men (Spain 1992). Already during the Maoist era, the common pattern of living in apartments distributed through husbands' work units meant longer commutes for women. In the reform period, the spatial structure of the city reaches a new gendered extreme when women decide to stay at home because, after having been resettled to suburban areas, commuting to their former work places is no longer economically feasible.

In many aspects of daily life the state is receding. State-run services, such as care for the elderly and children, are curtailed and this significantly influences family and

gender relations in the struggle to counterbalance these developments. Many aspects of daily life, such as shopping, commuting, taking care of children and elderly, have to be reorganized. And in these reconfigurations, gender, and gender roles are implicated and affected. While the private service sector is growing, access to it is increasingly determined by financial means, which in turn excludes many people.

Physical transformations of the Chinese urban landscape, the emergence of a consumer society based on a market-driven economy which is entangled with, and results in changing gender ideologies – these new developments call for an analysis of space *and* gender as mutually constitutive and dependent.

4.4 Global Capitalism and Consumption

New urban forms have emerged not only in the transitional economies of the former Soviet bloc and China; qualitative changes in the urban landscape have also been observed in Western metropolises. This, in turn, has sparked an outpouring of new urban theories (e.g. Castells 1996; Davis 1990; Harvey 1990; Soja 1996). Harvey, for example, has focused his analysis on global capitalism, a force characterized by an international division of labor, flexible production controlled by the transnational corporation, revolutions in communications and other technologies, and a shifting of national capital. This new force is said to be in the process of completely reshaping local cultural practices from labor and consumption to experiences of time and space (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1984). With the introduction of market forces and the growing integration of the Chinese economy into the global capitalist system, certain aspects of these processes are also already visible in contemporary China.

In order to create more employment opportunities, at the beginning of the reform period, the private sector was restored to legality. Besides this domestic private sector, there is the rapidly expanding joint venture sector, including collaborative investments especially from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore (Tang and Parish 2000). Indeed, much of China's initial economic success was sparked by Foreign Direct Investment; its new economy is largely export based. The country's development today is closely linked to (or "dependent on," to use Logan's [2002] phrasing) its global connections. Nonetheless, as Chen et al. (2001) point out, "the material and social dimensions of capitalism and foreign consumer cultures are built within the cultural structures already established by Chinese socialism." In contrast to the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but also to Western capitalist societies, China's reforms are a mix of retained state power and hyper-capitalism.

Xia hai, literally "jumping into the sea," is the popular term given to participation in China's market economy. In the mid-1980s, most urbanites still viewed the petty merchants of street stalls with more contempt than envy. Yet by the 1990s, many people felt the pressure to, or were excited about "taking the plunge" (Chen et al. 2001). The self-employed and domestic private and foreign joint venture sectors have thrived. People today can quit their state jobs and work as street vendors or in small domestic enterprises. But there are also increasing opportunities to work in the many private, joint venture, and foreign companies that pay much higher salaries. The more successful of this new class of Chinese urban professionals (*Chuppies*) who work in private business and foreign companies travel by plane, go to fancy restaurants, drive luxury cars, and live in extravagant apartments (Tang and Parish 2000).

Independently of individual economic success, the reforms have brought Chinese citizens into close contact with transnational capitalist goods, ideas, and practices. These have triggered a consumerism that profoundly changes relationships and self-identities (cf. Chen et al. 2001). Especially the 1990s have been characterized by a state-sanctioned and transnationally produced valorization of consumption. "What comes into being," writes Mayfair Yang, "is a culture of desiring, consuming individuals yearning to be fulfilled" (1997:303).

The transformation of state-society relations and the partial withdrawal of the state from domestic and social life have given rise to increasingly diverse kinds of leisure and personal space. As new policies displace the planned structures of the socialist order, individuals must locate themselves in new markets with vastly different social geographies. During the Maoist era, Chinese citizens were immobilized through the household registration system, occupying fixed specific places in a national development hierarchy with Beijing at the top. Today space and people are redefined and ranked in a hierarchy of modernity and exchange value (Chen et al. 2001).

Much has been written about the disempowerment of the nation-state in the face of increasingly flexible and mobile capital. Anagnost (1997), however, maintains that in China we can observe a process of negotiation between the state and new kinds of economic actors. Indeed, the state and the market are sometimes mutually constitutive. Since ideological and material reconceptions of culture and cities in China are put into place by planners, developers, marketers, and state governing bodies, all are key "players" to focus on in an anthropological investigation of the reform process.

5 Organization of Present Work

Several of my elderly informants came to Beijing after the 1949 Communist Revolution. They vividly remembered the early years of the newly founded People's Republic and the revolutionary zeal of creating a "new society." Chapter I of the dissertation discusses the most important political, social, and economic projects of the Communist government after 1949, and their effects on the lives of Chinese citizens. We will see how the creation of such institutions as the hukou and the danwei socially and spatially positioned the population in ways which continue to affect peoples' lives today. Throughout the chapter, I will portray the emergence of the Wangjing neighborhood and what people felt and thought about the changes in the city and their lives during this period.

In Chapter II, I discuss various aspects of the reforms that have been introduced since in 1978. The chapter is divided into two subsections. The first section discusses social and economic reforms, such as changes in work contracts, retirement arrangements and pensions, as well as the health care system and the way my informants have been affected by the new policies. Further, I look at the opening of the private sector, who has taken advantage of it and to what effect, and at the complex issue of rural-urban migration. In the second subsection, I discuss the housing reforms and their effects on the city and its residents. The chapter closes with a short discussion of the expanding real estate sector in Beijing, and the issues involved in its emergence.

Chapter III zooms the ethnographic lense on the Wangjing neighborhood. I portray the differences in architectural style and life in state-sector and commercial housing complexes. The focus lies on the way resident's lives have been affected by the housing reforms, and how they negotiate these effects. This will be contrasted with life in other

residential arrangements in and around Wangjing, namely, affordable housing projects and pingfang houses in the rural hinterland.

In Chapter IV my attention shifts to the question of gender and how women's lives have been affected by changing ideologies. The point is to show how the two generations of women discussed here have been differently socialized and accordingly have diverging views on issues of work, equality, child bearing, and family. In addition, it will become apparent that apart from age, the social organization of society into rural and urban during the Maoist era has had a lasting effect on women's position and possibilities.

In Chapter V, I analyze emerging socio-economic differentiations in Chinese society, and show how these are connected to history, ideology, and emerging market forces. I will show that the three groups discussed here are indeed beginning to develop diverging values and behaviors, which makes it possible to speak of a class structuration of Chinese society.

Chapter VI, finally, discusses the interconnections between increasing socio-economic stratification, the growing integration of China into the global capitalist system, and China's state project of modernization. The conclusion, Chapter VII, offers my interpretation of the socio-spatial reconfigurations of Beijing.

Data Collection

Throughout the fourteen months of my research, I spent practically every day in the research locale, "hanging out" in one of the old danwei connected residential compounds, a

new commercial complex, or in one of the various markets around Wangjing, eventually concentrating on one of them, where a group of sales people became my friends.

My interviews with the young, educated couples living in commercial housing took off after a friend introduced me to several of her classmates who lived in Wangjing. Through these initial contacts I was able to eventually get to know more people. In addition, I spent several weekends and evenings with a group of young, educated couples, whom I got to know through another Chinese friend. Most of these couples did not live in Wangjing and they became a reference group for comparison with my Wangjing-based findings.

I initially gained access to danwei residents through the neighborhood organization of one of the old residential compounds around Wangjing. They generously introduced me to several elderly people, who in turn put me in touch with others. In total I interviewed 40 young and educated, elderly, and migrant men and women in set-up appointments. While I had developed a catalogue of questions for these meetings, most of the time the structure was broken by the narratives of my interview partners, and more spontaneous and individually patterned conversations developed. The sessions lasted between one and two hours, and were tape-recorded. Quotes from the interviews are cited as "Interview" with the date. In addition to these "formal" interviews, I constantly interacted and talked with Wangjing residents and workers in the settings noted above. Here I took notes about the conversations I had, at times during the exchanges, at times reconstructing them afterwards. The information I gained in this way is cited as "notes" with the respective date.

Throughout the research I worked with two assistants who took turns in accompanying me to the interviews. “Mei” was an overseas Chinese social science student, who was taking a year off from university in the U.S. to try “to find her roots” in China, as she herself put it with a laugh. “Cindy,” a young Beijing woman worked as a self-employed translator, and waited to begin graduate studies abroad. Both women became extremely interested in my investigation, and during the interviews often began to ask their own questions, as I had urged them to do.

The decision to work with the assistants was based on two considerations: First, while my Mandarin was good enough for conversations with Beijing people, I had difficulties understanding some of the migrant sales people in the markets around Wangjing, who spoke in their local dialects. Second, several researchers at Beijing University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) advised me that it would be much easier to gain the confidence of residential neighborhood committees, which would help me find interview partners in danwei compounds, if I was accompanied by a Chinese student. I would be regarded with much less suspicion of being a journalist looking for a sensationalist story.

Generally, the interviews with the research assistants turned into conversations between the three of us. Only with some migrants my language skills were insufficient to fully participate. In that case, I formulated my questions to the assistant who in turn translated them to our conversation partner. While the use of an assistant/ translator can involve a loss of information and change of meaning, in fact I understood enough to realize translation mistakes. The many informal conversations I had by myself with residents and workers around Wangjing were a good reference and “reality check” for the translations.

In addition to this interaction with people in Wangjing, I met several times with a group of young sociologists, city planners, and anthropologists at Beijing University and at CASS. In these encounters, I had the chance to discuss my impressions from the field, and received some valuable background information and suggestions for my research.

Throughout the research, I read and collected articles in English and Chinese newspapers and magazines, which are now widely available in the city. My attention lay on discussions of lifestyle, public culture, housing, and social issues. This gave me an impression of what the government considered important issues and which messages it wanted to spread.

A final contributor to the investigation was a Beijing journalist, specialized in the real estate market, who shared with me some of the facts, gossip, and rumors in the field.

A Note on Privacy

Even though I do not think that the information my interview partners revealed is potentially endangering or embarrassing, I chose to assign pseudonyms to them in order to protect their privacy.

The Chinese currency *renminbi* (RMB) is colloquially called “Yuan”; US\$ 1 roughly converts to RMB 8.

Chapter I: Beijing and the Socialist Transformation of Space and Society

1 Beijing Municipality

In 1949, when the Communist regime made Beijing once again the capital of the newly established People's Republic of China,¹ the city looked back upon more than 2000 years of history. Originally designed to represent ideas combining the cosmological order with rules of government and spatial form, key elements of the city epitomized the traditional Confucian worldview (cf. Mote 1977; Sit 1995).² Though Beijing was destroyed and rebuilt various times, in the early 20th century its general layout still reflected the original plan even after the wars, revolts, Western commercialization, and the industrialization of the previous century.

Today, the municipality of Beijing comprises roughly 16,800 square kilometers. In the attempt to blur the distinctions between town and country, agriculture and industry, mental and manual labor, in 1949 the Communist government introduced the new concept of the city-region which emphasized self-sufficiency in contrast to a regional division of labor.³ A large rural adjunct was added to the Chinese city's jurisdiction, effectively making up the city-region. The municipality of Beijing came to constitute nine

¹ During the Republican era, the Nationalist Government had moved the capital to Nanjing.

² The Chinese saw the universe as a harmoniously functioning organism which consisted of innumerable objects, qualities, and forces. Despite their apparent heterogeneity these were integrated into a coherent pattern as they all derived from one source. This source was the universe or *dao*, the "Great Unity." Translated into spatial form, this meant that the imperial city was to have a central position relative to its subjects and the natural environs. It was to be located on level lands and near water. It should be placed in precise alignment with the four directions and have a southward orientation. The general layout, finally, was to be square and orderly, expressing a need to conform with the orderliness of nature in order to avoid haphazard mishaps. See Sit 1995.

³ In this, the concept resembles the traditional Chinese notion of the city as a nodal point for a rural hinterland, an integral part of the vast agricultural community rather than a distinctive, separate body. See Mote 1977; Sit 1995, Whyte and Parish 1984.

urban districts (*qu*) plus nine adjacent rural counties (*xian*) (Ma 1979, Sit 1995). Under the “Master Plan for Beijing’s Urban Development (1991 – 2010),” approved by the State Council in 1993, the city’s planned urban sector of 1,040 square kilometers is defined as extending from Dingfuzhuang in the east to Shijiangshan in the west, and from the Qing River in the north to Nanyuan in the south. The city center, or “central part of the city,” itself lies roughly within the Fourth Ring Road, occupying about 290 square kilometers. The “city proper” is made up of the four old districts (*shixiaqu*) of Dongcheng, Xicheng, Chongwen, and Xuanwu, with an area of 87.1 square kilometers. Around these lie the “near (or semi-urban) suburbs” (*jinjiaoqu*) Haidian, Chaoyang, Shijingshan, and Fengtai that grew mainly after 1949 and cover 1282.9 square kilometers. Although administratively under the city, these districts are considerably less densely populated. The outer suburbs are mainly rural, consisting of the two less-developed city districts, Mentougou and Fangshan, located in the southwestern part of Beijing, and the eight suburban counties (*jiaoxian*), Tongzhou, Shunyi, Changping, Daxing, Pinggu, Huairou, Miyun, and Yanqing (Zhou and Ma 2000). Here are also 14 satellite towns which were established by Communist city planners after 1949. Guided by the Soviet model of a “mother-child” pattern of inner (central city) and satellite settlements, these towns were intended to steer away growth from the inner city and avoid overcrowding and environmental problems. Because of their distance from the city center, the satellite towns remain relatively independent entities until today (*Beijing Statistical Bureau* 2001; Li Xin 2002; Sit 1995; Wang Dandan 2002a).

Wangjing Xincheng, the research locale, is part of *Chaoyang Qu* (Chaoyang District) in Beijing’s north-east. Chaoyang has an area of 476 square kilometers which

stretches beyond the fourth ring road, a permanent residential population of 2.29 million, 22 sub-district offices, and 24 townships under its jurisdiction (*Chaoyang Tourism Administration Beijing*, n.d.). As one of five “semi-urban” districts, part of Chaoyang’s population is registered as working in agriculture.

Table 1: Beijing Households and Population (Registered Statistics)

Region	Total Population (10,000)	Households (10,000)			Permanent Residents (10,000)			Temporary Residents (10,000)
		Total	Non-Agricultural	Agricultural	Total	Non-Agricultural	Agricultural	
Total	1278.0	397.9	275.5	122.4	1107.5	760.7	346.8	170.5
<i>City Proper</i>	266.3	87.7	87.7	---	238.2	238.2	---	28.1
Dongcheng	71.3	23.5	23.5	---	62.6	62.6	---	8.7
Xicheng	85.6	28.2	28.2	---	78.1	78.1	---	7.5
Chongwen	46.2	15.7	15.7	---	41.3	41.3	---	4.9
Xuanwu	63.2	20.3	20.3	---	56.2	56.2	---	7.0
<i>Near Suburbs</i>	537.3	152.4	132.2	20.2	429.2	381.9	47.3	108.1
Chaoyang	189.7	56.9	48.7	8.2	152.2	133.5	18.7	37.5
Fengtai	110.3	31.4	25.3	6.1	82.2	67.5	14.7	28.1
Shijingshan	41.5	11.5	10.8	0.7	33.2	31.6	1.6	8.3
Haidian	195.8	52.6	47.4	5.2	161.6	149.3	12.3	34.2
<i>Outer Suburbs</i>	277.8	91.9	35.9	56.0	253.9	91.2	162.7	23.9

Source: *Beijing Statistical Bureau* 2001

Today, the district not only attracts the greatest number of migrants (“temporary residents,” see chart), but also the majority of the foreign investment in the city.⁴ During the

⁴ In 2000, the “Number of Signed Agreements and Contracts of Foreign Capital to be Utilized” was 188; the “Amount of Foreign Capital to be Utilized through Agreements and Contracts” was US\$ 115,757,000;

first years of the reform period, foreign investors and businesses were still doubtful about China's course of development. For this reason, but also because of logistical considerations in expansive Beijing, many of them chose to set up offices close to their embassies in the eastern part of the city. This foreign quarter itself is a continuation of the historical lay-out of the city, begun in imperial times and continued under communist planning. The reform-period conglomeration of foreign businesses, in turn, was probably the decisive influence for placing the new Central Business District in the eastern part of the city, despite the fact that various city districts attempted to win this prestigious and potentially lucrative project.

2 Socialist City Restructuring and the Antecedents of Wangjing

2.1 Transformations

Wangjing Xincheng lies west of *Jiuxianqiao*, a suburban development zone for electronics factories which was set up during the Great Leap Forward in the 1950s. Separated from the city by farmland and today's Third Ring Road, with dirt roads and only one bus connection to the urban center, the small conglomeration of factories and residential *danwei* quarters strewn among farmers' small houses resembled for many years more a village than a part of the capital or suburban area. Today, ample roads connect it to the city, and new middle- to up-scale residential buildings attract increasing numbers of young, urban professionals. 65-year-old Fang Hongzhu, who was assigned to one of the

and the "Amount of Foreign Capital Annually Used" was US\$ 134,796,000. *Beijing Statistical Yearbook* 2001.

electronics companies around Wangjing as a young man, described how he had seen the neighborhood change:

There was no paved road; only a dust road. Nothing but fields. Step by step, things are changing. Especially after the Cultural Revolution, it was different every year. Sometimes, we [felt like] we couldn't recognize it anymore ourselves. We used to ride bikes downtown. Now we have buses that go everywhere in the city. We planted the trees ourselves when we were young. We helped the farmers during the harvest, since the fields were around us. Now we see no fields, only shops and skyscrapers. [Interview August 19, 2002]

Chinese cities' suburban fringes, and Beijing's specifically, have changed dramatically, first under the Communist regime after 1949, and then again in the reform period which began in 1978. Since most of the elderly people, but also many parents of younger residents whom I met and talked to in Wangjing, had moved to Beijing in the years after the Communist Revolution, in the following sections I discuss the most important events and policies as regards city life and structure since the founding of the P. R. China. My focus lies on the way urban residents were affected by the changes, and how people in my interviews commented on them.

2.2 The Producer City

After the years of the civil war, the occupation by the Japanese, and the revolution, when the communist regime took control of China in 1949, Beijing was in a state of decay.

Inflation, unemployment, a breakdown of public services, crime, and social distress of all kinds dominated city life. There was not sufficient housing stock and two-thirds of all housing was in a dilapidated condition. Many people lived in slums. Moreover the city was filthy, with inadequate sewage facilities and water supplies, and little garbage collection (Hu and Kaplan 2001; Ma 1979; Strand 1995). Other urban centers were in similar condition. The main effort of the new national government therefore was to revive and improve the normal municipal functions and facilities of cities. Maoists' disdain for cosmopolitan centers, however, generated a new ideology of state-guided development. The dominance of large cities was to be discouraged while the focus of development lay on medium and small cities. Inspired by Marx, and with the help of Soviet advisors, Chinese planners set out to eradicate the contradictory relations between city and countryside. The principle of "equity" promised that under socialism rural areas would no longer be ruthlessly exploited by urban centers. The gap between the proletariat and the peasantry, that is, between towns and country was to be eliminated. The proclaimed goal of the Communist government was to turn parasitic "consumer cities" (*xiaofei chengshi*) into centers of production, or "producer cities" (*shengchan chengshi*). Production activities, such as industries, construction, transport, and communication, were deliberately favored over activities that did not result in tangible products, such as whole-sale and retailing, finance, and housing. As a result, socialist cities came to be dominated by the secondary economic sector, whereas the retailing of consumer goods was subjected to restrictions (Ma 1979; Naughton 1995; Sit 1995; Whyte and Parish 1984).

In the mid 1950s, China established its centrally planned economic system with the help of Soviet advisors. Following Stalin's model, this new system set economic de-

velopment goals in five-year plans, and emphasized heavy over light industry and industrial development over agriculture. Fully 63 per cent of the total state investment during this period went into capital construction, of which almost two thirds went to the ministries of heavy industry, the fuel industry, and the machine building industry. As a result, for a few years China experienced rapid industrialization, a high rate of growth, and an expansion of employment opportunities in the cities (Tang and Parish 2000:19).

Beijing, as the capital and model for the country, was under special scrutiny and the first city to be subjected to the new socialist urban planning principles. While it became the major administrative center of the country, the capital was subjected by the First Five Year Plan (1953 – 1957) to a crash industrialization program with the dual purpose of turning it into a “productive” city and a leading industrial base whose status was considered to befit a socialist national capital. Urban growth took the form of hectic, large-scale construction, during which the number of central ministries increased. In the east, south, west and northeast of Beijing, huge new industrial zones with factories for mechanical engineering and textiles were constructed. In the northeastern suburb of Jiuxianqiao, adjacent to what today is Wangjing Xincheng, ten new, large-scale electronics manufacturers were congregated.

Several of my older informants moved to Beijing (and other cities) during this time. They came alone or with their parents in search of work, education, and better living conditions than those offered in the countryside, which was in large parts devastated after the years of civil war and Japanese occupation. One of the women in my investigation, Luo Hongjie, a retired factory worker in her fifties, for example, grew up in the south of Beijing, where her parents, who had come to the city after the revolution,

worked in newly established factories: her mother in a textile plant, and her father in a car parts factory (Interview May 28, 2002). Like many other of my older informants during this time, they lived in a primitive little brick house in the district.

Housing was a general problem after the revolution. But the new government cleaned up the city and sought to provide decent housing for everyone. To this end, private housing stock was transferred to government ownership and new housing was planned. In fact, between 1949 and 1977, 23 million square meters of residential space were constructed in Beijing, and 150 new residential areas developed (Ma 1981). Nonetheless, this was a slow process and many of my older informants vividly remembered the primitive living conditions they had to deal with after their move to the city. One woman recalled: “We lived in the house of my father’s friend. [...] It was a very shabby and small house” (Interview May 22, 2002).

One effect of the living situation in the early years after the revolution was that many people faced extremely long commutes to their places of work. Thus Yang Guofen (age 67), a retired worker continued to live with her parents even after she got married. Both, she and her husband had to take care of their elderly parents, but they could not find a house which would accommodate them all. Her parent’s house, however, was far away from her workplace, “on the other side of the city,” as Yang said. She described her daily commute: “I lived near Qianmen [south of Tiananmen Square]. I had to change buses three or four times to get to my work place. The sun hadn’t risen when I left home and it was already dark when I came back. It was very hard for me (*dui wo hen kunnan*)” (Interview May 22, 2002).

2.3 The Great Leap Forward

In the late 1950s, everyone in urban areas was mobilized to participate in industrial production. Mao believed that mass mobilization could be used to increase economic development. The power of the people, once mobilized, would be more effective than new technology and managerial innovations, and China – in a “Great Leap Forward” – could surpass major industrial countries within a short time. Since the basis of industry was iron and steel, people collected any metal parts that they could find in their households and set up iron-casting furnaces in their backyards.

In the countryside, with the aim of increasing agricultural output, people’s communes were established where peasants worked and lived collectively. The urban equivalent were the newly introduced “scattered collectives” which meant that factories were located in residential and educational areas to enhance convenience and a complementarity of functions. Extensive “greenbelts” separated the constellations, in which farm crops were cultivated, so that the city would not only possess industrial, but also agricultural functions. In this way, the city was turned into an entity of mixed industrial-agricultural uses, the ultimate goal of which was to definitely eliminate the “three contradictions,” that is, town versus countryside, manual labor versus mental labor, and industry versus agriculture (Sit 1995). The result of the Great Leap Forward, however, was quite contrary to its intention: while China’s investment in heavy industry rose to 43.4 percent of the national income in 1959, grain exports to the Soviet union were increased to pay for more heavy machinery. The average amount of grain available to each person in China’s countryside dropped from 205 kilo in 1957 to 183 kilos in 1959, and to 156 kilos in 1960. The

result was famine on a gigantic scale which claimed more than 20 million lives between 1959 and 1962.⁵

My informants frequently recalled the poverty of those years. This is 52-year-old Hu Lanfu's recollection:

My childhood was during the time of the Three Years Calamity (*san nian zainan*). Our food was rationed; an adult received 14.25 kilo per month. We had ration-cards for soy oil, meat, and clothes. Food other than staples was completely lacking. We could only have meat or fish on holidays. We ate steamed buns and corn flower; we didn't have as much different food as today. Every time my mother cooked, she used the scale to measure the food. Otherwise we would be starving at the end of the month. Life was hard (*shenghuo hen kunnan*). [Interview May 17, 2002].

During this time, coal fields were developed in Beijing's west, and auto-making and internal combustion engine manufacturing plants were set up in the eastern suburbs. Hundreds of thousands of peasants followed calls by the government and flocked into the cities and suburbs to work in newly set up factories. This was the period when most of the older residents of Wangjing came to the city, either with their parents or to become workers themselves. The government responded to the influx of new urban residents with an effort in housing construction. A new "generalized" planning style presupposed that each district of the city was to be self-sufficient, offering its residents all, or most general

⁵ Spence (1990) points out that the number of victims of the Great Leap Forward are likely to be much higher because many more died from progressive malnutrition. In 1957 the average age of those dying was 17.6 years, while after the Great Leap in 1963 it had gone down to 9.7 years.

functions such as housing, employment, and the provision of subsistence goods and services. Over the years, this led to the formation of planned clusters of industrial workers' quarters in the suburban areas (Sit 1995). One of these clusters was Jiuxianqiao, to the west of which the Wangjing Xincheng Residential and Commercial Development Zone would eventually emerge during the reform period.

2.4 The Hukou

Probably the most important social institution of socialist China, which was introduced by the government in the late 1950s, was the hukou system of residential registration.

The Great Leap Forward, with its intensification of the industrial bias, particularly in heavy industry, favored urban areas over the countryside. In a few short years, the number of employees in urban state and collective enterprises doubled.⁶ Between 1958 and 1960, 8.3 million new urban residents arrived in Chinese cities every year.

Though take-home salaries were highly constricted, urban workers in the formal state sector had access to many subsidized benefits, including almost cost-free housing, medical care, pensions, subsidized staples, among others, that soon made real urban incomes almost double the nominal take-home pay. Long Fengzhan, a 64-year-old retired worker, recalled: "Our salary was low but we had free housing, free health-care, free education; so 120 Yuan [RMB] per month was enough for a family [of four]" (Interview August 19, 2002). These benefits quickly created an urban labor aristocracy. Peasants soon learned about the advantages of urban living and working, and in the middle and

⁶ Part of this increase resulted from the mobilization of women into neighborhood-run collective enterprises, the successors of the backyard steel furnaces. See Tang and Parish 2000.

late 1950s flocked into the cities, particularly after the Great Leap Forward brought about a collapse of agriculture (Logan 2002; Tang and Parish 2000:24).

The government was, however, unable to sustain an unlimited number of urban residents. To prevent further rural-urban migration, in 1958 it passed new regulations which would become the most important base of social stratification/ segregation in socialist China. The new system effectively divided the population into those with agricultural status (*nongye hukou*) and nonagricultural status (*feinongye hukou*), practically establishing a sturdy “bamboo wall” between them.⁷ From then on, if one was born on the privileged, nonagricultural side of the bamboo wall, one was entitled to many urban benefits, including school attendance, being part of the urban job assignment process, subsidized housing, subsidized grain, and hardship allowance. Typically, those in the urban job assignment process got a job in the state sector, which brought with it additional benefits, including free health care, disability insurance, pensions, and a host of other allowances (Cheng and Seldon 1997; Solinger 1999; Tang and Parish 2000:25). In the countryside, in contrast, peasants received some social benefits through the communes. These, however, were never as extensive as in the city. In addition, due to the collapse of agricultural production after collectivization, the overall living situation in the countryside deteriorated into unprecedented poverty.⁸

⁷ The hukou system was actually first set up in cities in 1951 and extended to rural areas in 1955. Initially, it served as a monitoring system of population migration and movements, not as a control mechanism. With the growing influx of peasants into cities, however, in 1958 the National People’s Congress decided on legislation that gave way to an altered system of migration permits, and recruitment and enrolment certificates, which in effect made rural-urban migration practically impossible. See Chan and Zhang 1999.

⁸ Potter (1983) explains that the new hukou system of differentiation between population in the countryside and the cities actually connected to a long tradition of disregard for the peasantry. Already Confucian philosophy considered it immoral for officials to regard peasants’ concerns with empathy. Socialism with its theoretical, not entirely sympathetic, understanding of peasants was superimposed on this negative attitude. Socialist theory questioned whether or not peasants could unite sufficiently to be useful subjects in a revolution. Socialist theory also predicted that peasants as a class would disappear after socialist revolution and

During the initial years of the hukou system, when the new residential restrictions were not so strongly enforced, some men who already worked in the city urged their families to follow in order to eventually receive urban residence status for the entire family. Wen Hong, a technical worker and cadre in his late 50s who grew up in Tianjin, explained: “I lived in the countryside until I was ten years old. In 1956, my father asked my mother to come with him to Tianjin because the government was going to give out hukou to inhabitants of cities; so my mother was able to become an urban resident too” (Interview August 19, 2002).

The hukou policies were linked to control of consumption. Those with agricultural registration had to grow their own food and were excluded from the subsidized state grain market.⁹ With the creation of the People’s Communes in 1958, the registration system became formalized on a national scale and, especially after 1962, the government made a concerted effort to enforce the law. This affected even people who were already working in the city, as shown in this woman’s account:

My hukou was moved to the city in 1958, as was my husband’s. In 1962, all the people coming from the countryside were sent back to the countryside to do farm work (*pai dao nongcun gongzuo*). We were among the

industrial modernization, and that they would be replaced by a rural proletariat. Nonetheless, in China peasants played a crucial role in the Communist Revolution, and in the new socialist state the peasantry had not at all disappeared. Mao’s thoughts reflected a conviction that peasants were not completely valid allies for workers and that only poor peasants with ideological purity could be relied on. In his opinion, most peasants would not understand their own class interests. As a result, even though Mao proclaimed that the antagonistic contradictions between peasants and workers had disappeared with the revolution, the differences in status continued to exist. See also Cohen (1993) on the “cultural and political invention” of “peasants.”

⁹ Chan and Zhang (1999) stress that the hukou system was designed less as a system to prevent rural–urban migration than as part of the larger economic and political system implemented to serve multiple state interests. This system, in turn, has been less effective in controlling migration than portrayed.

ones on the list, but my husband was the best worker in the factory and so the leaders decided to let my husband stay. [Interview May 22, 2002]¹⁰

When the new residential system was fully implemented, every person needed police approval to change residence, and migration from rural to urban areas and from small towns to cities was prohibited.¹¹ Even after the elimination of the communes in the early 1980s, the hukou system continued to control rural migration and exclude the rural majority from most government-subsidized goods and services (Davis 2000).

For migrants who came to the city shortly after the revolution or during the Great Leap Forward, the urban residence status that the new hukou system granted them was quite fortuitous and arbitrary. Interestingly, though, the new institution continues to serve as a basis for urbanites' self-identification, setting them off, especially, from the current migration of rural population to the cities. Although many of my elder informants had migrated to Beijing (or other cities) only shortly before the hukou system was rigorously enforced, ever since receiving urban residence status they considered themselves an integral part of the urban population. Not a few of them expressed dislike or disregard for present-day peasant migration to the city. This is what an elderly woman living in Hong Yuan had to say:

There are lots of farmers who lost their land and came to Beijing to find a job. They can only do some work which city people don't want to do.

¹⁰ This was a very unusual case in that the wife decided to stay with her husband, despite not having a job any longer. Many families were actually separated during this time. This woman, however, became a housewife until several years later, when she found another job in the factory from which she eventually retired.

¹¹ For a discussion of hukou as a Chinese form of the Indian caste system which one is born into and cannot leave, see Gong 1998, and also Potter and Potter 1990.

There are so many of them. Not every one of them can find a job, so they begin to... They are not educated, they steal, they rob. Their improper behavior is harmful to others. [Interview December 9, 2001]

2.4 The Danwei

The hukou system of strict controls over migration could succeed only because of China's tightly organized structure of social control, one element of which was the danwei.¹² Based on the work-place, danwei were an extension of the state apparatus which undertook the function of social organization. Since virtually every adult man and woman worked in China during the Maoist era, work-units became an all-encompassing institution affecting practically all aspects of life. The self-contained danwei provided medical insurance, labor protection, pensions, direct subsidies, and employment for offspring under the replacement system (*dingti*). The work unit acted as parent, caretaker, mediator, and even matchmaker. It provided employees with gloves, hats, shoes, meat, rice, and cooking oil, but also granted permission to get married, to get divorced, and to have a child. In addition, the work unit was a political unit where government policy was implemented, loyalty to the party promoted, political mobilization carried out, public opin-

¹² Tang and Parish (2000: 27 - 29) explain that besides the danwei, the other important institution regulating citizens' lives, was the neighborhood organization. In small cities, it was directly under the government's control, while in larger cities it was subject to the districts. Each neighborhood had a civilian neighborhood committee (*jiedao banshi shu*) which worked closely together with a local police office. Each neighborhood committee had a staff of around 50 people, who controlled a population of 20,000 people, living in 3,000 to 5,000 households. Most staff members were retired residents. The committee's functions included the supervision of birth quotas, cleaning of the neighborhood, and mediating conflicts. In addition, the committee provided social services to the community, and worked with the police unit in crime prevention. Until today, one can see retired, elderly women with a red armband patrolling the streets in urban neighborhoods, who know everybody and everything going on in the neighborhood. Branch offices (*paichusuo*) of the public security bureau (*gonganju*) are located in every neighborhood, and one of its representatives is member of the neighborhood committee. The paichusuo keeps the official household registration (*hukou*) of every resident.

ion tapped, and where voting took place (Tang and Parish 2000:29). One of the most important functions of the work unit became the construction and distribution of housing.

In the socialist system, all land belonged to “the people” represented by the government. Housing, in turn, was build, owned, and distributed by employers – usually state-owned enterprises. It was considered a welfare benefit that both employer and state were responsible for. While employers (*danwei*) paid low wages to the employees, they had to provide subsidized housing. The allocation of housing was based on job rank and seniority: the higher the job and the more work years, the more likely one was to access public housing. The state had two roles: first, it provided funds to the work units which developed housing for their employees. The amount of investment allocated depended on the importance of the work unit to the national economy, for example, whether it was a research institute for nuclear technology or a minor clothes factory. This was indicated by an administrative rank system. The higher the work unit ranked, the more housing investment it received (cf. Huang and Clark 2002; Wu 1996). Second, the state also directly provided housing to households who could not access accommodation from their work units. This, however, applied only to households with a permanent urban *hukou*.

Newly constructed *danwei* compounds ideally integrated work and residential functions. While this was not always realized and some factories remained “only” adjacent to their living quarters, work unit compounds were nonetheless multifunctional complexes.¹³ In fact, they became miniature walled cities that offered a wide range of services for their employees, fostering home and neighborhood life (Gaubatz 1995).

¹³ In this sense, *danwei* compounds were somewhat reminiscent of the walled wards of the historical Chinese city. The latter were, however, primarily residential in function. See Gaubatz 1995.

In the typical work unit compound, the highly controlled environment was entered through a guarded gate beyond which the architecture was utilitarian and regimented. Production facilities and residential facilities were usually housed separately. Orderly rows of residential structures commonly consisted of rectangular three- to five-story high brick or cement buildings. Dwellings within these buildings were arranged with an entryway and stairwell system, with two or four units on each landing of the stairwell which (well up into the reform period) shared a common bathroom. These units included both apartments for families and dormitories for single workers. Like the residential units, production facilities were located in large rectangular structures.

The common areas between the buildings in the work unit compound served as bicycle parking lots, children's play areas, recreational spaces, and green areas. Other facilities within the walled compound varied but ideally included dining halls, provision shops, medical facilities, meeting rooms, and administrative offices.

Based on the politico-economic importance of the workplace, the many danwei had differential access to housing and benefits (in the form of government allocations). In fact, on the eve of economic reforms, a families' standard of living was more influenced by the resources of the workplace than by the wages earned by the household head. As a result, there was considerable competition to get into the best work units (Bian 1994; Davis 2000).

Distribution of consumer goods and services through bureaucratic decree certainly also affected social relations in Maoist China. The politicized ties between subordinates and superiors in the workplace could define the quality of one's personal life, and "it was virtually impossible for employees or their family to prosper without the active

support of enterprise leaders” (Davis 2000:5). Even leisure time and venues for socializing were rationed through bureaucratic channels.¹⁴

In reality, for a long time many danwei were not able to provide their employees with adequate housing. Investment in housing was given low priority under the general planning framework, and only a disproportionately low amount of funds was made available, whereas most capital investment was put into industrial projects.¹⁵ Most of my older informants actually had to find their own accommodations since danwei were notoriously short of housing facilities and distribution of the scarce apartments followed criteria such as age, years of work, and number of children. One 60-something year old man described his situation after he got married in the following way:

[After I got married] we first rented a house in the suburbs where we lived for ten years. Then in 1976 we shared an apartment with another couple. Later we had a small apartment for ourselves. Now we have this bigger apartment. The Institute [danwei] was new when I first started to work there. A lot of new staff and most people had no place to live. The Institute had no houses. Everybody had to wait in line. The Institute would distribute the houses according to age, degree, and years of working, and so forth. [Interview August 19, 2002].

¹⁴ See Wang Shaoguang (1995) for a discussion of changing leisure patterns in urban China.

¹⁵ Housing development was consistently kept very low in proportion to the total capital investment over three decades. State investment in urban housing as a proportion of gross national product averaged only 0.78 percent from 1949 to 1978. See Zhu Jieming 2000.

If the danwei was able to provide accommodation, this was actually often a shared dormitory room rather than a private apartment. 65-year-old Fang Hongzhu, for example, first lived in the dormitory of his school. When he began to work, Fang moved into the dormitory of the factory, where he shared a room with seven other men (Interview August 19, 2002). Even married couples often had to live in (separate) danwei dormitories because they could not obtain housing. As told by this woman: “I lived in the dormitory of my factory, and he lived in the dormitory of his. We met once a week or every other one. We would meet in parks. We finally moved together in 1973. [After ten years of marriage]” (Interview June 17, 2002).

Even in the case of people who were lucky and received a danwei apartment, women derived only limited advantages from the combined work - housing design of the work unit. Single women tended to live with their parents (if they were in the city), and after marriage women were more likely to reside in housing provided through their husband’s work unit. 68-year-old Li *taitai*¹⁶ described the distribution process of apartments in her danwei in the following way:

I could get in line and wait for an apartment from my danwei, but there were more than a thousand people in my company, and houses were few. Male comrades were less than female ones, 60 to 70 percent were women. So the leaders liked to give houses to men first. Most of the female workers got married to men from other companies. They could get a house

¹⁶ “Taitai,” literally, “wife, lady, woman,” is a respectful form of address for elderly women. Commonly used outside the mainland, the term has been re-introduced in the P.R. since “comrade” (*tongzhi*) is no longer considered an appropriate form of address. The male equivalent to taitai is “*xiansheng*,” “mister,” but appears to be much less common. I use the term taitai according to how my informants were introduced to me.

through the husband's danwei. It was difficult when a couple worked in the same company. [Interview May 31, 2002]

This meant that women frequently continued to face long commutes, as was the case for He Yuehua, who explained: "My work place was very far. I had to leave the house before 6:30 am to arrive there at 8:00 am" (Interview May 28, 2002).

Nevertheless, given the insufficient housing which the older generation had often lived in for many years, many of my informants considered the newly introduced Communist planning style of combined work and housing a favorable solution to people's everyday problems, since usually at least one spouse spent less time commuting to work. In interviews the elderly also repeatedly (and positively) stressed the close-knit community that formed over the years of living in the danwei. This is how one woman expressed this sentiment:

The compound was built by the factory. All of the people who live there are from the same factory. [...] We know each other and can help each other. We are from the same factory after all [...]. If we need help, we just knock at our neighbor's door. [Interview May 17, 2002]

2.6 The Cultural Revolution

To fully understand present-day transformations, and Chinese people's reactions to them, it is necessary to take the Cultural Revolution into account. The "ten bad years of great disaster" or "ten year calamity" (*shinian haojie*), as the period is officially

referred to today, were less important in their effect on the city structure than on everyday city (and rural) life, which practically came to a halt.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, was Mao's last grand attempt to keep Chinese socialism on a populist track. In a backlash against the inevitable bureaucratization inherent in the Stalinist model of development, anything related to hierarchy and traditional authority was attacked. That is, not only bureaucratic leaders and their organizations became vulnerable, but also Confucian values, literature and art, anything seen as impeding China's march towards a utopian revolutionary future (Tang and Parish 2000:22).

During this period, millions of peasants were recruited to work in urban industry. This movement, however, was counterbalanced by "sending down" millions of urban youths to the countryside.¹⁷ Hence by the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, the level of urbanization was still only around 17 percent. Nonetheless, the composition of the urban population had decisively changed (Logan 2002; Sit 1995; Tang and Parish 2000:22).

Most of my informants who agreed to talk about this still sensitive period in Chinese history were relatively lucky, and only passively affected by the upheavals of this time. One woman's husband, however, was a university graduate and as such was "sent down to the countryside" in 1967, just two months after the couple got married. He could not come back to the city for eleven years. Similarly, Li taitai's sister was sent to the countryside to help villagers build a dam. Like many others, she ended up

¹⁷ Over 16 million urban youths were resettled to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, allegedly to boost production there but also to ease overcrowding in the cities. See Naughton 1995.

staying in the countryside because her hukou was never moved back to the city. Li taitai, however, was more affected than that. She explained:

My father was an intellectual in the old society [before the revolution] which was bad. All of my leaders knew about it. If they wanted to call us rightists,¹⁸ we would be rightists, if they said we were good people, we were good people. As for us, if we made a single mistake at work and somebody saw it, we would be in trouble. Every change in our life we had to tell our leaders and the secretary of the party committee. [...] I had to behave, not only one year or two. From school all through my work life, we were so serious and dared not make any mistakes. [Interview May 31, 2002]

The Cultural Revolution also had a lasting, but very different effect on Wang Jangling, a woman in her late 30s, who worked for the neighborhood organization in one of the danwei compounds in Wangjing. All through her middle school, the Cultural Revolution disrupted her education. Because of the movement and its effects on the students, she was not able to attend university. Instead, she initially took over her mother's job in an electronics factory, but when she saw that the factory began to lay-off people, she looked for another job by herself. That is how she came to work in the neighborhood organization. "It was hard for us to find a job. [...] We didn't have many choices, so I went to my mother's company which organized the children of the workers [to replace

¹⁸ Anybody not conforming with the current party line could be called a "rightist," a designation which already emerged during the 1957 "Anti-Rightist Campaign." See Andreas 2002, but also Lü 1994, and Pye 1986.

them]. The days were slow; the electronics companies were on their way down hill. So I left there and found myself a new job” (Interview April 26, 2002).

As regards the city’s structure, the chaos of the period led to the haphazard growth of dangerous factories within residential zones, intended to achieve Mao’s target of mixing manual and physical labor, and engaging all people in some productive activity. Many new buildings were blindly located on basic infrastructural lines, several hundreds of thousands of square meters of substandard housing were completed, green and open spaces eroded, and harm was done to countless cultural relics (Sit 1995). By far the greater damage, however, was to people’s lives: hundreds were killed and families were torn apart; friendships, as well as the entire middle and upper levels of administration were destroyed; trust and a sense of community seriously undermined.

Conclusion

The economic policies and modes of social organization introduced by the Communist government after 1949 worked together to bring most of my older informants to the city and eventually to the Wangjing neighborhood. Forced industrialization offered new employment opportunities which pulled migrants to the cities where they were assigned to jobs, and – eventually – received housing through the danwei. With the establishment of the hukou system, urban residents’ presence in the city received an identity-forming legitimacy that segregated China’s population into those who were provided for by the state – urbanites – and those who had to provide for themselves – the rural population.

Generally speaking, the years after the Communist revolution were important for the older generation of urban residents because many of them arrived in Beijing during this period of intense industrialization. They saw the beginning of the construction of danwei compounds, and the overall transformation efforts, with the concomitant atmosphere of revolutionary zeal and thrust. These experiences, together with their sacrifices in comfort, were formative to the older generation.

The social organization and state intrusion into urban people's private lives led to a dependency on (or supplicant relationship to) state services, but also to a social structure where differentiation was based on politico-ideological factors rather than on socio-economic ones.¹⁹ The period was characterized by extreme social supervision through the various institutions of control, by a vertical relationship of obedience between subject-citizens and party or government officials, but also by significantly homogenous living standards and politicized ties between subordinates and superiors in the workplace. It was, however, the violence and chaos of the Cultural Revolution which dominated life in the country before the opening and which set the stage for the economic reforms initiated in 1978.

¹⁹ One's "revolutionary background," for example, that is, if one was born from peasant or landlord parents, significantly influenced person's fate during the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter II Economic, Social, and Spatial Reforms

1 Stages of Reform

Tang and Parish (2000:22) divide the post-Mao reform period into five different phases. Beginning in 1978, when the Communist Party resolved to embark on a new campaign of economic modernization, it took several years of useful changes in the agricultural sector before the party confronted the challenge of urban reforms. During this second period (1984 – 89), extensive reorganization programs eventually included changes in enterprise structure, prices, finances, banking, housing, labor markets, welfare, pensions, and wages. Bureaucracy, polity, and mass media availability underwent corresponding adjustments, although more cautiously.

In the following years, unrestrained investments led to surplus demand and inflation, with the result that in early 1989 the economy was overheated, while at the same time the bureaucratic apparatus was riddled with corruption. The economic austerity program to confront these issues coincided with the urban demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in Beijing and the subsequent violent crackdown in 1989.¹ In the aftermath, the state again increased its control over the economy and curtailed previously gained political freedoms. Withdrawal of foreign direct investment and a societal state of shock led to an effective halt of the economic and political reforms during this third phase of reform (1989 – 92).

¹ These student-led demonstrations called for democracy, which for many people meant greater pluralism in life and expression, and the call for a fervent government effort to confront the rampant corruption. The demonstrations were violently brought to an end by political hard-liners under Deng Xiaoping, who insisted on the continuous leadership role of the CCP and the one-party state.

A new, fourth period of post-Mao reforms (1992 – 97) was sparked by Deng Xiaoping's famous visit to the South of China. Evoking a neo-authoritarian approach typical of some East and South-east Asian countries, Deng urged for a new push towards market reforms while maintaining political control. After Deng's death in 1997, the Chinese leaders continued the modernization project in what became the fifth period of reform.

Since Tang and Parish's periodization, Jiang Zemin's resignation from the presidency, and the appointment of Hu Jintao as his follower in 2002, has initiated a sixth phase of post-Mao reforms, the consequences of which are still unclear.

2 Social and Economic Reforms

2.1 Work Contracts, Retirement, and Pensions²

Since the beginning of the reform period, public sector employees have been affected by various measures which were intended to cut the costs of social benefits and make state-owned businesses work (more) profitably. Before the reforms, lifetime job security in the public sector was the rule. The “iron rice bowl” (*tie fan wan*) guaranteed that one could not be laid off. One of the first measures to address the common problem of lack of labor flexibility, discipline, and incentives, was to replace lifetime tenure by a system of successive five-year labor contracts. Older workers, however, were exempt from this measure. They were instead encouraged to retire early to create vacancies for younger employees (Tang and Parish 2000:35).

² See Appendix B for Statistics on Beijing Annual Cash Income

Already during the Maoist era, women were allowed (or required, depending on one's point of view) to retire at age 50.³ Within this *dingti* system, women especially were encouraged to pass their jobs on to a child, even before official retirement age. Most elderly women whom I talked to during my research had indeed stopped working in their state assigned job at age 50 or earlier. "I retired when I was 48. According to the principle of my factory, female workers can retire when they are 48 years old" (Interview May 17, 2002). In some cases, however, the women *had* to stop working because their companies reduced their personnel in the reform period. "I should have retired at age 55, but I left my company when I was 50; my company didn't make any money" (Interview May 15, 2002). This certainly happened to men too. Nonetheless, in the case of staff reduction for profitability reasons women are likely to be laid off first, since they are considered costly workers. I will come back to this issue in Chapter IV.

Several of the elderly danwei residents used their early retirement to seek other employment in the free job market, like this 62-year-old woman:

I worked for another company for 4 years after I retired. I was a store-house keeper for one and a half years, and I went home after this company was closed. Later I went to Jianguo Hotel and worked as a maid for more than one year. I worked from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. It was too late for me to get home; we didn't have as many buses as today. So I left. It was in 1994 or 1995. I worked for a private company for half a year and left be-

³ The official age for retirement in China is 50 years for women workers, 55 for women cadres and staff, and 60 for men.

cause my back was not well. I stay home since then. [Interview May 22, 2002]

The reasons why people mentioned, when I asked them, why they continued to work after retirement from the state-owned company, were that they could not get used to not working any longer, or that they needed the money. “I could not get used to the life of staying at home, so I went to Jingyuan to work as a cleaning woman for a construction company. It lasted more than two years. In 1999, I applied for work in the neighborhood committee and since then I have this job” (Interview May 17, 2002).

It was, however, not always easy for the elderly to find a new job. Since the beginning of the reform period, people’s different skills and qualifications played out much more than before. Zhu Laoning, for example, an engineer, was rehired by her own company after retiring at age 55. Later she worked for several years in two different joint venture companies until she finally chose to retire for good. Wang taitai, in contrast, had difficulties finding an appropriate job since she had not received higher education.

After my retirement I tried to go and work in other companies, but my skills were far behind. There are so many automatics. The technology is beyond my power to catch up with. I did everything, according to the demands; I can do simple things. I managed the construction material depot of the Australian Embassy when it was under construction. I was the guard of the building. [...] There are all kinds of demands from the society, if you are daring enough. I was a cosmetics company storehouse manager, making a record of the incoming and outgoing goods. I have worked for

seven to eight years after my retirement. I also worked for a hotel; room management, administration, and cleaning. I found it was not interesting at all, since I was a skilled worker. They told me that different kinds of work have different characters, so I said okay. [...] I don't work any longer. [Interview May 31, 2002]

Until the mid-1990s the rules regarding workers' pensions had remained largely unchanged since their establishment in the 1950s. To be entitled to retire, one had to work at least ten years, and one's pension was based on years of service and wages prior to retirement. If one began working before 1949 one received 100 percent salary. Those retiring after the minimum work years got 60 percent of their previous wage; after 15 years, 70 percent; and after 20 or more years, 75 percent. Pensions were based on the basic income, disregarding bonuses that greatly increased income.

With increasing life-expectancy and an aging population (because of the one-child policy), pensions have become a growing burden for work units.⁴ In order to address this new inequality, in 1984 the central government began a new retirement fund which is intended to shift the responsibility for financing retirement from the individual enterprise to employers and workers as a whole (Ikels 1996; Tang and Parish 2000:36).⁵

⁴ Since individual enterprises became responsible for their retiree's pensions, they took on unequal burdens because of differences in the age composition of their work forces. Ikels (1996) gives the example of two factories: In 1980 a factory established in the mid-1950s was likely to have a middle-aged work-force, with most people in senior grades or retired, whereas a factory established in the late 1970s was likely to have a young work force in the lowest pay grades and no retirees. The different wages and retirement burden of the two factories would have a major effect on their competitive position.

⁵ Under this system enterprises contribute 15 to 18 percent of the wages they pay every month to a social labor insurance company, which pools the contributions from the province and redistributes them to retirees. Not all the money is reimbursed, however. A certain proportion is set aside each year to build up a retirement fund for the time when the ratio of workers to retirees is less favorable than now. See Ikels 1996.

The state-company retirees in my investigation said that they were generally able to support themselves on their pensions. These were raised every year in adjustment to inflation and price increases. However, most of the elderly did not have enough to pay for bigger medical bills, travel, or other great expenses. “I have 600 to 700 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 75 to 87.5) pension each month. Enough for eating, but not for the hospital” (Interview May 15, 2002). Several people indicated that they relied on, or would count on the support of their grown-up children now, or in the future. “We took care of our children when they were small, they will take care of you when you are old” (Interview May 15, 2002).

If one looks at annual income and expenditure statistics for Beijing, one can see that the retirees I talked to were comparatively well off. Whereas the average annual discretionary income of Beijing urban residents in 2000 was higher (RMB 10,349.7) (US\$ 1,293.75) than my informants’ average pensions, average living expenditures (RMB 8,493.5) (US\$ 1,061.75) were in the range of the funds available to them (see charts below).

Table 2: Beijing Income Per Capita (RMB)⁶

	1999	2000
Net Income Per Rural Resident	4,316.4	4,687.0
Annual Discretionary Income Per Urban Resident	9,182.8	10,349.7

Source: *Beijing Annual Statistical Yearbook 2000*

⁶ RMB 8 equal US\$ 1.

Table 3: Annual Living Expenditures Per Capita in Beijing (RMB)

	1999	2000
Rural	3,132.5	3,441.4
Urban	7,498.5	8,493.5

Source: *Beijing Annual Statistical Yearbook 2000*

Table 4: 2000 Annual Cash Expenditures Per Capita of 1000 Beijing Urban Households (RMB)

	Average	Low Income	Medium Low Income	Medium Income	Medium High Income	High Income	2000 as % of 1999
Total	11,690.41	6,716.18	8,534.92	11,049.56	13,085.60	20,498.41	118.2
Actual Expenditures	10,083.62	6,225.37	7,581.77	9,778.09	11,435.97	16,479.36	119.3
Living Expenditures	8,493.49	5,412.73	6,763.12	8,369.35	9,687.15	13,043.4	113.3
Non-Living Expenditures	1,590.13	812.64	818.65	1,408.74	1,748.82	3,435.96	166.5
Individual Income Tax	12.87	1.2	4.06	8.38	10.92	43.95	181.4
Taxes	4.02	1.53	2.18	4.79	2.89	9.43	35.8
Non-Savings Deposits Insurance	37.4	16.5	35.76	32.98	41.1	65.39	103.6
Support Expenditures	145.35	82.37	110.12	164.63	164.08	219.76	91.5
Gift Expenditures	379.05	182.31	236.44	363.24	465.30	704.33	115.1
Expenditures on Purchasing and Building Houses	973.92	520.33	402.74	803.86	1,013.35	2,315.93	292.8
Others	37.52	8.39	27.34	30.85	51.18	77.18	43.5
Credit Expenditures	1,606.79	490.81	953.15	1,271.47	1,649.63	4,019.05	111.6
Saving Deposits	1,185.18	300.55	592.99	951.12	1,232.83	3,131.57	109.2
Reserve Fund	2.48	1.31	7.32	1.28	1.72	0.54	44.4
Returning Loans	46.71	40.28	34.69	9.69	69.69	85.39	117.1
Others	126.32	50.72	100.44	118.43	119.72	262.24	119.6

Source: *Beijing Annual Statistical Yearbook 2000*

It must be noted that most of the people I talked to, and who told me about the amount of their pensions, belonged to danwei which, as electronics producing companies, had been relatively important during the Maoist era, and also been able to stay economically competitive since the beginning of the reform period. Retiree's pensions in these work units were generally higher than in other state-owned companies. One man, for example, explained that his sister's company could only pay half of her pension, since they had economic difficulties.

2.2 The Health Care System

Other reforms, in the early 1980s, targeted the health care system. At the core of the project was the attempt to improve the quality of care, strengthen medical training, increase foreign exchanges, purchase high-tech equipment from abroad, and increase funds for medical research. State-provided medical services were cut back, and private health providers gradually stepped into the void. The measures have resulted in improved care in a small number of hospitals in urban areas. Nonetheless, their services are restricted to a few, since the majority of urban Chinese cannot afford to pay their market-driven prices. The average cost of a hospital stay, for example, increased by 11 percent over the past eight years, while urban incomes have risen by 8.9 percent. A nationwide survey in 2004 indicated that 48.9 percent of mainlanders did not go to the hospital when they needed medical care, and 29.6 per cent of patients had cut short their stays in the hospital (Wang 2005).

Health has, in fact, become closely intertwined with consumption and the global economy. Since the 1980s, major transnational pharmaceutical firms have established

operations in China. The firms capitalize on the fact that Chinese patients spend far more on prescriptions (60 percent of total health care expenditures) than their counterparts in the US (8 percent) and Germany (12 percent) (Chen 2001). While the government upholds certain price restrictions on medical services, this does not apply to prescription drugs. Health providers, hospitals, and clinics today function as independent economic units that have to be profitable. Prescriptions are a sure way to increase income. The more expensive the medicine (i.e. imported drugs), the more revenue for the hospital. The lucrative market in pharmaceuticals thus boomed in the 1990s. Local Chinese firms also joined the battle with state support, making the domestic market even more competitive and complex. Today, patients have been turned into consumers and wealth is the increasingly crucial determining factor in overall health maintenance (cf. Chen 2001).

With the growing cost of health care and the shrinking financial ability of the state to subsidize it, the public health system is becoming increasingly selective about who is qualified for benefits. This process results in a stratification of health care access (Tang and Parish 2000:38ff). Correspondingly, the one worry elderly danwei residents I talked to uttered in unison was about becoming seriously ill, and having to go to the hospital, because their pensions would not be able to pay for that and their health insurance benefits had been cut.

I am still worried that I will be ill, although I have my pension. The state used to pay 90 percent in case of illness; people dared to see the doctor. After the reform of the medical care policy we have more problems with it. Some retired people don't like to go to the doctors because they have

only 700 or 800 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 87.5 or 100) salary per month. [Interview May 17, 2002]

These feelings of my informants are supported by statistical data for Beijing. The following table of annual per capita living expenditure presents numbers on various items, among them medical expenses.

Table 5: 2000 Annual Living Expenditures Per Capita of 1000 Beijing Urban Households (RMB)⁷

	Average	Low Income	Medium Low Income	Medium Income	Medium High Income	High Income	2000 as % of 1999
Living Expenditures	8,493.49	5,412.73	6,763.12	8,369.35	9,687.15	13,043	113.3
Food	3,083.37	2,385.19	2,842.4	3,206.29	3,379.24	3,747.34	104.2
Clothing	755.03	374.11	569.13	789.98	919.66	1,211.60	103.3
Household Facilities, Articles, and Services	1,097.82	522.98	632.07	943.83	1,067.85	2,520.61	146.5
Medicine and Medical Services	588.80	453.53	461.90	597.07	671.74	798.99	114.7
Transportation and Communication	604.69	321.69	435.66	524.40	732.27	1,092.33	129.2
Recreation, Education, and Culture Services	1,283.85	713.6	1,042.85	1,284.44	1,546.77	1,965.56	112.4
Residence	587.42	451.57	453.25	557.84	679.43	839.37	122.8
Miscellaneous	492.51	190.06	325.86	465.50	690.19	867.6	107.6

Source: *Beijing Annual Statistical Yearbook 2000*

⁷ RMB 8 equal US\$ 1.

Average expenditures on Medicine and Medical Services per month thus amount to RMB 49 (US\$ 6.12). A doctor's visit costs between RMB 10 and 20 (US\$ 1.25 and 2.5), depending on the hospital or clinic. This, however, is only the basic fee for being seen by the doctor. Any kind of special examination is extra, and even for a small ailment, Chinese friends assured me, one pays at least RMB 100 (US\$ 12.5) at a "cheap place". Not surprisingly, my elderly informants, who had limited financial means, repeatedly stressed that they had to exercise regularly since they could not afford to become ill.

I am afraid to become ill [...]. My children have to work and they will have their own family. I hate to bring trouble upon them through illness. I will count on the social insurance, but China is such a big country and there are so many people. A lot of people are sick, not all of them can be taken good care of. It is a big problem. I will do more exercises. [Interview May 31, 2002]

Even some of the young educated people in well-paid jobs that I talked to had worries about their health insurance. These, however, seemed to be more centered around future developments of the system than present-day realities of higher costs. Ping, a 34-year-old who worked with her husband in their own information technology company, thought that

the medical insurance is not very good. I am not quite sure what will happen to me when I grow old. I hope the environment will be better for my daughter because I don't know what will happen in the next few years or in the future. I don't know politics. I want to concentrate on my work. I

don't know if the policies will change or not, now I can just try my best to work. [Interview May 28, 2002]

Since the insurance sector in China is still incipient, like many other young people working in the private sector that I talked to, Ping thought her best bet for providing for her future was to work hard in order to be able to save money for her future and that of her child. Very much in contrast to the Maoist period where people had been trained to be supplicants to the state, the young generation had internalized the new ideology of self-reliance which has been growing in tandem with the reform process.

2.3 Opening the Private Sector

Before 1978, practically everybody worked in state or collective work units. Since the reform, to create more employment opportunities, the private sector was gradually restored. In the beginning, private plots, sideline activities, and market trade were legitimized in rural areas. In 1981, however, the State Council issued a set of regulations for urban nonagricultural individual businesses. At first, such businesses could hire not more than seven employees,⁸ and were considered a "private household" or *geti*. In 1987, the government allowed enterprises to hire eight or more employees, comprising the "private sector" (*siying*).

Ideological hostility, and public contempt or distrust of entrepreneurs, initially led only those persons who had no alternative means of making a living to "*xia hai*," that is,

⁸ Probably because of leaders' ideological discomfort with enterprises in which the workers were not clearly the owners.

to enter the private sector. For some time the government actually restricted business licenses to youths waiting for employment, to the unemployed, and to retirees with urban hukou. Most cadres with state jobs were only willing to venture into the private sphere after 1988 when new regulations required private businesses to obtain insurance for their workers and comply with the requirements of all labor protection legislation (Ikels 1996).

Besides this domestic sector, there is the rapidly expanding joint venture sector. This includes collaborative investments from European, American, and Japanese companies. But especially companies from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao, faced with labor shortages and rising labor costs, have been eager to move labor-intensive operations to the Chinese mainland.

Especially since the early 1990s, both domestic and foreign private sectors have grown rapidly. Though the traditional state and collective sectors remain the dominant employers, these sectors are shrinking. By 1996, domestic private endeavors and joint ventures together employed nearly 17 percent of the urban labor force, compared to 3 percent in the beginning of urban reforms in 1984. The trend is even more obvious for new employees: in 1997, the domestic and foreign sector hired 50 percent of newcomers, compared with only 6 percent in the 1980s. Based on this trend, one can predict that private workers will become an increasingly dominant force in urban life.

In the early days of reform, private self-employed households were looked down upon because of their low status compared to the traditional public sector. Over two decades later, however, this has significantly changed. The self-employed, domestic private, and foreign joint venture sectors have thrived, and people who xia hai not only can earn

significantly higher salaries, but they also increasingly derive status and prestige from working for private, joint venture, or foreign companies. The more successful of this new class of Chinese urban professionals (chuppies) in private business and foreign companies travel by plane, go to fancy restaurants, drive luxurious cars, and live in extravagant apartments. As a result, more people consider giving up a low-income but stable state job for a high-income but no-benefit and low-security private job. For many, the benefits and job security offered by the public sector still seem too important to lose, but for many others the opportunities in the private sector are more attractive (Tang and Parish 2000).

Among my elderly informants, only one man had left his job in the state-sector before retirement, venturing into the private sector early in the reform period. As an engineer with a university degree he was able to find a job in different joint venture companies, first at Siemens and later at Ericsson. This unusual career move was reflected in the fact that he and his wife were one of the few elderly couples who owned an apartment in the medium-priced commercial housing complex Wangjing Xincheng on the western side of the Capital Airport Highway, which offered a significantly higher standard of living, and a distinctly different lifestyle than the danwei compound (see Chapter III). Some other elderly had found employment in the private sector after retirement from their public sector jobs. Nonetheless, these jobs were usually neither high-level nor well paid. One man, for example, worked as a gardener for an embassy.

It was mainly young people who ventured into the private sector. Since 1985, jobs are no longer automatically assigned through the government; graduates are responsible to find employment themselves. Several of the younger generation of people I talked to, who worked in private or joint venture companies, had initially taken up a job in a state-

owned company. Here they were able to gain some work experience, but they also learned about the reality of working in the public sector. Quite a few of them pointed out that they left the state-owned company because they were bored, fed up with incompetent colleagues, or in pursuit of their general career perspectives. 35-year-old Ning, for example, had held a job in a ministry after graduating from university. But she told me:

I found the work in the ministry was not very interesting. I only read the newspaper and drank tea every day. I thought it was a long way for me to run and I didn't want to waste time. My husband was a colleague of mine and he had the idea to establish his own company, so I helped to realize it.

[Interview May 28, 2002]

The main motivation to leave the public sector, however, was to earn more money. Tang Shan, a 31-year-old woman, had studied electronics. After graduation, she worked in a state-owned machine factory, but she said: "I felt it would be better if I would work for a foreign company. So I changed my job." Asked about the benefits of the change, she answered that she could make more money. Nonetheless, she later specified: "Although the salary is high in the foreign company, the work I do is simple, which is not good for my future career. I studied electronics, but now I am working on an assembly line. My work has nothing to do with my major" (Interview June 13, 2002). In order to improve her career chances in the market, Tang studied English and computer programming in her spare time.

Many of the wealthier young couples that I talked to in Wangjing actually engaged in a strategy which has been called "one family, two systems" (*yijia liangzhi*). In

this, either husband or wife leaves the work unit (or never joins one) in order to find employment in the private sector with the hope to make more money, while maintaining the security net of the state-sector through the spouse. Among my informants, it appeared that women were more likely to enter the private sector than men. This might have been caused by the special opportunities that the urban labor market offered to young, educated women in the reform period, but it also reflected gender ideologies which considered men's contribution to the family economy more important than women's (see Chapter IV).

Another aspect of this family arrangement, however, was that in all the cases I encountered where women remained in the state sector, they studied at night school or on the weekends to obtain higher degrees, or specializations, with which they hoped to improve their job perspectives. "I have class on the weekend. I only have a bachelor's degree; I want to have a master's degree, so I am working on it, taking classes" (Interview October 29, 2001). Another woman revealed: "[My major in university was] English. I chose my major myself. Now English is not enough for my work. I have to extend my knowledge to other fields" (Interview June 19, 2002).

2.4 Migration

While the hukou system of residence permits remains officially intact in China, much of the state control has lessened in the reform period. During the Maoist era, it was virtually impossible to move between locations without official permit. Even if one escaped surveillance, the rationing system through government channels and the absence of markets forbade living in a city for very long. In the reform period, however, peasant markets

have returned to cities and rationing has been gradually abandoned. As a result, citizens today can live in cities without legal permit.

Rural reforms since the late 1970s significantly improved agricultural efficiency, making a large amount of rural labor redundant and giving rise to increasing numbers of rural surplus workers. In 1983, the State Council issued a directive allowing peasants to move to and settle in towns. Millions of surplus workers were absorbed in the growing rural industries that emerged after the abolition of the commune system. Millions of others, however, sought their fortunes in urban centers. By the early 1980s, therefore, the “bamboo curtain” increasingly showed holes as officials either issued temporary work permits or ignored illegal migrants to cities. According to the 1995 census, 13 percent of the city residents of Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai did not have local registration, and more than three-quarters of these out-of-towners were from rural areas. The continuous policy of rural and urban segregation had become porous (Ma and Xiang 1998; Tang and Parish 2000:30).

To better understand the changes in peasants’ lives and the motivation for migration to urban centers, I will introduce the account of Liang Jiehua, a Shandong woman in her late 30s, whom I met in one of the markets around Wangjing. After failing the university entrance exam several times, at age 23 Liang Jiehua decided to go to Beijing where an acquaintance had arranged a job in a factory for her. One day I asked Liang Jiehua to tell me about her background and how she came to Beijing.

I was born in 1963. I come from Yangyu town, Shandong province. I grew up on the banks of the Yellow River. [...] My parents were farmers, my grandparents too. They never went to school. After Liberation [1949

Revolution] they worked in a production team. All of the farmers worked on one piece of land. Life was hard. [...] My family had just about enough to eat. We lived in a house made from earth; the walls were also made from earth. My grandparents, my parents and the five children lived all together. [...] The output of the field was not enough for people to eat for a year. We ate corn, baked potatoes, and sweet potatoes and the powder made from potatoes. We used the powder to make steamed buns, it didn't taste good. But we also ate the leaves from the trees, wild grass, flowers and sugarcane, so we could save some flour. [...] That was my life in primary school. My life was improving in middle school. We ate corn powder then, the situation of the family was changing. [Interview June 4, 2002]

Liang Jiehua's narrative here recalls the years after the revolution when peasants in the countryside worked and lived in communes and production brigades. Private land plots were abolished and peasants derived their income exclusively through the commune.⁹ Mismanagement and low incentives to work turned this policy, born from the intention to improve living conditions in the countryside, into the opposite: wide-spread famine, poverty, and death from starvation were the reality during the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰

In the continuation of her life story, Liang recalled how her living situation improved around 1980, when communes were dissolved, peasants were allotted private

⁹ In 1958, at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward, 120 million rural households, or 99 percent of the peasant population, had been organized into 26,000 communes nationwide. See Spence 1990.

¹⁰ The slight improvement in living conditions that Liang Jiehua recalled at the time she attended middle school was probably due to a fading out of the radical period of the Cultural Revolution which meant that peasants, still organized in communes, could dedicate more time to work in their fields.

plots and allowed to sell in local markets everything they produced which exceeded government-set quotas. Through the new system, effort was finally rewarded again, and hard-working peasants could significantly improve their living conditions.

My parents took care of us. They planted and harvested, and prepared food for us to eat. The elder children would work with them in the field, the small ones would go to school. [...] I had to collect grass and feed the geese and ducks after I came home from school, and I also did some housework, like washing the dishes, laundry. [...] The girls did the housework. My eldest brother was married and did not live with us. My second brother went to another place to work in order to make more money to support my third brother and me go to school. [...] I couldn't [study at home]. Not like students in the schools in Beijing. I went to my school very early in the morning and I had two more classes after dinner. I tried to do my homework at school. On Saturdays and Sunday I had to do housework at home. [...] Our house was on the banks of the Yellow River. On the plain we began to build a new house with earth when my elder brother was at the age to get married. When I went to high school, in the countryside the policy of fixed farm output quotas for each household was practiced. We had a good harvest if we worked hard in the fields and every day we began to eat white steamed buns which we used to have only on the Spring Festival. We planted no rice but flour and our life improved step by step. [But] I was very short because of the poor conditions. I was

only 1.55 meter when I graduated and I was very thin. It was all because of malnutrition. [Interview June 4, 2002]

Partly because of the bad study conditions, Liang was not able to pass the university entrance exam, even though she would have liked to.

I was not admitted to university, so after I graduated from high school, I went back to my hometown and worked on the farm for 2 years. [...] I liked to go to school. I was the youngest child in the family. Both my parents liked me and they thought I should go to school. But they could not afford school for all the children, so some of my brothers and my sister had no chance to go to school. My sister is 48 years old and she can not even write her own name. [...] I was one of the two lucky girls in my village [who went to school]. There were at least five to six thousand people in my village, but only two of us girls had the opportunity to go to high school. More boys than girls went to high school. [...] [After high school graduation] I prepared for the entrance exam to university for the second time. Actually, I took the exam three times over the next two years, but I failed each time. For my first try of the exam to university there were only 10 points missing to be admitted. The second year there were 25 points missing, and the third year 50. So I thought I was going further and further away from being admitted to university and I would never have a chance to study. I was an old girl in the village because the girls my age got married and some of them even had their children, so I decided to give up. I

began to work in the fields for two years, but I didn't like that kind of life at all. [Interview June 4, 2002]

When the opportunity arose to leave her town, Liang Jiehua eagerly took it.

I went to Beijing during the Spring Festival of 1986 in order to get away from the farm work. My classmate's uncle was in Beijing and her father was my teacher. My teacher thought I was a good student although I was not admitted to university. [He] introduced me to the uncle in Beijing and encouraged me to find a job there. So I came to Beijing. [...] I had a place to live and the uncle found me a job before I went. So the second day after I came to Beijing I went to work. There were altogether 15 workers both from the countryside and the city who were employed. My cousin also worked with me. We lived together in the factory's dormitory and also ate at the factory. The situation was totally different from knowing nobody in Beijing and coming to look for a job blindly. The uncle was the head of office in the No. 301 factory. [Interview June 4, 2002]

Migrants are officially referred to as "the floating population" (*liudong renkou*). In urban centers such as Beijing, however, the floating population is not all that "loose" and "uprooted" as the phrase implies (cf. Zhang 2001). Today, many of the migrants to urban centers live in relatively permanent structures and return only seldom to their home

provinces.¹¹ Nonetheless, the government refers to these people as floating population based on the fact that they do not have an urban hukou. Since the early 1980s, however, there are actually two different types of migrants: those who follow regulations according to which staying in a city longer than three days requires one to pay for temporary registration, and those who don't. Even the temporary registration does not entitle its holder to any of the state-provided benefits urban residents receive (Ma and Xiang 1998).

Hukou regulations are currently changing, with some advances by the government to grant migrant workers a change of resident status, but the issue is far from solved and persistent in people's minds. Migrants constantly spoke of themselves as *nongcunren* (peasants), whereas city residents referred to them as *waidiren* (people from outside). In addition, many of the current problems in the city, such as dirt, rudeness, and increasing crime rates were blamed on the "uncultured" (*mei you wenhua; suzhi di*) migrants from the countryside, such as in this statement by a middle-aged woman who lived in Wangjing:

More and more people are moving here, people from all kinds of places.

It's a social problem. Beijingers want to go abroad and the other Chinese want to go to Beijing. Nobody can stop them. But it's a big problem of the quality (*suzhi*) of the people. [Interview August 7, 2002]

The increased flow of menial laborers and service providers from the countryside, however, has actually been beneficial for residents. First, many local peasants and rural

¹¹ According to a survey conducted among rural migrants in Beijing in 1999, 19.4 percent of the "migrants" had lived in Beijing for three years while 10.4 percent had lived in the capital for more than five years. See Josephine Ma 2002.

house owners have become directly dependent for their income on renting out property to migrant workers. Second, migrants are filling labor shortages in cities that result from the acceleration of economic growth.

Despite increasing unemployment and serious underemployment in Chinese cities, the urban labor market remains highly segmented. Most migrants were originally peasants¹² who in cities work in (1) high labor intensity, low-income, but formal jobs, concentrated in secondary and tertiary industries, where they earn half the salary of urban residents or less;¹³ (2) stable, contractual, but temporary jobs, such as manual labor in small firms;¹⁴ (3) unstable, temporary, and insecure jobs such as supplying outdoor services;¹⁵ or (4) as either employees or employers in small firms, such as the garment cottage industry set up by migrants from Zhejiang province (Gu and Liu 2002).¹⁶

The emergence of the private sector economy, therefore, particularly in retail trade and personal services, offers job opportunities for undocumented urbanites. Many employers now recruit extensively in rural areas, hiring migrants as temporary contract workers and often providing dormitory housing for them. In sectors with labor shortages,

¹² According to a 1994 census, the average age of Beijing migrants was 27.7 years (28.5 for males, 26.4 for females), 6.6 years younger than the average age of the permanent population. Migrants aged 15 to 59 years made up 87.9 percent of all migrants, while this age group made up only 60 to 70 percent of the permanent urban population. The youngest group (between 0 and 14 years) accounted for only 9.9 percent of the total migrant population, while the oldest group made up less than 2.2 percent. See Gu and Liu 2002.

¹³ The jobs include positions in chemical industries, some office services, public service in catering industries, and private services that urban residents don't like to take up, for example, professional typewriters, printing clerks, retailers, cashiers, and waitresses.

¹⁴ For example as family servants, house decorators, furniture repairers, deliverers, street cleaners, family electrical equipment cleaners, movers, and porters.

¹⁵ Such as street stand owners, peddlers, rickshaw boys, show menders, bicycle mechanics, locksmiths, watch repairers, seal engravers, knife sharpeners, and trash collectors.

¹⁶ According to a 1994 census, only 3.1 percent of Beijing's floating population had college degrees. Those with middle and primary school education accounted for 79.7 percent, and illiterate or almost illiterate migrants made up about 5.5 percent. This educational profile supports the trend that migrants usually work in low paid, unskilled, or informal jobs, which urban residents are reluctant to take. See Gu and Liu 2002.

often the process of labor recruitment is well organized and conducted by public agencies (cf. Logan 2002).

City governments, however, have been reluctant to either build the infrastructure or give migrants legal access to urban amenities that would prevent social problems (Jie and Taubmann 2002; Tang and Parish 2000:30ff). Without legal access to urban housing, peasants in the city are forced to live an uncertain existence on construction sites, in marketing stalls, on the streets, in rented rooms, or in makeshift settlements on the urban periphery. Nonetheless, some migrants have done economically remarkably well, breaking with the stereotype of peasant migrants as passive victims. They have established their own settlements,¹⁷ and many migrants, far from hopeless, are optimistic about carving out their niches (cf. Ma and Xiang 1998).

In Wangjing, migrants could be most commonly found working in various temporary markets. One of these, for example, was a combined indoor and outdoor affair. The outside area was the size of a soccer field, on what seemed to have been in the past the yard of an industrial plant or similar. Every day vendors and customers streamed into the square to look, bargain, trade, buy, and sell everything from toilet paper to herbs, paper decorations for the Chinese New Year, clothes, fruit, electrical appliances, aquarium fish, flowers, puppies, fake antiques, cigarettes, and so forth, as well as freshly prepared food, such as dumplings, fried rice, tofu and meats. The sales stands were all make-shift structures; sometimes an old bedstead or a table, sometimes moveable carts with window panes around a cooking device.

¹⁷ Such as Zhejiang Village, Xinjiang Village, Henan Village, and so forth. See Ma and Xiang 1998; Zhang 2001.

In this place, a middle-aged woman from Hubei province whom I got to know in another market around the corner set up shop three days a week. She offered slightly different clothes, trying to attract a different clientele than with her stall in the inside market, which was taken care of in the meantime by one of her nieces.

In the beginning of my research period, the inside of the indoor and outdoor market did not attract much attention from customers because it was crammed, steamy, and badly ventilated. However, shortly after Chinese New Year in February 2002, the outside area and all of its permanent structures were razed, having been designated as the site for yet another new apartment complex. From that time on, some of the previous outdoor vendors rented stalls in the indoor market hall to sell their wares and produce. Most of the people who prepared food could not afford to rent stalls, however, and a few of them huddled together in the small space in front and behind the market hall, trying to attract the entering and leaving customers. After a few weeks, in the area behind the hall a kind of food street emerged, with little stools grouped around a number of tables where people could sit down to eat their breakfast, lunch or dinner, which they bought from one of the ten to twelve moveable stands lined up around. This business was obviously semi-legal and roughly once every month I could observe policemen scaring the food vendors away from the area behind the market hall, although I later learned that they still paid a fee for a sales permit.

This was the place where an elderly couple from Harbin (in the north-east) sold pancakes. They had moved to Beijing after the wife retired and the husband was laid off. Similarly, Ling, a woman in her late 20s, followed her husband in 1999 to Beijing, since neither she nor her husband had been able to find work in their home province Hubei.

Now Ling sold baby and children's clothes in one of the markets in the Wangjing neighborhood, and her husband worked as a helper in a nearby bread factory. All of these migrants had carefully evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of coming to Beijing, and decided that a semi-legal lifestyle in the capital was preferable to the desolate living situation in their home places.

While the risk as private entrepreneurs, who sold food or goods in markets, was greater than working as an employee, the general, more or less exploitative and practically lawless employment situation for un-educated migrants motivated them to venture into the private business sector. Here they relied on their own capacity. They had to develop sales skills and find out about their customers' tastes and needs, but they could also decide what they wanted to sell and how much they would work. In that way, they were able to exercise a certain amount of self-determination. Indeed, all the migrants I talked to around Wangjing considered themselves lucky and having the better lot than friends and family who remained in their home places.

2.5 Conclusion

The various reforms since 1978 have "reshuffled" Chinese citizens' social and economic conditions, and their social positions in contrast to the Maoist era, when differentiations were based on a person's "revolutionary background," the importance of one's danwei, and personal relations to superiors. In the reform period, work units have become increasingly differentiated according to economic success rather than political importance. At the same time, however, the growing marketization of various state services is beginning to favor the part of the population who took the chance to xia hai, dive into the sea of the

private economy, and has financially profited from the decision. State-sector employees have to either accept significant cut-backs in benefits and social welfare or look for alternative incomes to purchase these in the market. In addition, after 25 years of being fixed in the countryside, peasants are able to migrate to urban centers where they attempt to get a share of the emerging wealth. Feeding the transforming (or developing) urban labor market, migrants' presence in cities questions pre-reform political, social, and economic dichotomies.

3 Housing Reforms

3.1 Commodification of Real Estate¹⁸

Among the major changes which have affected city structures, and concomitantly urban citizens' lives since 1979, have been reforms of the housing sector. In the 1980s, the national government realized that the welfare character of housing provision was one of the reasons behind the continuous housing shortages in Chinese cities. Funds for housing construction were unrecoverable and neither local governments, nor enterprises, nor individuals had an incentive to construct housing (Ye 1987). To address the problem, various experiments were initiated to reform urban housing with the intention of shifting new housing provision from employers to the market realm (Zhou and Logan 2002). Initially, efforts concentrated on improving and expanding the existing public housing stock. Housing construction was funded by public funds, primarily from state-owned enter-

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the various reforms see Zhou and Logan 2001 and Wu 2002. Appendix C lists the various land and housing reforms.

prises, and average living space doubled from 3.6 square meters per capita to 7.1 square meters between 1978 and 1992 (Davis 2000). It was during this time that the electronics factories in Jiuxianqiao joined financial resources to construct various residential compounds in the research locale.

In the 1990s, government policy shifted to stimulate commodification of residential real estate. The Second National Housing Reform Conference in 1991 decided on three initiatives: First, rents were to be raised to cover the costs of maintenance; second, sitting tenants were to be encouraged to purchase their apartments on installment plans; and third, an increasing share of new housing was to be offered in the market (Davis 2000).

The consequences of these new policies were quick and far-reaching.¹⁹ By 1992, five million urban households already held twelve-year mortgages from the Chinese Construction Bank, and by the end of 1994, 30.5 percent of urban households held some type of ownership rights.²⁰ Most home buyers purchased the rental units they already occupied at a highly subsidized price, but others bought newly built homes sold by commercial developers. While a private real estate market existed before 1991, it was concentrated in areas where overseas Chinese could purchase homes for themselves or their PRC relatives. “In the 1990s, commercial developments appeared throughout the country, and new homes were sold to individuals with no overseas connection” (Davis 2000:9).

¹⁹ Various scholars have pointed out, however, that it was the land reforms of 1987, which allowed for the transfer of land-use rights, that were crucial in the take-off of the real estate sector. See, for example, Wu 1996, Wu and Yeh 1997, and Yeh and Wu 1996.

²⁰ There were basically three different ownership rights: ownership with the right to resell in the market, ownership with obligation to resell to the employer, and ownership of use rights with no right to resell.

Davis points out that China's immature financial institutions contributed to the rise in home ownership. Families were accumulating substantial savings, and confronted with growing inflation, the purchase of a home was an attractive investment. However, as I will show later, purchases were not only financially motivated. Urban residents also bought homes in order to enjoy both greater privacy and a sense of exclusivity.

3.2 Effects of the Reforms

Changing City Structure

Urban reforms have significantly changed the relation between the central government and the municipalities. Cities have become more autonomous in terms of political economy, hierarchical structures, and authority over resource allocation, as well as more embedded in their immediate locale. Decentralization and greater reliance on market mechanisms have, in turn, have decisively changed Chinese cities' environments. The "hard edges" of cities that segregated rural and urban populations during the Mao-era "as clearly as a moated city wall" (Davis 1995:2) have eroded, resulting in visible urban – rural sprawl. In contrast to the structure of self-sufficient work unit "cells," since the land and housing reforms new construction projects have begun to break the uniform, gray horizons of the 1960s and 1970s, and signs of capitalist enterprises began to color the cityscape: the ubiquitous yellow arches of McDonald's fast-food restaurants compete with the red and white of *kekou kele* (Coca Cola) advertisements and the bright yellow signs of the Kodak photo-studios. Chinese cities in the early 1990s grew around specialized centers of commerce, finance, and trade. Increased differentiation and specialization between cities on the national level has been paralleled by a high degree of specialization

of commercial and industrial function that have developed or reemerged within urban centers.

In Beijing, three main new functional zones are developing around the center: Zhongguancun Science and Technology Park, the Central Business District (CBD), and the future Olympic Park. Zhongguancun, located in Beijing's northwestern Haidian District, was inaugurated in 1988 as China's first state-level high-tech development zone. Municipal planning includes Zhongguancun Science Town, a state-level software park with high-speed, broadband multimedia information network, and a light railway to connect Zhongguancun with the city's north-eastern and north-western suburbs. The future Olympic Park, in turn, lies at the northern end of the city's north-south axis and will occupy 1,135 hectares, including 680 hectares of forest. It will offer a range of sports, cultural and commercial facilities that will be open to the public after the 2008 Beijing Games (Li Xin 2002).

Beijing's CBD, finally, covers a four square kilometer area in the eastern part of the city, which is already home to the city's foreign embassies, 60 percent of foreign-funded companies, and more than 50 percent of the city's luxury hotels and restaurants. The municipal government has launched a massive campaign to promote the area and to accelerate its development as part of its efforts to stylize Beijing as a "modern international metropolis." A range of construction projects are being planned and designed, including the World Science and Trade Center, and the office complexes for China Central TV and Beijing Municipal TV (Li Xin 2002). In addition, several commercial centers have (re)emerged: first Xidan in the West, followed by the Jianguomenwai area in the east, and the makeover of the historical shopping street Wangfujing (Gaubatz 1999).

Since 1990, because of rising land prices in the inner city, the focus of development of property complexes has increasingly shifted to the outlying areas and satellite towns. Areas beyond the Third Ring Road, which were formerly considered “the suburbs,” or even countryside, are now unquestionably part of the city proper, which is roughly defined as the zone within the Fourth Ring Road. As a friend who lived and worked in Haidian district in Beijing’s north-west put it:

10 years ago when you came to Bei Da [Beijing University] beyond the Third Ring Road, the area was still referred to as Haidian village [*haidian cun*]. Buses that went there were the ones starting with the number three, like the No. 302. All buses starting with that number were considered to be serving the suburbs. But since the creation of Zhongguancun, that area and Bei Da which are actually outside the 4th Ring Road are considered city proper! [Notes January 8, 2002]

The Fourth Ring Road has indeed become the center of new residential construction projects, with some new complexes also being built beyond it. The municipal government, in fact, envisions that the construction of edge areas, and the development of the transportation system will draw more and more citizens to new houses in the suburbs. According to the general plan, 250,000 citizens are expected to have moved out of Beijing’s downtown areas by 2010. By the middle of the 21st century, most people will live in suburbs, leaving a relatively small urban population. In the future, a Beijinger’s morning should look like this: Leave a forest-encircled apartment, jump into a light rail train,

express public bus, or one's own car, and arrive at work downtown within an hour (Jin Liming 2001; Tan Rui 2002; Wang Dandan 2002a).

Foreign trade zones, industrial parks, hotels catering to foreign business travelers and apartment complexes for foreigners have already sprung up in concentrated form on the outskirts of the city area, or in previously "under-utilized" areas such as warehouse districts in closer proximity to the city center because of the substantial land requirements and the growing cost of land, or land use rights. Special economic zones have been established in the northwest and southeast of Beijing. In the northeast, around the research area, empty land was designated for the Wangjing Science and Technology Park. Close by, the Lido Hotel and Residential Complex offers wealthy foreigners an exclusive respite from the noise of the city center.

The Beijing Real Estate Market

In the first quarter of 2002, RMB 9.8 billion (US\$ 1.2 billion) were invested in the Beijing real estate industry, an increase of 46.5 percent over the same period in 2001. Investment in residential housing was up 32 percent, reaching RMB 4.9 billion (US\$ 592 million). Housing areas under construction and reconstruction totaled 36.6 million square meters (*China Daily Real Estate Supplement* 2002). Beijing's real estate market, however, is dominated by mid- to upper-level apartments, many of which are located in the Asian Games Village, and the north-western and north-eastern areas of the city, for example, Wangjing. Since the successful bid to host the Olympic Games 2008, Olympic fever has further heated up Beijing's property market. Apartment projects are mushrooming up around the future Olympic site, and existing complexes have chalked up their

prices. Residential property near the proposed Olympic Village witnessed growing sales, for some time even mad purchases, with people queuing up for new projects (Gao Haiping 2001).

In 1997, the price for regular housing in the inner suburban areas was already more than RMB 4,000 (US\$ 500) per square meter, while the average annual salary in the city amounted to RMB 11,000 (US\$ 1,375). Although salaries have risen in recent years, property prices have increased more steeply. In addition, as socio-economic differentiations intensify, this adds to the number of urban families who cannot afford commercial housing. In 2002, the proportion of income to apartment prices in Beijing was 11 to one, that is, much higher than the international average of 4.6 to one, according to the State Bureau of Statistics (Wang and Wang 2002).²¹

With large areas of Beijing under reconstruction, many residents *have* to buy new apartments.²² However, despite national and municipal governments' policies, low price apartments are few and there are long waiting lists. In the next five years, the homes of an estimated 340,000 Beijing families will be demolished. Of these, it is estimated that 67 percent will seek to purchase a new apartment, most of them economically priced. Statistics show that more than 70 percent of Beijing families belong to the low- and medium income level, but most of the city's new developments have scared away the majority of Beijing's prospective home buyers with their high prices. "We would like to live in

²¹ Among the factors that lead to such high prices is the cost of land. In Beijing's inner suburbs, land prices range from RMB 400 to RMB 500 (US\$ 50 to US\$ 62.5) per square meter, while further out prices reach about RMB 180 (US\$ 22.5) per square meter. In addition, within the city, average demolition fees per square meter are RMB 1,700 to RMB 4,600 (US\$ 212.5 to US\$ 575). These costs account for nearly 30 to 40 percent of the total price of construction. All charges are paid by the developers who then pass on the costs to the apartment buyers.

²² Evicted inner city residents are supposed to receive per square meter compensation. Many, however, are cheated out of what is lawfully theirs by the developers. See, for example, *Agence France-Presse* 2003.

Wangjing which is very nice, but it costs 400,000 to 500,000 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 50,000 to US\$ 62,500). How could we afford that? Everybody wants to live in a better house, but the common people like us depend on their pension. How could we afford it, what do you think?" (Interview May 15, 2002)

Since 1998 (after several years of trial) the national government has been promoting the affordable housing project (*jingji shiyong fang*).²³ This policy was not born from mere altruism. Rather, it corresponded with the economic shift from export-led development to concentration on internal consumption in response to the Asian financial crisis. Affordable housing was promoted as a major sector of the urban economy, which was aimed at tapping into savings held by urban households. Since 1993, commercial housing has been in oversupply in Beijing. Many developers had to cut prices to sell their stock. The profit on investment has declined continuously. The perceived market for affordable housing has become an attractive alternative for property developers. Nonetheless, although the price of affordable housing is cheaper than ordinary commercial housing, it is still too expensive for most ordinary residents. In comparison with work unit housing, the price is much higher than the standard sales price used by most danwei when privatizing their existing housing stock. In addition, although social rental housing was promoted by the reforms, commitment to the construction of affordable housing remained an unfulfilled promise in most locations (Wang Ya-ping 2001).

In the past two years, Beijing's supply of economically affordable housing has lagged far behind customers' demand. In fact, in 2001 a substantial drop in the marketing

²³ The main difference to regular commercial housing is the way in which land is allocated, and the control that the government has over developers' profits. For affordable housing projects land is allocated without charging land use fees. Investment profits of developers of such projects are set at 3 percent.

volume of this kind of property was reported compared to 1999 and 2000. In addition, the total floor space of the apartments is mostly relatively large. Often the smallest unit still exceeds 100 square meters, driving up the total price of the apartment (Lin Li 2002). In consequence, in 2002 the Beijing Municipal Government decided to enforce construction of economically affordable housing. In the summer of the same year, about 736 million square meters of affordable housing were under construction, 3 million of which were part of newly launched projects (Ma Zha 2002). The government claimed that the continuous effort to promote the housing construction market and to satisfy housing needs of the less wealthy were top priorities of the 2002 housing reform agenda. "We should change the trend of most real estate developers [which is] to construct luxurious villas and apartments" (Fu Jing 2002).²⁴

According to government regulations, economically affordable housing is targeted at families with a family income of less than RMB 60,000 (US\$ 7,225) per annum. If we recall from section 2.1, above, the annual discretionary income per capita in Beijing for the year 2000 was RMB 10,349.7 (US\$ 1,291.8), far below the amount used to indicate qualification for affordable housing units. But the housing does not even all end up in the hands of this relatively large, officially defined target group. Statistics show that about 16 percent of economically affordable housing was purchased by higher income families. In fact, behind the boom in economically affordable housing many problems have arisen. The most serious is that income qualifications and house sizes are out of control. Families with low incomes face the difficulty of finding houses of affordable size because of the

²⁴ At least in academia there exists a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of residential properties aimed at mixed income dwellers, and about how such projects could be encouraged. See Shan Wen-hui 2001.

shortage of small- and medium-sized apartments. In addition, citizens complain about the procedural loopholes in the income qualification assessment for affordable housing. The only proof of a buyer's income status is a stamp from his/ her work unit and it is difficult for administrators to investigate this type of information due to the lack of personal credit cards (Xiao Yin 2002b).

The most striking aspect of the various reforms and new policies, however, is that they are all geared towards established urban residents who have secure jobs and steady incomes. For the "floating population," no matter how settled they have in fact become in the city, even the so-called economically prized apartments continue to be out of reach (cf. Huang and Clark 2000; Li 2003; Logan and Bian 1993; Logan et al. 1999; Wang Yaping 2001; Wu 1996; Zhu 2000).

3.3 Conclusion

We have seen how various reforms have affected Beijing people's lives, and how the social, economic, and political changes play out differently for different segments of society. While the public sector continues to exert a significant influence, state-sector employees today are not necessarily better off than people working in the private sector. The picture that emerges is one of growing socio-economic stratification.

In the following chapter I will discuss life in the different forms of housing available around Wangjing, how it has changed during the reform period, how residents are affected by the transformations, and what strategies they employ to counter the more disruptive changes.

Chapter III Living in Wangjing

1 The Wangjing Residential Landscape

1.1 Danwei Compounds

Throughout Wangjing at the time of my fieldwork there remained several old, state-owned residential compounds, which had been built after 1950. Although of differing size, these compounds were all designed in the typical work unit style: Rows of identical, evenly spread out, parallel, five-story, walk-up apartment buildings on both sides of the main street of the compound. Around the buildings were a small recreational park-like area, a kindergarten, usually a primary and middle school, some shops and service stores. All this was enclosed by high walls with one or two gates which used to be guarded by security personnel, but subsequently just stood open. One such compound is Hong Yuan.

Hong Yuan, an Old Danwei Compound

Hong Yuan was built in the early 1980s as the residential quarters for the employees of one of the electronic parts factories in the area. At the time of the research, 4,337 families, or 13,180 people, were living in Hong Yuan. More than 30 percent of the residents in the compound were over 60 years old and depended on their pensions.¹ The average income of the working population was RMB 1,000 (US\$ 125) per month. Management

¹ This according to the neighborhood organizational bureau. Some of the elderly, however, pointed out that actually 60 percent of the residents in the *xiaoqu* (residential compound) were retired. This does not necessarily contradict the bureau's numbers, but is a different form of looking at the population, since people can, or have to retire earlier than 60. I am not sure whether the head of the neighborhood bureau *consciously* chose to present the compound's population according to age, not to work status, which significantly changed the picture. My question had generally referred to the residents' composition.

and service offices' financial expenditures were covered by the electronics company, which had put the money into building the residential complex.

Hong Yuan had seven so-called "work stations" (*juweihui*), each staffed with two employees who were responsible for health care, child care, employment for laid-off workers, and care for the elderly in the community. In addition, the work-stations took care of family issues and acted as mediators in communal conflicts. They also offered free social activities to the residents, which were normally led or taught by volunteer community members.

The majority of the people living in Hong Yuan were (former) work colleagues, and this created an overall atmosphere of a close knit neighborhood in which everybody knew everybody. Life in the compound today was strongly marked by the retired residents, who could be seen all over the *xiaoqu* (small residential neighborhood) involved in one of the various activities that were offered: chess, dancing, gymnastics, card playing, and so forth. People I talked to gave me a sense of a "pensioner's paradise":

After the building of the community, we organized some groups, such as the singing group, folk dance group, disco group, gongfu, and sword practicing teams. In order to prepare for the Great Olympics, every community has its own English class and calligraphy class. It is fine. We have plenty of activities. We can play around after the meals. We also have gym facilities for us to do some exercises. This area is very good; they offer the retired men and old grannies a place to play. [Interview May 17, 2002]

Hong Yuan, like other old work unit compounds around Wangjing, felt a little like being in a different time. Even though the compound had been renovated and changed, once one had stepped through its gates, life became slower and more quiet. Wherever one looked, people chatted with neighbors on their way to run errands. This stood in stark contrast to newer residential complexes, where anonymity of living was actually one of the positive qualities that residents mentioned (see below). The communal atmosphere within the danwei compound was underlined by the increasing changes just outside of the compound's walls. While there were still some tree-lined streets on this eastern side of the Capital Airport Highway, trees were being cut down and roads widened. Newer developments, such as factories, stores, and apartment complexes, were rising around the older structures.

Hua Yuan, a New Danwei Compound

On the western side of the Capital Airport Highway, amidst the growing number of new commercial housing complexes, lies Hua Yuan, built in the mid 1990s by the State Bureau of Education for its employees. They work in various educational institutions throughout the entire city. One man was the art teacher in a nearby middle school, another woman worked as a secretary in a university in Beijing's west. The vast majority of residents were relatively young, between 30 and 40 years old.

The compound covers a roughly 10,000 square meter large property on one of the major roads through Wangjing. It is enclosed by a wall and fence with three gates that are guarded by security personnel. Cars going into the compound were stopped and if one was not a resident, the guard called the person one wished to see. As a pedestrian, how-

ever, one could pass through the gate easily. I observed only a couple of very poor looking people being stopped from entering. I, as a foreigner, was never bothered by the guards.

Inside the compound, about 20 fifteen-floor high-rises lie scattered on one side of the main road, while on the other side there are five two-story houses which have been spilt up into individual apartments. The buildings are very simple in style, without any decoration or other distinguishing features. Apartments range in size between fifty and 120 square meters, and were offered to employees according to age and family size. All were sold at highly discounted prices. One family who lived in a roughly sixty square meter large apartment told me that they had bought it in 2000 for RMB 80,000 (US\$ 10,000), having received discounts for both of their ten years of working.

Between the buildings are lawns, small paths, and a few nooks with benches, bushes, and Chinese-style garden elements. In one corner of the xiaoqu is a parking lot, with above- and underground facilities. On another side sits a combined kindergarten, primary, and middle school building. There was only one small provisions store located within the compound, but several of the high-rises had small kiosks on the first floor which sold telephone cards, soft drinks, snacks, and ice-cream. Just outside the main gate of the compound, a new supermarket had opened a couple of months before my research.

During the week, the compound was very quiet. On weekends, however, the compound became lively and crowded with the predominantly young residents and their small children. While some of the couples chatted with each other, these were usually short interchanges and greetings. Rui Lan, a 33-year-old editor in a university publishing house, confirmed my impression: "As for the neighbors, everybody has to work during

the day and we all come back home late at night, go see our parents on the weekends, so we can hardly find the time to meet each other” (Interview October 29, 2002). While the residential neighborhood organization also offered activities for its residents such as a health club, dancing, and music, none of the people I talked to in this compound took part in them, claiming that they were at inconvenient times and that they were too busy anyways.

From these short descriptions we can already discern the different lifestyles in the two danwei compounds. Hong Yuan was a community that had grown over several years. Even though the complex itself is not that old, residents knew each other for a much longer time since they were work colleagues. The elderly residents made frequent use of the social activities that were offered, among other reasons because their limited financial means did not allow them to seek much entertainment outside. Hua Yuan, in contrast, even after more than five years of existence, had not fostered any community-like social atmosphere. Its predominantly young residents worked in different places, with busy schedules, and little time to socially interact with their neighbors. Few of them actually showed interest in that kind of contact. Generally speaking, life in the newly constructed danwei compound resembled much more what I found in new commercial housing complexes.

1.2 New Commercial Residential Complexes

Wangjing, a Mid-Level Residence

Wangjing, the residential complex at the heart of the Wangjing Xincheng neighborhood, is a mid-level commercial development that was built in the mid-1990s by the Wangjing Construction Company (*Wangjing Jiangkang Gongsi*), a state-owned entity. Several of the residents in this complex told me that they actually decided to buy an apartment here because the developer was a state-owned company. They felt it was “safe” (*baoxiande*), and that the facilities would be better than in other complexes at the time. Wangjing allegedly was the first Chinese “middle-class compound” (*zhongchan jieceng qu*) or even “rich people’s living complex” (*furen qu*), as one resident told me, and many of the first wave of reform-era wealthy people in Beijing were said to have bought apartments here.

The complex was one of the biggest around Wangjing, covering more than a square kilometer plot. Framed by large roads all around, the walled compound has four gates with security checkpoints and a barrier across the street. Incoming cars and pedestrians were stopped and asked for their references. Inside the compound, a winding road inscribes a loop around a central, low building that is a simple mall with various shops, two restaurants, ping pong facilities and a gym. By its side is a paved square with a fountain. Various benches, seats, and pavilions are loosely arranged around it. This central area was strictly pedestrian; security guards watched closely that no car and no bike entered the space.

About forty 30-floor high-rises are strewn across the compound, facing in various directions. Most of them had small shops and facilities on the entrance floor. There were hairdressers, small restaurants, a travel agency, kiosks, beauty salons, another gym, a

flower and present shop, and more. The buildings are plain, without any distinctive stylistic markers. Apartments are of various sizes, ranging from over 200 square meters to the smallest of 90 square meters. In 1995, a square meter was sold for RMB 4,000 (US\$ 500). In 2002, I was told that there were no units available.

On weekdays, the compound was quiet and lonely, apart from midday when the central square was populated for about an hour by small children and their nannies, most of whom, judging by their clothes and dialect, came from the countryside. They were joined by a few elderly who sat in the sun before disappearing into the buildings again. On warm evenings the compound became more lively when the mostly young couples went for leisurely walks. Weekends, in contrast, were busy times. The compound was crowded: young people, and the few elderly strolled about, went window shopping, sat on the benches, or played with children. Nonetheless, like in Hua Yuan, there was not much communication between the residents, an impression once more confirmed by people I talked to, who unanimously said that they hardly knew anybody in the xiaoqu, and were not interested in meeting anybody.

New Commercial Housing Projects

Many of the new residential complexes that were mushrooming around Wangjing set up sales offices in the neighborhood, even though the projects were only started after at least a third of the units had been sold. Throughout the research, I interviewed a number of the sales representatives about the new projects. In these interviews I was interested in who

the investors were, which market/ clientele they were aiming at, what the compound would offer in terms of facilities, and why the investors had chosen Wangjing.²

One of the complexes that caught my attention was a project with the English name "Heart Ocean." It was going to close the last open lot in a mixed residential and commercial block. I had visited many times the outside vegetable, fruit, and miscellaneous goods market which occupied the corner property where the complex was going to be built. In two days, the make-shift structures around the market were torn down; workers with horse carts drove away the neatly cleaned bricks, and a fence and sales office were set up.

According to the clerk in the sales office, Heart Ocean was financed by a group of (mainland) Chinese investors. They considered Wangjing an attractive area because it was one of the biggest residential areas in Asia. This was also the reason, he pointed out, why the land in the neighborhood had become much more expensive within the last two years. The architect of the new complex was a Chinese who had been trained in the Netherlands, as the agent proudly stressed. He previously built the highly acclaimed "Century Plaza," an office/ hotel complex in the growing Central Business District, which now served as a model for the current project. The idea was to build a "European style complex."

The compound will have five buildings with a total of 18,000 square meters of apartments. In 2002, the apartments sold for RMB 5,500 (US\$ 687.5) per square meter with a 20 percent down-payment, and the most expensive unit cost RMB 800,000 (US\$

² The interviews were usually short, about 20 minutes at most, and followed the same outline of questions. The sales clerks were courteous, but not overly helpful. They were obviously not quite sure what to make of a student conducting research on the residential situation in the area, and they did not have guidelines from their employers about how to handle such a situation.

100,000) in total. The compound promised facilities such as an underground parking lot, coffee shops, retail shops, and a gym. There would be no offices in the complex, only residential units. When I asked what kind of people the project aimed to attract, the sales clerk assured me that “with the availability of mortgages to Chinese people today, the apartments are affordable to everybody.” (Notes May 10, 2002)

One of the striking contrasts in the Wangjing neighborhood was the close proximity between new wealth, reflected in these kinds of recently constructed, up-scale, expensive apartment buildings, and the poverty of the people who lived in the few left-over pingfang houses, or who worked and/ or bought in the make-shift markets spread throughout the locale. Just opposite the market hall where I conducted the main part of my research, for example, lies the almost finished “Ocean Pearl” complex.

“Ocean Pearl,” the name written in English and Chinese, was financed by Chinese investors and designed by a Chinese architect. The complex has six buildings and 212 apartments. The sale of units started in summer 2001 and there were only 50 units left. As a special feature of this project, the sales clerk pointed out that the apartments have very big living rooms, and are marketed to young wealthy couples without children. According to this real estate agent, Wangjing was an attractive area because of its environment (Notes May 10, 2002).

Just two buildings down the same road lies the next complex, which stands out because of its mixture of European styles. The fence around the compound is decorated with marble plaques depicting legendary Greek scenes with naked women and amphorae of wine. The common ground between the complex’s four main apartment towers fea-

tures a gothic-style building in the shape of a church which will house the office and service bureau. On the roofs of the apartment towers are gilded cupid statues with bow and arrow. The main entrance to the complex is closed with a four meter high, pointed arch-shaped iron gate with gothic ornamentation.

The complex, “Saint Angel Holy Fragrant” (*Saint Angel Shenxin*) had caught my attention early on because of the advertising posters around the compound. These depicted various Caucasian people – a middle-aged couple, a young man in a business suit, an elderly couple – who happily gazed down on the patch of green lawn between them. There, two over-large Chinese and Caucasian babies in diapers giddily spread their legs and arms, and beamed with big, bright eyes at the observer on the street. The photo-collage was surrounded by the words (in Chinese characters) “Environment” (*huanjing*) “Water” (*shui*) and “Clean Air” (*kongqi*). The real estate agent in the sales office informed me that this complex also had a Chinese investor and Chinese architect. The investor chose the location because he considered the development potential of Wangjing as very big.

There are 1,100 apartments in 31 different styles within the compound; each of the apartment towers has its own distinctive style, which the sales women described as overall “European romantic.” The apartments range from 67 to 277 square meters in area, and their price in 2002 was RMB 5,360 (US\$ 670) per square meter. Among the amenities offered by the complex are a supermarket, dry-cleaner, swimming pool, gym, library, and restaurant, which was scheduled to open in June 2002. The entire complex was supposed to be finished by the end of 2002, and only 100 apartments were left for sale. The project aims to attract white collar workers and business people. The apartments so far

had predominantly been sold to couples, and only a few to families (Notes May 10, 2002).

The sales representatives of the various emerging complexes all happily presented me with their glossy advertising brochures. These typically tried to lure buyers with slogans that referred to a cleaner environment in the suburban region, the nearby airport, the convenient commuting distance to the inner city and the Central Business District, and, recently, the proximity to the planned Olympic City to the west of Wangjing. The developer of the last project, Saint Angel Holy Fragrant, had published an entire magazine which, centered around the complex, propagated a whole new lifestyle, explaining basics about health, sports, and nutrition, but also about community and family life. I will come back to the naming/ framing and advertising for the new commercial complexes in Chapter VI.

2 Living in the Old Danwei Compound

Almost all danwei residents that I talked to around Wangjing had bought their apartments. The elderly said that because of their many years of work, they had received considerable discounts on the sales price for the houses. 63-year-old Ling Dawen, for example, explained: “We have bought it [the apartment] from my husband’s company. It was very cheap. My husband started to work in the 1950s; our working years together are more than 65 years, so we got this house for 10,000 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 1,250)” (Interview May 15, 2002). In other compounds, apartments had sold for RMB 30,000 to 40,000 (US\$ 3,750 to US\$ 5,000). Nonetheless, some of the elderly, whose pensions

were not very high, had received support from their children to purchase their house. Table 6 gives a sample overview of the living conditions of 15 residents of danwei compounds.

Table 6: Sample Living Conditions of 15 Interviewees in Danwei Compounds

	Age	Type of Housing/ distributed to whom	Size of house	Date of Move	Date of Pur- chase	Who bought the apart- ment	Price ³	Number of People [Genera- tions]	State of Apart- ment ¹	Previous Living Condi- tion
1	> 60, male	Danwei/ husband		1987	1993	Children	< 10,000 RMB	4 (5 until death of mother) [2/ 3]	First floor, no southern expo- sure; damp	
2	39, fe- male	Danwei/ husband	2 bed- rooms (10 and 15m ²)			Parents- in-law	< 100 RMB RENT		Very old; should be re- paired	Rented pingfang
3	62, fe- male	Danwei/ wife	51m ²	1983	1998	Husband and wife		3 [2]		Danwei Pingfang
4	67, male	Dan- wei/wife	40m ²			Husband and wife; Loan	30 – 40,000 RMB	2 [1], used to be 3 [2]		Rented Pingfang
5	54, male	Danwei/ husband	40m ²	2000	2000	Daugh- ter; Loan	30,000 RMB	3 [2]		Rented Pingfang
6	68, fe- male	Danwei/ husband	2 bed- rooms, 40m ²	1986	1997	Husband and wife	10,000 RMB	2 [1], used to be 6 [2]	Cement floors; No car- pet	Apart- ment with shared bath- room
7	62, fe- male	Danwei/ wife						3 [2, grand- daughter]		Rented Pingfang
8	61, fe- male	Danwei/ joint	2 bed- rooms, 40m ²	1988				4 [2]		Shared Danwei Apart- ment, 16m ²

³ RMB 8 equal US\$ 1.

(Table 6, continued)

9	56, female	Danwei/husband		1993			10,000 RMB	6 [3], husband, wife, son, daughter-in-law, grandchildren		Danwei Apartment
10	60, male	Danwei/husband	42m ²			Husband and wife		3 [2], grandson		Danwei Apartment, 17m ²
11	62, female	Danwei/husband	2 bedrooms, 40m ²	1986	1997	Husband and wife	20,000 RMB	3 [2]		Danwei Apartment
12	63, female	Danwei/joint	40m ²	1986				3 [2]		Danwei Apartment
13	60, female	Danwei/husband	50m ²			Husband and wife	10,000 RMB	4 [2], husband, wife, son, daughter-in-law		
14	33, female	Danwei/husband	30m ²	2001	2001	Husband and wife		2 [1]		
15	53, female	Danwei/joint	21.7m ²	1997	1997	Widow	10,000 RMB	2 [2, widow with son]		Rented Pingfang

¹ Informants description/ comments

The two younger women in this list, Wang Jiangling and Su-ming (Lines 2 and 14), both worked for the neighborhood committee of their residential compound. Because the Cultural Revolution severely disrupted Wang Jiangling's education, she was not able to find a highly qualified (and better paying) job. Neither did her husband, who worked as a driver. Therefore, the couple could not afford to buy their own apartment. Instead, they rented the apartment of Wang's parents-in-law, who lived with the other son in his bigger house.

Su-ming (Line 14), in contrast, was in a financially better position since her husband worked for one of the electronics companies which had built the residential com-

pound. With financial support from their parents and the money they had paid into the Housing Provision Fund since 1998, they were able to buy a small apartment.

Because of the recent policy to sell houses to sitting tenants, new danwei employees and adult children of residents were forced to (and at times chose to) move to different, often commercially built housing complexes if they wanted to have their own place. Quite a few of the children, however, continued to reside with their parents even after they got married because, working in state-owned companies, they did not earn enough money to afford commercial housing. It usually took a few years of saving money through this kind of co-habitation before young couples could finally buy their own house.⁴

Unger's research (1993) showed that in the early 1980s, according to a five-city survey, some two-thirds of all households in China's major cities consisted of parents and children (nuclear family structure). Almost half (47 percent) of those children were newly-weds. In contrast to popular perceptions that Chinese families usually are composed of three generations (grandparents, parents, children, or stem families), the data showed that actually only one quarter of urban Chinese families followed this model. Unger attributed these residence patterns to the temporary lack of alternative accommodation. In my experience, most interviewees – parents and married children – would want to live in separate households. Because of the lack of housing, however, they accepted co-residence, at least temporarily. In my investigation, Ma taitai (age 60) was quite upset when I asked her about her living situation:

⁴ In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of apartments in a typical danwei compound such as Hong Yuan or Xin Yuan were only 40 square meters big, and often had only two rooms.

My daughter doesn't live with us, but my son does. He has no house. To tell the truth, apartments are really expensive in Beijing; the most expensive in China. How can a salary class people afford to pay for it? We don't like to live together but we have to. The old people should have their own place, so should the young people. We have to save money and also ask for loans from the bank. [...] To tell the truth, the houses are so expensive, I have to let them save money for their own house. I won't stop them if they want to move out. My son in law has his apartment. My house is only 50 square meters; too crowded. [Interview May 15, 2002]

Today, with the increase in housing construction, more and more families are able to fulfill the ideal of separate households, at least after some years of co-habitation. However, even after setting up their own household, married children and parents maintain close mutual contact, more so than would be the norm in most Western societies. "A multifaceted interdependency between the households of parents and married children very frequently is deliberately sustained even when they live apart" (Unger 1993:40). This applies especially to the interchange of monetary gifts. Since state-sector wages are based on a steep seniority system, many married children actually remain financially dependent on their parents.

Unger's findings, although dating to the early 1990s, were supported and well illustrated by two of my informants – 31-year-old Tang Shan and Caroline⁵ – who were high school classmates. Tang Shan, who studied electronics, had recently left her state-

⁵ It has become a widespread fashion among young urban Chinese to adopt foreign names, many of which they first get in English courses they take. I usually asked my friends for their real names. Several of them, such as Caroline and Liz (see Chapter IV), however, did not use their Chinese names any longer.

owned company and found a job in a joint venture company. Tang Shan's husband worked on a construction field in the northwest of China, where he could earn more money than in the city, and came back home only occasionally. Despite their double income, the couple could not afford to buy their own house. Instead, they lived with Tang's parents who had bought their danwei apartment. Because of their financial situation, Tang and her husband had also postponed having a child. All their striving was to have their own house. "It's my aim [to have my own house]. All my works and studies are for realizing this dream." When asked why the house was so important to her, Tang explained, "It will change the quality of my life and I may be able to have a child." (Interview June 13, 2002)

Caroline, on the other hand, had studied International Trade. She was first employed in a state bank. Later she worked as an accountant in different foreign companies, and was with a Canadian telecommunications company at the time we met. Her husband was a telecommunications engineer at Siemens. Because both of them worked in foreign companies, the couple had been able to buy a small one-bedroom commercial apartment, and was planning to buy a bigger one soon. Caroline also considered purchasing a car. Despite living in a separate household, the couple spent their weekends at their parents' houses.

But other people spoke of even closer ties: Several adult children actually relied on their retired parents for special expenditures, especially for their child. Wang Jiangling, for example, pointed out that she did not support her retired parents. "On the contrary, they give me money. The computer and my daughter's stuff are all bought by our parents" (Interview April 26, 2002).

Some adult children visited their parents every day. This supports Unger's research, which showed that even when family generations lived apart, they tended to interact almost like stem or extended families. Chinese researchers have called this arrangement "networked families" (*wangluo jiating*) which is said to have become more common during the 1980s when state-provided social services were increasingly cut back. Although young couples and their elders now prefer to live apart, they want to live near each other in order to be able to carry on such a "networked" arrangement.

Unger reports that families actually maneuvered to acquire housing that would enable one or more of the married children's homes to be clustered near the original home. With growing socio-economic stratification and indeed segregation in Chinese cities, this ideal, however, will become more difficult to realize. As we have seen above (Ch.II.4.2), sales prices for apartments rise according to their proximity to the city center and, in addition, certain "fashionable" suburban areas, such as Wangjing,⁶ have also experienced sharp price-rises. None of the adult children of elderly danwei residents in my research, who had moved out and been able to purchase housing (either commercially or in new danwei constructed complexes), actually lived physically close to their parents. Although the kind of "networking" described by Unger (1993), remained intact, therefore, it was at a growing cost. Long distances to work places or to children's schools have also become a very concrete difficulty in the organization of every-day life. Some adult children with their own apartment actually stayed with their parents in the danwei compound throughout the week because it was closer to their work place.

⁶ Other "fashionable," high-end residential areas are the "Asian Games Village" in the north of the city, and the "Zhongguancun Science and Technology Development Zone" in Haidian District, in Beijing's northwest.

Apart from the direct monetary (i.e. cash) or indirect (co-residence) support that married children derive from their parents, another important aspect of their close relation is daily childcare. Since most young husbands and wives work full-time, and most often at least one of their parents (usually the mother) is retired by the time of the birth of a grandchild, couples rely on the grandparent to take care of the child. In some cases, grandchildren live with their grandparents because their house is closer to the grandchildren's school or the parents do not have time to take care of them. "They have bought their own house, but it is far from my little baby's [granddaughter] school. It is a newly developing residential area" (Interview June 5, 2002).

Networking support between parents and married children in my sample appeared to be guided by practical considerations of convenience and necessity. These networks existed equally with parents of the husband and the wife, and were not determined by the traditional connection between parents and married sons. Interestingly, but maybe not surprisingly, though, the younger generation with less financial means mentioned retired parents more frequently as a source of support than the young, wealthy couples living in Wangjing who were more likely to rely on paid services.

Even though the nuclear family is the dominant residential pattern, this should not conceal another reality: once parents reach old age and become frail, or after one spouse dies, it is common to move in with married children again. An important factor influencing this living arrangement is that elderly pensions are usually very low, and some (those who worked in collectives, for example) do not receive pensions at all.

The real estate market has actually "discovered" the rapidly growing retired population as a new target group for residential developments. In Beijing, Oriental Sun City,

for example, is a new residential complex that aims at the elderly population. The capital has a population of 1.8 million aged 60 or more. However, most real estate projects in Beijing cater to the needs of young and middle-aged professionals. Oriental Sun, in contrast, calls itself “a multifunctional community aimed at senior citizens,” and “a leader of a whole new retirement lifestyle”. The construction of the buildings was supposed to take the needs of the elderly into account. Obstructions in the houses were kept to a minimum and surfaces inside were made to be non-slip. There is electronic emergency protection equipment, and efforts were put into adjusting the infrastructure of the community to the elderly’s needs. Given the average incomes of senior citizens, however, they would have to rely on their children’s support to be able to afford to buy property in a development such as Oriental Sun City, where apartments sold for a minimum of RMB 3,500 (US\$ 437.5) per square meter in 2002 (Zhong Rong 2002a).

As stated above, several elderly danwei residents indicated that they indeed relied on, or would count on the support of their grown-up children now, or in the future. But there were not many adult children who could afford to buy property for their elderly parents. Instead, frail elderly parents moved in with their children. In case they had several children, choice of co-residence appeared not to be influenced by gender, but parents usually lived with the child who had the biggest house and the best financial means. In some cases, informants told me that their parents took turns in staying with each child for a certain period of time. This, of course, also applied to the young, wealthy couples living in commercial housing.⁷

⁷ In her research in Shanghai in 1987, Davis (1993) observed a predominance of co-residence with sons and a greater reliance on parents or employers of the groom. Indeed, comparing post-marital households of respondents who had married in the 1940s and early 1950s with the arrangements of their sons who had married in the 1970s and 1980s, Davis found a shift to greater virilocality. Davis explains these findings

New danwei complexes in suburban locations pose a problem for some adult children taking in their elderly parents. This became apparent in Xiu Lanlan's story. Xiu Lanlan, a middle-aged woman, worked in Haidian, in the northwest of the city. She had recently bought the Wangjing apartment that her danwei offered her. Xiu had to take care of her elderly parents, who lived further inside the city in an old work unit apartment. But Xiu Lanlan did not want to take her parents away from their accustomed surroundings and resettle them in suburban Wangjing, where they would neither know anybody nor have many elderly co-residents. Therefore, instead of moving into her new apartment, Xiu and her husband actually rented it out and lived with her parents in their old house.

Living in the old suburban danwei compound in the reform period presented elderly residents with new logistical problems. During the Maoist period, the integrated lifestyle of the work unit rarely called for leaving the compound or the immediate neighborhood. There was nothing one had to buy which was not available around the compound, and, in addition, there was not much time or opportunity for leisure activities that would involve traveling throughout the city. Since the reform period, this has significantly changed. Nowadays, there are farmers- and small-goods markets throughout Wangjing, of which danwei residents happily take advantage. Nonetheless, as of the time of my

with changes in Chinese urban society since the reform period. First, since 1978 job assignments are increasingly rewarding credentials, but at the same time, discrimination against females is no longer a focus of policy. Parents could therefore expect more material gains by living jointly with a son than with a daughter. Nonetheless, preference of living with sons was not an entirely rational choice but continued to be nourished by traditional preferences for male offspring, which produced such statements as "It is shameful for a man to move into his wife's house." The fact that I could not find this kind of gender bias in co-residence among my respondents might derive from the fact that the adult children in my investigation were a younger cohort, many of whom had been educated, came of age, and began working during the reform era. Several of the women, actually, had higher paying jobs than their husbands or brothers, which would make it more logical for elderly parents to live with them. See Chapter IV for a discussion of gender influence on women's social position in the reform period.

fieldwork, more specialized goods, such as clothes, electronic articles, specialties, were not available in this developing neighborhood.

In contrast to the Maoist era, public transportation has significantly improved, offering frequent bus services to the inner city. Li taitai explained:

[Transportation] is improving year after year. We didn't have so many buses but there are more and more of them. No. 420 takes us to Wangfujing directly. It is convenient. We buy vegetables at Jiuxianqiao. It is near; we can go there by bike. We can also go shopping at Erqi, Huajiadi, and other places in this area. While if I want to buy something really nice I will go to Wangfujing, Longfudasha, Blue Island, or Xidong'an Market.

[Interview April 26, 2002]

The cheapest buses, however, take over an hour to reach a central city destination, and faster ones are more expensive. In addition, riding cheap buses remains quite an experience: old, dirty, and polluted, without any comfort, and rarely a place to sit. Even for me, a younger person, these trips were physically exhausting.

Asked about how they moved around the city, several danwei residents named the bicycle, but also the bus. Very few said they would use taxis, because the price was too expensive for them.⁸ "I seldom take the taxi. I take buses in order to save money" (Interview June 17, 2002). In consequence, the majority of the elderly danwei residents actually said that they did not go to the city very often. If they did, maybe once a month or every two, many of them relied on children who had cars to pick them up. Besides, they

⁸ In 2002, a one-way trip from Wangjing to the inner city would cost around RMB 40 (US\$ 5), compared to RMB 1 (US\$ 0.12) for the cheap bus, and between RMB 5 and 10 (US\$ 0.62 and 1.25) for a new, fast bus.

depended on the danwei to organize outings for them, as this woman described: “Several days ago, our factory organized for us to go to Fengyang Zhuozhou, to visit the Film City. We had a bus for free. [...] Our factory always organizes some activities for us although we are retired” (Interview April 26, 2002). Almost all younger danwei residents used bicycles or the cheapest public buses as transportation methods.

In conclusion, residents of old danwei complexes were able to lead a fairly secure life. Most owned their apartments and received a state guaranteed pension, which, together with the remaining social benefits granted by their danwei, allowed for a relative comfort. The elderly also had developed a reciprocal relationship with their adult children: parents supported children by offering housing and childcare, and in return received material, logistical, and eventually old-age support. The two generations were mutually dependent on each other. This dependency, or “networking” as it has been called, is enforced by the structural transformations of the city in the post-Mao era. Daily life in the reform period involves overcoming larger distances and a growing necessity to reach different places within the city. In this regard, residents of old danwei compounds, who generally earn less money, have faced new challenges. While the elderly more or less retreated behind the walls of the danwei, the younger generation became even more reliant on their parents for support to confront the changes.

3 Life in Commercial Housing Complexes

The most blatant difference between residents of old danwei compounds and those of commercial housing was that the latter had consciously chosen the location and complex they lived in. The predominantly young, wealthy inhabitants of these new residential complexes were quite specific about their reasons to move to Wangjing, that is, their choice was well founded and reflected upon. Among the attractive features of the neighborhood they named a better environment in the suburb, more ample space, less noise and pollution, better “quality” of people, and the convenient location in relation to points of attraction in the city, such as the CBD, for example. Several residents also cited the variation of the old saying about the imperial city mentioned in the introduction, according to which the south of Beijing was where the poor lived, the east was where commerce was located, the west was for commoners (or intellectuals), and the north was where the wealthy had their homes: “The east is better than the south, comparatively; as you know the north is better developed than the south. The government focuses its attention on the north, the infrastructure is better than in the other places” (Interview October 27, 2001). 33-year-old Ling made the connection between the imperial, cosmologically-based layout of the city and present-day developments even clearer:

The north of Beijing is really fast developed. [...] You should know that the north of Beijing has the best geomancy [*feng shui*⁹], aren't the emperor's tombs there? So, if you can choose, north is the best place, but the price is more expensive. For the price you buy an apartment near the

⁹ *Feng shui*, literally “wind” and “water,” is often called the art of placement or the “art of flow.” Feng shui is an ancient Chinese practice aimed at maximizing the beneficial movement of the *qi* – the universal life force present in all things – through an environment.

North Fourth Ring Road you can buy one near the South Second Ring Road. It is expensive indeed, but if you are able to afford the price, the north is your best choice. [Interview October 29, 2001]

While the north of the city has an allegedly geographical advantage in terms of its climatic conditions,¹⁰ with these quotes we can also see how history connected to present-day developments: the historical layout of the city still influenced peoples' choices of residence and, in the end, city planning and development.

However, while the young and wealthy couples chose to live in this area, they also saw its shortcomings. "It is kind of difficult for shopping because we have few supermarkets here, let alone a shopping mall. I have to go downtown if I want to buy anything, like a country girl. I think it's not very convenient for me" (Interview October 27, 2001).

When they bought their houses, most of the young couples had only limited financial means. In addition, at least until the end of the 1990s, there were also only few choices in the developing real estate market. Wangjing belonged to the first cluster of medium- to high-priced residential areas in Beijing, and the young and wealthy considered it the best option at the time. Nonetheless, with growing wealth and, importantly, the purchase of a car, they started to look for other, newer, and more costly projects that would offer an even more exclusive space in terms of environment and living area. Wen Kaiqing (age 34), who lived in "Atlantic Place," for example, thought about eventually moving to another, meaning "better," place:

¹⁰ Since winds in the Beijing plain usually come from a northern direction, dust and industrial smoke is blown across the city towards its southern sections. In addition, the city is flanked in the north-west to north-east by extensions of the *Taiheng Shan* (Taiheng Mountain) which form an effective physical barrier in a horseshoe shape. According to feng shui teachings this is a favorable living environment. See Sit 1995.

If I can afford it, I would like to live somewhere where it is easy for shopping and convenient for transportation. We plan to buy a better apartment and rent this one to others. We have to save money to pay for the first sum of money before we move into a new apartment and pay the rest of the money every month with the money our old flat makes. Transportation and shopping places are important for us. I don't understand the developers who built such a densely populated living area without building any shopping centers; they will surely make money from it, because the newly opened supermarket is flourishing. They have so many people here and no shops. It's easier to make money than in downtown. People would rather shop here than going to town, because it takes hours on the way. [Interview December 9, 2001]

One important change in regard to the general living situation in the city, and a result of the real estate market which began to take off in 1992 – 1993, is the incipient residential segregation of Beijing's population (cf. Gu and Liu 2002). The city now has what Hu and Kaplan (2001) call "zones of affluence." Quite generally, due to the differential prices of residential complexes, Chinese people find themselves more and more living with people in similar life situations and of comparable income strata and often age. Among the wealthy young couples in Wangjing, living with similar people was actually a criterion for selecting where to settle. 29-year-old Huijing, for example, explained: "There are about 200 apartments in the compound. A lot of young people live here. It is important for me to choose a kind of house where nice people live" (Interview June 19,

2002). But Wen Hou (age 30), who also lived in Atlantic Place, made it even clearer: “Most of the people here work in foreign companies or joint ventures. They have a good educational background which is important for me. [...] It’s a good place for young people” (Interview June 18, 2002).

Residents of the commercial complexes also embraced the newly found anonymity of these living areas which stood in stark contrast to the old courtyard house or *danwei* compound-produced control and supervision of the Maoist period. 29-year-old Ma Li, a resident of the Wangjing complex, for example, said: “I have no idea of others [neighbors]. I don’t think people like to associate with each other. It’s not like living in a *siheyuan* [traditional courtyard house]. People don’t know each other very well here” (Interview November 1, 2001). Wen Hou confirmed this attitude: “We seldom interact with other people in the community. I know some of my son’s classmates’ mothers live in the community. When I lived with my parents and in the school dormitory, a lot of people peaked into my private life. I have my own space now” (Interview June 18, 2002).

A 2002 survey by Market-Expert, a Shanghai-based market research firm, actually found that 44 percent of mainland urban families did not know their neighbor’s names, while 63 percent did not have any contact with the people next door (cf. Fang 2003). This presents quite a change from the living situation in *hutong* (small alley ways) where residents knew each other very well, as described by an elderly couple, still living in an old courtyard house, whom I met at a housing fair: “Our neighbors are our friends. We like the old lifestyle where we meet the neighbors in the street and everybody knows everybody else. In the evenings we sit in front of the house and chat with each other” (Notes May 18, 2002).

In contrast to the younger generation living in old danwei compounds, among the young wealthy couples living in commercial housing around Wangjing being close to parents or parents-in-law was not a criteria for their choice of residence, nor were they depending (with few exceptions) on their parents to take care of small children. The reasons are twofold: First, because they were financially sound; all of the young, wealthy couples I spoke to had household help, including nannies for their children. Quite a number of them send their children to boarding schools, liberating themselves from the daily task of taking care of them. Second, because they had few financial worries, this group of young couples relied on private cars or taxis to overcome distances within the city. For them, physical location was not a limiting concept. On the contrary, most of the young, wealthy couples traversed the city frequently and widely to take advantage of the various facilities and amenities it offered, ranging from educational institutions, to sports facilities, to entertainment venues. Ma Li expressed this sense of independence based on owning a car: "We only have one park around here, it is Wangjing Park. Chaoyang Park is another one but a little far from here. As for me, it doesn't bother me too much because I have my own car" (Interview November 1, 2001). Ownership of a car, or the frequent use of taxis, of course, also made it easier to regularly visit parents in other parts of the city.

While the young, wealthy residents of commercial housing did not rely on their parents for financial or social support, they had the same close relations to parents as less financially well-off residents of old danwei compounds, described above. In their case, however, it was clearly the children who took care of the retired parents by taking them out to restaurants, driving them to places in the city, inviting them to their houses, financially supporting the purchase of a house, or their travel and vacations. Nonetheless, very

few of the young, wealthy couples had their parents living with them. This, however, might have been caused by the fact that most of the young and wealthy I talked to were in their early thirties, and their parents were therefore likely to be still able to live independently and take care of themselves.

In the commercial housing complexes that I visited around Wangjing, there were hardly any elderly residents. The most important reason for this was, of course, that the elderly had fewer chances to financially profit from the economic opportunities of the reform era. They were, therefore, usually not able to afford commercial housing. In the Wangjing complex, however, I met one exception: 55-year-old Liu Dongtian and her husband, Zhang Renqing (age 60), who worked for Ericsson, a foreign telecommunications company. The company had financially contributed to the purchase of the new house, even though the couple already owned their previous danwei connected apartment, which was located further away in the city proper. Present-day (foreign company) employment and previous work unit membership clearly put this couple into the very privileged position of owning two houses. Renting the old apartment to relatives, they could even make some extra money on the side. Liu Dongtian explained their living situation:

We have another apartment near Yabaolu [within the Third Ring Road]. Our apartment [here] was bought with the help of my husband's company. The company paid part of the money, and we paid a part; for the rest, we asked for a loan from the bank. My husband's company was buying housing for its staff. A lot of people like this area. His company is located at Jiuxianqiao close to here, so we chose this place. The reason why we

didn't choose Atlantic Place was because the management fees there are very high. Some of his colleagues chose Shunyi county [beyond the Fifth Ring Road]. Whichever place you chose, the company paid for you. Several of our good friends live in this same building, so we can take good care of each other if we need help [*hao hao huxiang bangzhu*]. [...] We also bought the old apartment. It cost only 30,000 Yuan [RMB]. Working years helped reduce the price. [...] I like this [apartment]. The old apartment at Yabaolu is our house in the city. I have relatives who live there now. Compared to people my age, I have good living conditions [*bi wo nianqingde ren wo zhufangde qingkuang hen hao*]. Our house was not enough when my children were small. Later on, the company helped us solve that problem. I got what I needed. [...] I had a lot of choices before we bought this apartment. We chose this place at last. [Interview May 14, 2002]

Allegedly, this kind of holding on to several apartments is a rampant problem in Chinese cities today, discussed in a growing number of newspaper articles, and apparent in my conversations with Beijing residents. However, while Liu Dongtian and her husband certainly appeared over-privileged, one consequence of this kind of set-up might be the eventual emergence of a real rental market (which currently is still under-developed), which could allow non-urban hukou holders to rent houses in the city.

4 Subsidized and Temporary Housing

4.1 Affordable Housing

Around Wangjing, there were only two affordable housing complexes which had been built in the late 1990s. Since the successful Olympic bid, residential projects have become even more expensive, and it is unlikely that more affordable housing will be built.

The Fangs were a family living in one of these affordable housing projects. The compound, Nanlu Yuan, is clearly of a much simpler style than commercial housing around Wangjing, and even than Hua Yuan, the new danwei complex. Nanlu Yuan consists of five straight rows of box-shaped five-floor buildings. The small paths between the buildings have minor greenery to each side. There is no significant green space, no garden, and no children's playground in the compound. While there is also a fence around it, and a gate at the main entrance, this was always open and I never saw any security personnel.

Fang Aimei, in her early fifties, had retired early from a state owned company. At the time we met, she worked as a household employee on an hourly basis for one of the young educated women I knew, mainly because she felt bored at home, she said. Because of the lower price per square meter (RMB 2,000 [US\$ 250] per square meter) in this project, the family had been able to buy an apartment for which they would have otherwise had to save money for a much longer time. The apartment was small, but, Aimei assured me, much better than their previous house:

It's a little apartment of about 50 square meters, two bedrooms, a living room. Very small. The small room is eight square meters; the living room is 12.5 square meters. One bedroom is 11.5 square meters. Two balconies.

The kitchen is only half of hers [employer's]. The bathroom is very narrow, shaped as a balcony. But it's better than our old house. [Interview August 7, 2002]

Aimei was happy that, after having lived all her life in pingfang houses, she could now enjoy the comforts of an apartment building. Nonetheless, she complained about the quality of the people in her residential compound, who were of “low quality” (*suzhi di*), she said. Not surprisingly, she did not have many social contacts within the xiaoqu.

4.2 Pingfang Houses

The migrant sales people in the different Wangjing markets, who were at the low end of the economic spectrum, all lived in small sub- or low-standard housing, as close as possible to their work place. They were, however, often threatened by eviction from these places, forever vulnerable to being torn down to make way for new development projects. This process became evident one day when I walked down a back-street alley in Wangjing which was the poorest and most dilapidated part of the entire area.

Here, a small back-street market served the population of the vicinity at significantly lower prices. I approached various people selling goods and vegetables in the market, but people were reluctant to talk to me. After a few visits I finally found out the reason for this: in one of the run-down, former state-owned factory buildings, the “Office of Redevelopment” (*chongjian fazhan bu*) for the Wangjing neighborhood had settled. The proximity to a government bureau obviously inhibited people's willingness to comment

on their situation. One day, however, I was able to interview an official in the bureau who explained the bureau's task to me.

Since 1996 we have been administering the transformation taking place around here. Until that time, the area was entirely rural with 11 villages and about 500 people living here in the one-story pingfang houses you can still see around. We administer the entire Wangjing area, that is, 7,000 hectare between the Fourth and Fifth Ring Road. Since 1993 there has been a plan for how to develop the area and we are the ones who put the planning into practice, step by step, deciding which village is torn down next, and so forth. The kind of communities, schools, residential complexes that are going to be built, that was already decided in 1993.

People from the places that are torn down are relocated and we here in this office offer new houses to them. They are in the area. At the end of next year all the small houses around here should be gone. There has been no protest or critique. People see development as betterment. We are a state agency and therefore people feel safe and trust us about what happens around here. Generally the residents of houses that are torn down get money from us which has already been allocated. Then they use the money to buy a new place. [Notes May 10, 2002]

What the government official neglected to point out was that the residents from the destroyed houses would likely have to move to other parts of the city since there were not many "affordable living" projects around Wangjing. In addition, his statement re-

ferred exclusively to the rural population with urban hukou who lived in the pingfang houses. The migrants who had found accommodation here would just have to find new places, probably further out of the city in the rural hinterland.

Since the reform period, villages in the rural hinterland beyond the fifth ring road have developed a dual character: while maintaining their rural appearance, increasingly more of the inhabitants commute daily to the capital to work. At the same time, the city is also continuously moving outwards into this hinterland. Practically every month a new village on the urban fringe is marked for destruction. Increasingly, new development projects have resettled from over-crowded inner city locations to rural areas where farmers are happy to receive cash in return for the transferal of land-use rights. During my research period, for example, the International School leased land and, in the construction of its new campus, practically erased an entire rural village in the hinterland beyond Wangjing. Close by, an exclusive gated community with garden-villas had attracted foreigners for already more than five years. Every day they are joined by more wealthy Chinese.

The remaining villages in this hinterland, however, are also the places where migrants without residence permit, who are excluded from the urban housing market, find accommodation in simple pingfang houses that they rent from the local population. Liang Jiehua, one of the migrant women who sold clothes in a Wangjing market, for example, lived out here.

The bus ride from the market at the center of Wangjing to Liang Jiehua's village took almost one hour. Located on the edge of the settlement, her house was another ten

minutes walk from the bus stop, set in a yard that was enclosed by a brick wall of about 20 by 20 meters. The property had four housing units, and belonged to the employer of Liang Jiehua's husband, the City Gardening Department. Each of the brick houses consisted of one four by five meter big room. With a closet and a curtain, Liang's family had divided theirs into two halves. Liang Jiehua and her husband slept on one side, and their son on the other. Opposite the two bedsteads, below one of the two windows, stood a folding table and a number of small stools. The kitchen was in a small brick construction just outside of the house. It was so low that Liang could just about stand upright and it contained only a stove and a small table. Behind the kitchen was another square structure, the toilet. In summer, the family washed themselves outside in the small space between the house and the kitchen. In winter, they had to take turns in the room.

Liang or her husband bought their daily necessities in the city. The village had a small store, but not much selection. While there was a rural school, Liang's son went to a better school in the Wangjing area, and therefore had to ride the bus every day. When he was smaller, Liang had to bring him there and pick him up on her way to and from the market in which she worked at the time.

Although Liang Jiehua's living conditions were very simple, she was nonetheless better off than many of the other migrants working in the market around Wangjing because her husband had a city hukou. Working in a danwei, despite the restructuring and downsizing of state services, still conferred certain advantages. She explained: "If the house is torn down and we want to buy an apartment we will have to take a loan from the bank. He can get a loan because he has a danwei. I wouldn't because I am self-employed" (Notes August 6, 2002). In contrast, when other market women who did not have hus-

bands with Beijing hukou faced the destruction of their houses, their only choice was to move on, look for another “left over” pingfang house close to a market place and to start all over again, until the day that place would be torn down too.

Frequent change of residence, therefore, was a common pattern among the “floating population.” In general, migrant lives were determined by unpredictability. They never knew what was going to happen to either the market in which they were currently working, or to their houses, which sooner or later were all doomed to be torn down. As one woman expressed it: “Everything is very much up in the air. I never know how much money I can earn, or what is happening with our house. I mean, maybe they will really tear it down and we will have to look for another place” (Notes April 7, 2002).

Generally, there was a pattern of migrants being further pushed out into the rural hinterland as the city expanded and new suburban zones developed. Nonetheless, migrant entrepreneurs were also always themselves scouting the different options and possibilities throughout the city. They discussed and exchanged ideas about new markets and places where they got their supplies. In addition, visiting relatives, acquaintances, and friends in other places, they compared each others’ profits and evaluated if they could possibly be better off in a different market place.

While the migrants were excluded from the urban residential market, and could only rent simple pingfang houses on the urban fringe, incurring the scorn of urban residents, the migrants themselves considered their living situation favorable in comparison to the life they left at their places of origin. All the more as they held the deep-seated conviction that through hard work they could steadily improve their lives.

Migrants' parents almost always remained in their home places. They were usually taken care of by siblings who remained in the floating population's home towns. Migrants' support for the family expressed itself in money transfers, and material goods sent home. Some migrants had either left behind or brought back small children to their home places to be taken care of by their parents, but most tried to eventually bring their children with them to the city (see Chapter IV).

Apart from relying on parents in the home place to take care of small children, another form of "networking" among migrant families was the support for the migration of other family members. In many cases, after a migrant became somewhat established in the city and found a way of making a living, other family members followed. They initially depended on the help and resources of the already established relative to support them. In the case of Ling, for example, some time into my research, her little sister, who was 17 years old, came to Beijing to stay with her. The sister had finished high school, and, with the same bleak job perspectives at home, hoped to find a job in the capital. To start with, she helped her sister at the market while she learned *putonghua* (standard Mandarin Chinese). After about three months she was able to find work in the factory where Ling's husband worked.

Conclusion

The land and housing reforms have significantly affected and altered the urban landscape. Not only are bedroom suburbs growing on previously empty fields, but the long-term population of suburban zones is also increasingly isolated in its old-style compounds. While the rural hinterland offers migrants without residence permits or access to the

city's property market comparatively cheap accommodation, the growing, and outward pushing city turns this into a temporary solution. The altered urban structure affects daily lives of all residents – state-employees, wealthy, and migrants – alike.

Chapter IV Gendered Lives

1 The Elderly

When I asked my informants what they thought about women's position in Chinese society, this brought contradictory statements to the fore. Most of them immediately assured that women and men are equal in China. The elderly, however, usually pointed out how much women's position had improved in comparison to imperial times. 62-year-old Fang Weixing, for example, had no doubts:

Of course it has much improved compared to the period before liberation.

[...] Today men and women are equal, but not so before the liberation.

The husband often wouldn't agree to let his wife go out to work or to join social activities. So women had to stay at home. Girls were not allowed to go out as they liked. Today there are more and more women representatives and women who have the right to participate in governmental and political affairs. We have a lot of women leaders in the government. [Interview June 5, 2002]

Fang Weixing here referred to pre-revolutionary times when ideologies of women's virtue confined them to stay "inside," while men lived on the "outside." Other "traditional"¹ ideologies subordinated daughters to fathers, wives to husbands, and widows to sons, and considered women to cease connection with their natal family upon

¹ I write "traditional" in quotation marks because it is a highly problematic term. The rapidly growing body of scholarship on women in imperial times reveals immense regional and temporal differences in their lives, which makes it difficult to speak of one, definite, and coherent "tradition." See Waltner (1996) for a review of some of these studies.

marriage. While the position of women varied widely throughout China, it is safe to say that because girls were seen as only temporary labor providers, they were likely to receive less food than male children and therefore often did not survive childhood. If they did, they were less likely to receive education.² Several elderly women actually began their life story by recalling the difficulties they faced going to school. Most often the reason was not the lack of facilities or financial means, but continuing gender stereotypes. This was the situation of Su Yaping (age 60):

My second father didn't let me go to school because he thought that it was useless for a girl to go to school. We were poor and couldn't afford it either. After the liberation my second father was still against me going to school; he thought that knowing a few characters was enough for a girl as long as she could read the address of the street and find her way home. I went to primary school in 1953 and graduated in 1958. My teacher wanted to send me to middle school but my father would not let me go. Several of my classmates and I applied for work in the 738 factory. I was employed and began to work when I was 16. [Interview May 22, 2002]

Even before the 1949 revolution, Chinese communists declared that Marxism's promise to liberate the oppressed should also be applied to Chinese women. In socialist China, biology was no longer supposed to be destiny. In contrast to class societies where "men occupy the position of the ruling class ... and women become the household slaves

² For a more detailed discussion of women's position in pre-revolutionary times, namely in the late Qing Dynasty and Republican era, see, for example, Bray 1997, Hershatter 1995, Honig 1983, 1986, and Mann 1992. All these studies show the intricate relation between economic production processes and women's status in society.

of men and the instruments for producing more men” (Robinson 1985:32), in revolutionary China men and women were to be equal. Women would no longer be enslaved by reproduction; if they continued to be oppressed, it was only because of leftovers of feudal thinking, superstition and backwardness (Robinson 1985).³

Accordingly, the Chinese Constitution of 1954 granted women equal political, economic, cultural/educational, social, and familial rights. The 1950 Marriage Law, in addition, explicitly outlawed polygamy, concubines, child marriage, bride sales, and forced marriages.⁴ Through these laws and policies, the Maoist state significantly improved women’s position in society in comparison with imperial times, especially as regards education, basic rights, and employment. Indeed, following Engels’ notion that participation in social production would liberate women and create gender equality, wage labor became the key to women’s liberation in Chinese socialism.

With one exception,⁵ all the elderly women I talked to had held full-time jobs throughout their lives. Independently of their educational levels, they had been assigned

³ Already late imperial and early republican reformers and revolutionaries presented raising the status of women and strengthening the nation as inseparable projects. Indeed, in the early 20th century, both the Nationalists and the Communists promised women equal citizen status, which they considered as a marker of China’s arrival at modernity. Early CCP leaders supported free-choice marriage and divorce, and an end to polygamy and prostitution. Faced with horrified reactions of male peasants, however, they quickly abandoned the more potentially divisive parts of this program – notably free marriage and divorce. See Gilmartin et al. 1994.

⁴ The laws, which varied by region, upheld the principles of free-choice marriage and allowed for divorce, if reconciliation could not be reached. But the laws were unevenly promoted, and party cadres discovered an overwhelming resistance by male peasants. Numerous women who resisted marriages or sought divorces were killed or committed suicide. In addition, tensions arose between older and younger women. The new found rights and privileges of young women meant that older women lost their long-awaited traditional position of power. After the difficulties of the early marriage reform campaign, the party cut back its efforts towards women’s equality during the early 1950s. Women in cities were urged to support the revolution as good housewives and mothers. In rural areas, cadres focused their efforts on the collectivization of agriculture. Women gradually contributed more to agricultural labor, but suffered the double burden of collective labor and housework. See Gilmartin et al. 1994.

⁵ This was Li Meihua who, after the Great Leap Forward, was supposed to return to the countryside after she had been hired to work in a Beijing factory. Nonetheless, because of his merit, her husband was allowed to stay in the city, and Li Meihua decided to stay with him, but lost her job for a couple of years. See chapter I.

to positions which they usually never changed until they retired. Besides the ideological imperative of contributing to the socialist project, staying at home was not an option for women, as Wolf (1985) points out. Husband's salaries alone would not have been sufficient to support the family, despite the social benefits urban households received through the danwei.

Women's employment and vital income contributions unquestionably enhanced their status at home. Nonetheless, women, in fact, carried more than "half of the sky"⁶ – the double burden of wage labor and household work. In one way or the other, almost all my informants indicated that they had been more responsible than men for domestic tasks. "It was me. I did the cooking, washing, laundry, and cleaning of the rooms" (Interview April 26, 2002). In some cases, this labor division was caused by the long-term separation from husbands. Generally, though, only a few women said that they and their husbands had shared the household burden equally.

After they had children, while working eight hours a day, six days per week, and in addition to having to participate in the many political campaigns during the Mao years, women realized that socialism's proclaimed equality only meant having the same obligations than men. As Dai Jinhua (1999) suggests, the seemingly gender-neutral language of state discourse during the Mao era actually assimilated female gender to the male. The discourse of "equality" took male gender as the standard to which women had to conform. Female difference was suppressed and sameness promoted, that is, being the same as men. Mao revealed this underlying logic in his slogan "Everything male comrades can

⁶ Referring to male - female equality, Mao claimed that in socialist China, women held up "half of the sky" (*funü neng ding ban bian tian*).

do, female comrades can do too” (*nan tongshi keyi zuodaode, nü tongshi ye keyi zuodao*) (Yang 1999).⁷

As a result, in everyday life women were extremely busy, despite the fact that their jobs were rarely very challenging. Women’s lives passed between the rush to work and back home, trying to find time for their children, wage labor, and political obligations. This was clearly expressed by Shu Lan (age 61), who described her day thus: “I had no weekend for entertainment. I had to bring the children to the public bathroom, then I had to do the laundry, go shopping, cook, prepare the meals for the next week for my children. I had no time and had to run to my danwei and ran back home to do the housework” (Interview June 17, 2002).

Further, if we recall chapter I, urban space itself had its gender biases in that housing was more likely to be provided through the husband’s danwei, resulting in longer commuting times for women to their places of labor. Often women worked too far away from home to return during their break to prepare lunch for the children. In order to accommodate child rearing and work schedule, many women therefore had to ask their mothers for help. “I was transferred from the workshop to the purchasing office and I couldn’t be off from work on time. So I asked my mother to come to help me for a year. After that I sent my children to kindergarten” (Interview May 22, 2002). Other women, who lived far away from their parents’ places, or did not have parents any more, had to pay other women or families to take care of their children. Several women left their children with other people for many years. On the other hand, some women were able to take

⁷ For a thorough discussion of different concepts of womanhood as intertwined with the state project, see Barlow 1994, 1995, but also Evans 1995, 1997, and Robinson 1985.

advantage of the socialist provision of free childcare facilities which were often connected to the work places.

My factory had a nursing room. It was very good. I could send my son there when he was several months old. It was allowed, no matter if your child was 2, 3, or 5 months old, if you were willing to leave your child there. My factory also had a kindergarten, which had three grades of classes for the children before school age. I sent my son to the kindergarten when I went to work and brought him back in the evening. [Interview May 17, 2002]

While women in socialist China were constitutionally granted equal pay for equal work, the catch was that women often did not get equal work. In fact, after proclaiming women's equality in China, most of the elderly women in my sample admitted that children interfered with women's careers. Despite equal employment guidelines, specific job assignments followed implicit gender assumptions,⁸ and a continued gender hierarchy in the sexual division of work channeled men into high-level decision making positions (cf. Yang 1999). This became clear in 56-year-old Jiang Fei's narrative. At the factory where

⁸ Wolf (1985) shows that indeed it was less women's physiology than the beliefs about their physiology that kept them out of certain sectors and jobs. For example, Wolf observed how women pulled cartloads of bricks along a five-mile stretch of road, their clothes dripping with sweat, but was told by a cadre that women were too weak to drive tractors or manage horses which men used to pull their cartloads of building materials. Confronted with these contradictions, cadres pointed to the physiological differences that had to be taken into consideration. They argued that an entire workshop would be brought to a halt if a woman in a key position had to take half-hour breaks in the morning and afternoon to nurse her baby. However, Wolf weighs in that urban women had at most two children and usually only one, and weaned them only 6 months, which made the cadres' argument questionable. The same applied to similar arguments around women's special needs during pregnancy or menstruation, since women in leadership positions were in fact likely to be beyond childbearing age. Wolf, therefore, concludes that the base of these beliefs was rather that women were not, and would never be equal to men.

they met, Jiang's wife was his superior. This balance, however, quickly changed after they had children: "I was promoted and became a cadre. She was still a worker and so I made more money than she did" (Interview August 19, 2002). Part of the bias coming to the fore in this account was the assumption that women could not fully concentrate on their work because of their family responsibilities. One woman observed: "Companies like to employ men as staff more than women. Women tend to think about their family and their children; but men can ignore that" (Interview June 17, 2002). The result was, as Dai Ling stated, that "women are left behind men after they get married and give birth to children" (Interview May 15, 2002). However, since all jobs were considered equally important to the cause of the socialist revolution, gendered job assignments were not perceived as discriminatory against women (Wang Zheng 2000).

Despite their pronouncements about equality, the elderly women actually revealed, themselves, a gendered ideology of male and female roles in society. Gao Yuenji, who lived in Hong Yuan, for example, first assured me that men and women were equal in China. However, after proudly pointing out that she had been promoted three times throughout her work-life and had earned more than her husband, she concluded her assessment by saying: "As far as I know, people happily live together. The husband cares for his wife, the wife makes a good arrangement in the family; the couple lives in harmony." Despite equal work, and even a higher salary, it appeared that Gao considered "home making," or social relations within the family a woman's obligation/ realm.

Similar kinds of implicit gender assumptions or biases became especially evident when elderly women reflected about the changes in the reform period. It has become common knowledge that some companies in the reform period prefer to hire men instead

of women (see section 2, below). Several elderly, however, expressed their conviction that it was in women's hands to overcome these hurdles.

I think it all depends on the women themselves. [...] As for applying for jobs, some companies don't like women who will get married and have children. It will affect their work. So they like to have a man instead of a woman. But *if you are capable* you [as a woman] can be competitive as well. [Interview May 17, 2002; emphasis added]

It was women themselves, not society or social institutions, who were challenged by the question of work equality.

In addition, after almost thirty years of socialist ideology of equality, pre-revolutionary ideas about men carrying greater responsibility for the family's income remained, or reemerged. Long Feitou, a woman who had worked for 35 years in a factory and was now retired, observed:

I don't know about men, I guess they are more stressed. Men have a heavier burden in social life. They are the main power in work. He is the good husband and father at home. He has more responsibilities than women. In China, we call men "great men" [*wei ren*]. It means that the society gives them more duties. If a woman has no job, people will say nothing, while if a man is between employments, he will have more pressure than a woman, don't you think so? [Interview May 31, 2002]

In the more competitive work environment of the reform period, some of the elderly also observed that, as a result of the changes, women today had to work even harder to succeed in their careers. Zhu Laoning remarked:

More is required from women than from men. Every position in a company has [several] people working on it. Someone will take your place if you are pregnant and have a child. You won't be able to go back to your former work place after the time you have to take off for child birth. Because you have an infant to take care of, the people who work in your place may work better. If you are a worker, doing simple work on an assembly line, it might be easier. [But] if you want to stay at home until your child is one or two years old, you will be far behind others and the society.

Nobody will want to employ you. [Interview June 17, 2002]

In contrast to the socialist era, in Zhu Laoning's eyes it was even more difficult for her daughters' generation to combine a career and have a child. During the Maoist period, women were at least not in danger of losing their jobs because of childbirth and competition between colleagues.

By pointing out the contradictions in the elderly's perception of gender equality in socialist China, my intention is not to question their evaluation. However, I think that the discussion reveals an internalization of the socialist discourse of gender equality and women's liberation through wage labor. As Lisa Rofel (1999) has so eloquently pointed out, in this context it is less important if "objectively," or in my western eyes, women

achieved equality under socialism. What is significant is that the women felt that way, and that in their reality they had indeed achieved equality. Compared to their mother's lives – and that was a comparison they all drew – they had indeed been liberated through the socialist paradigm of wage labor.

In her study on silk workers in Hangzhou, Rofel (1999) explains that the elderly women in her research had grown up in pre-revolutionary times with institutions such as foot-binding and polygamy or concubinage. They had lived according to the traditional Chinese notion that women had to be “inside” while men lived in the “outside,” which in practice confined women to the home. Some of the women who, for economic reasons, were forced to labor outside the house were considered “broken shoes” – polluted subjects society scorned upon. Not surprisingly, then, the women of this generation experienced the Communist Revolution, with its opening up of these confines, as liberating and empowering.

Many of the elderly women in my research had seen their mothers similarly confined and had themselves been prevented from getting education because of “traditional” concepts of womanhood. Despite having suffered from the double burden of wage labor and household chores, the women, therefore, insisted that they were equal to men and that their lives had been much better than their mothers’:

Great differences. Women had no position at all in my mother's time. Men could do whatever they wanted and women had no right to even speak. In my generation, I think my husband and I are equal, we may discuss about things if we have different opinions, I can tell him my thoughts without worries. [Interview, May 22, 2002]

Indeed, for the elderly women equality was less grounded in real, tangible achievements, such as the number of women leaders, but more in women's general financial independence. "As long as we are financially independent, we hold our position, but as for a housewife who depends on her husband, she will be looked down upon" (Interview June 17, 2002).

2 The Young and Educated

Since the 1980s, a disproportionate number of women workers in the state sector have been laid-off or forced into early retirement as "surplus labor" (Summerfield 1994; Wang Zheng 2000).⁹ Debates about women's employment have soared. As a solution to the growing unemployment problem, a "women return home" policy has been openly advocated in official journals and newspapers (Wang Zheng 2000). At the same time, booming women's magazines have created a culture of domesticity with a focus on cooking, home dressmaking, and child care, as well as on fashion and personal life (Hooper 1998).¹⁰

In the current economic reform period, gender, age, and class have assumed new importance. The figure of the sexualized woman has returned in mass-media representations. Women in seductive poses now advertise all kinds of desirable consumer goods,

⁹ A number of "protective" legislations, according to which women must be accorded special treatment during menstruation, pregnancy, delivery, nursing, and menopause, make women appear to be expensive labor in the eyes of employers. As Woo (1994) points out, these regulations reflect a strong trend toward biologization of women's issues, thereby supporting the concept of the "natural role" of women and, in effect, reinforcing discriminatory practices against women workers.

¹⁰ During my research, I was struck, for example, by the television program "Jojo's," which was a less-sophisticated Chinese version of Martha Stewart's television program: from cooking, to home decoration, to how to throw a children's birthday party, Jojo showed women how to "make a home."

from washing machines and vacuum cleaners, to cars. Female models decorate magazine covers, posters and calendars (cf. Hooper 1998).

The state itself has actually changed its official gender construction. In parallel with the economic reforms, women have been officially assigned a secondary and supportive working role in “female” occupations such as textiles, sewing, and the food industries; in commercial departments and the service trades; and in the professions of education, culture and hygiene. This roster is officially justified or explained as being compatible with women’s “other responsibilities,” the fact that “they have to spend a considerable portion of their time and energy looking after children and doing housework” (Hooper 1998:183). Meanwhile, China’s increasing affluence and the growth of middle class values has brought about another version of the “return home” suggestion: the idea of the “middle-class housewife.” The non-working wife, as Hooper (1998:184 - 5) points out, “is beginning to take her place along with the other trappings of relative affluence: a ‘modern’ apartment with appropriate interior fittings and domestic appliances, fashionable clothing, membership of a health club, and so on.” Correspondingly, the media often portrays a successful woman as one who stays at home and leads a leisurely life. Strong, capable women, in contrast, are portrayed as not having a life outside of work; their children are said to be badly educated while they have marital problems (cf. Ying 2003).

Despite these processes, the number of female employees in cities actually increased from 31.28 million in 1978 to 57.45 million in 1997. More than two decades of economic reforms have created a number of new urban jobs as well as jobs in the special economic zones in the countryside. Many of these occupations carry distinctly gendered labels: women are predominantly recruited in the service sector while men work more

often in technical and managerial positions (Wang Zheng 2000).¹¹ Other occupations have a distinctly “modern” aura. The figure of “the rice bowl of youth” (*qingchunfan*), which emerged in the early 1990s, describes a new urban trend in which a variety of well paid jobs target exclusively young, beautiful women to work as bilingual secretaries, in public relations, or as fashion models. The attractive young women are sought out to represent a particularly shining image of “modernity” (Zhang Zhen 2000).¹²

In fact, the one-child policy enacted since the late 1970s has led to a new generation of well-educated and strong-willed “only-daughters” who were brought up with high family expectations and who eagerly embrace new opportunities offered by the urban market economy, such as white collar and managerial positions in foreign companies, or “rice bowl of youth” occupations. The result is the rise of a new group of young, urban, women with high incomes.¹³

Opportunities for these women actually emerged from specific gender norms. For example, command of a foreign language, especially English, was a requirement for these new positions. This was a qualification that women were more likely to fulfill since they predominated in the foreign language departments of universities based on their alleged special talent in that field. In addition, men often rejected clerical jobs which are frequently portrayed as “feminine” in society (Wang Zheng 2000). The new “class” of

¹¹ A survey by the All-China Women’s Federation found that in 1999 the average annual salary for urban women was RMB 7,409, that is, only 70.1 percent of men’s. See Ying 2003.

¹² A variation of the figure of the young, beautiful “rice bowl of youth” woman, has emerged in the figure of the new “Confucianized” woman who is “modern” and “Chinese,” but not “Western” in nature. McLaren (1998) relates this figure to the difficulties that emerge in constructing a national identity in the face of China’s penetration by global capital and communication technology.

¹³ These young, relatively wealthy women have also been on the forefront of a sexual revolution in which white collar Chinese women, especially, dare to break social taboos and assert their rights to pleasure. While in the 1980s only 15 percent of married couples in urban areas had pre-marital sex, this number has risen to over 60 percent in recent surveys. See Chou-Wiest 2003.

wealthy young women, in turn, has already been discovered as a new market: in the south of China, new residential complexes are specifically fashioned to target young, urban, successful and unmarried business women (cf. Xiao Yin 2002a).

Zhang Jie, a friend of mine, was one of the new, educated, wealthy urban women. In her early 30s, Zhang worked for an international cosmetics company. She and her husband, who was a teacher, lived in an apartment they had bought from his danwei within the research locale. Zhang Jie repeatedly invited me to hang out with her and her friends. One Saturday afternoon we met at a café-bar, called “Petite Paris,” in the Sanlitun Bar Street, a popular zone with restaurants and bars in central Beijing, a convenient location since Zhang Jie’s friends lived scattered all over the city. Zhang Jie was dressed in tight, beige leather pants, a dark turtleneck sweater, a fashionable green wrap around her shoulders, and a pair of exaggeratedly long, pointy boots, which were all the rage in Beijing at the time. Dark sunglasses and a leopard-print hairclip completed the look.

Over soft-drinks and ice-cream we spent a sunny afternoon chatting away in English and Chinese while looking through illegal DVD copies of the latest western and Asian movies which hawkers in this place were known to offer. Liz, one of the women in the group, brought Alan, an American tourist, whom she had met on the internet, and who was visiting her and her husband for the second time.

Liz, also in her early thirties, was a college friend of Zhang Jie. She was “between employments,” that is, she had quit her previous job and given herself some time – a few months, she said – to travel and “play” (*wanr*) before starting a new job. By the time I met her, the few months had lasted a year and she was not looking for employment yet.

Every once in a while she worked on some English – Chinese translations on a free-lance basis. In the last year she had traveled to the South of China, to Tibet, as well as to Europe. Her husband was a high level manager in an IT company who fully supported Liz's explorations.

The third woman at the core of this group of friends was Liang Yang. The same age as the other two women, Liang Yang was single and worked in a joint venture company. Liang Yang was very preoccupied with organizing her life. She wanted to get married, but also eagerly sought to buy an "appropriate" apartment. "Property" was an important question for her, she said. "I mean, I want to buy a place where I want to live for a long time; at least for the next ten years. [...] But it is not easy to find something appropriate" (Notes March 10, 2002). Liang explained:

We [she and her friends] are only looking at new apartments because the second hand property market does not have much to offer and the quality of the apartments is not what I am looking for. But buying property is quite a task! I have to think what will happen during the next ten years of my life? I mean, where will my workplace be? Will I have children, and so forth? I work in Beijing's southwest, but the water quality is really bad in the area. I don't want to live there. I prefer a place in the north of Beijing. Right now I live close to the Beijing TV tower [in the west]. [...] I have to drive 30 km to work every day. [Notes March 10, 2002]

At some point during that evening, which we spent in a fashionable new restaurant and a bar, Liz and Zhang Jie were joking and goofing around until Zhang Jie burst

out laughing: “See, these are the new women of China – *hen mafan, hen renao* (very troublesome, very loud and lively)!” (Notes, March 10, 2002) Judging from the voice and manner in which she said this, she was quite content with this description.

While Zhang Jie and her friends, as well as other young, educated women I talked to, presented themselves as strong-minded and powerful women who determined their own lives, they still seemed to adhere to the traditional pattern of marriage and child-bearing. I did not meet a single woman who questioned these institutions. On the contrary, most of them were married and the ones that were not were hectically searching for a husband. They all wanted to have children and even dreamt of having more than one. They had, however, delayed childbirth much beyond the age that the women from the market considered fit and appropriate, if not possible, to have children.

To have a child had, in fact, become a matter of great deliberation and planning, but also a source of stress in the lives of the young, educated women. This was not only because for them having a child was a question of financial standing, but also because of the effect of child birth and care on their position at work, on their future careers.

People thought of having a child whenever they wanted before the opening and reform because they had less pressure. [Now] people prefer to have no child, or to have them late, partly because of the pressure at work. A child is a burden for adults if they are not well prepared financially or other conditions are not fulfilled. A child might even disturb their work and harm their careers, so some people do not want to have a child at all.

As for my parents' generation, they didn't have these thoughts; everybody was the same. [Interview June 13, 2002]

If young, educated women had children, due to their busy work lives they had to rely on childcare, which today is no longer state provided, but private and more expensive. Several of these young women put their children in boarding schools/ kindergartens, and only picked them up for the weekends and holidays.¹⁴ This, of course, required certain financial means.

My child is in kindergarten, which is attached to the People's University. My child stays there for the whole week. In the morning of Monday, I cook myself a simple breakfast and have it, then I take my child to the kindergarten. He has his breakfast over there. I have to talk to the teacher since he will stay there for 5 days, and the teacher will tell me something about him as well. [Interview October 29, 2001]

As an alternative to making use of such institutions, or in addition to such arrangements, all young wealthy women had household help, ranging from the live-in maid [*ayi*], to a woman who came daily or at least several days per week to take care of household chores. "I have a young *ayi* to help me do the housework. She is also my house-

¹⁴ Boarding schools existed during the Maoist era, but apart from special institutions for cadre children, they were not very common below the college level. It appears that the practice of putting children into boarding schools already at an early age is spreading quickly during the reform period. One can speculate that the demands of more competitive jobs, in combination with the growing distances that adults have to overcome in everyday life, are contributing factors that lead parents to send their child away during the week. These were at least reasons given by my informants in Wangjing. Unfortunately, I could not find any research/ literature on this phenomenon.

keeper. My daughter goes to kindergarten 5 days a week. When my husband and I go back home, everything is ready for us” (Interview May 28, 2002). Moreover, several women could rely on their mothers as additional help to take care of the household or child.

Postponement of child birth went hand in hand with a strong will, but also pressure, to excel in work and a strong feeling of obligation for self improvement. The young, educated women were all taking evening or weekend classes, pursuing higher degrees or work specializations, independent of their current position, that is, no matter if they worked in the public or private sector.¹⁵ 34-year-old Cao Xiangjun, who had studied Japanese and received a Ph.D. in Sociology, was working for a Japanese Investment Bank when I met her. Nevertheless, she was taking weekend classes in order to get another degree in economics. “The work I am doing requires more knowledge on economics and finance [...]. I need to learn theory and some basics of economics, so I study on the weekends and take examinations one subject after the other” (Interview June 15, 2002). Women who worked in private companies, however, paid a price. Every single one of them lamented the amount of work they had, the stress and pressure they were suffering from.

Well educated, hard working, and ambitious as these women were, they strongly felt that there was a “glass ceiling” which kept them from rising in their professions as they would have wished to.

It’s a men’s world. The government declared that men and women are equal, but the truth is they are not the same. In companies, no matter how

¹⁵ In contrast to the couples who engaged in the “one family, two systems” strategy, where it was usually the state-sector-employed spouse who pursued higher education. See Chapter II.

hard you work, the boss still prefers men to women. They think its hard for a woman to concentrate her mind on work because she has to take care of the family, her kids. In my post-graduate class I had 30 classmates, only 9 were women. All of the men found a job that accepted their files within a month, but it was too hard for the women. 2 of my female classmates went back to their hometown because they could not find a job in Beijing. Compared with other women, highly-educated women are better off than the other women in Beijing. Our salary is less than men's, though. If I were a man, my salary would be higher. I heard that a female doctor who graduated from an university in Beijing committed suicide because she could not find herself a job. It is rare, but it happens. In China, men's salaries are higher than women's and female leaders both in government and in companies number less than male. [Interview December 9, 2001]

Nonetheless, even the women who experienced gender bias in the working world often blamed themselves instead of society, institutional structures, or the government. "I think we have a low percentage of women with ambitions. [...] There are some prejudices, but sometimes it is because of the women themselves not because of the gender" (Interview May 28, 2002).

Like the elderly, several of the young educated working women also expressed the belief that men were more responsible for the financial welfare of the family than women.

I want to be a woman. Men have more pressure; the same as in every society. A woman can take care of her family, her clothes, listen to music without thinking of work most of the time. It's easier than for men. Men have more stress. Traditionally both family and society give men more pressure. As regards a woman, she is not expected to make any kind of contribution. [Interview June 19, 2002]

On the extreme side, one woman even expressed the idea, which circulated within the media at the beginning of the 1990s, that the solution to the increasing unemployment problem in China, as well as to the welfare of the family, would be for women to stay home and be housewives. "I think women should go back home and take care of their babies. Maybe one third of the women like to go back home. And for the reason of efficiency, we don't need so many people in the work [force]" (Interview May 28, 2002).

It appears that the young, educated women actually had conflicting ideas about their work-lives and motherhood. I would suggest that in the context of current government discourse about the need to work hard, and of their own felt need to secure the financial means to guarantee a future life standard, the more so as the government provides fewer social services, women have themselves embraced a discourse of being diligent, hard-working, modern citizens. This, however, stands in sharp contrast to their wish for motherhood, as well as to some traditional notions of men having to take care of the family. Listening to Wang Lan (age 31), the woman who suggested women to return home to take care of their babies, I wondered if the young, educated women actually felt they had

a choice as to how to design their lives between work and motherhood. Zhang Jie gave me an answer: “It is sad, but once you have a child you really *have* to work. Everything is so expensive today, and school fees seem to be rising every year” (Interview February 3, 2002).

3 Migrant Women

In the early 1980s, when migrants from the countryside had just begun to flock into cities, more men than women took advantage of the relaxed residence controls. In Beijing in 1988, for example, 87.5 percent of migrants were male. Nonetheless, since the 1990s, the male – female ratio among the Chinese migrant population has been changing. The number of female migrants has risen to above 40 percent, a trend that has been attributed to an increase of jobs in the tertiary sector which tends to employ female labor (Solinger 1999).

Migrants’ occupations are highly gender selective. Women dominate as domestic workers (95 percent in the late 1980s), and in the commercial, catering, and service trades. In addition, women work often as factory hands – in textile factories in the state sector, and in manufacturing of toys, shoes, and electronic equipment for foreign enterprises. Migrant women are also more likely than men to be hired by small private entrepreneurs. In all these sectors and jobs, female migrants are often preferred because they allegedly are more docile, but also more *lingchao* (careful, clever).^{16,17}

¹⁶ Honig (1986) cites the same occupational prejudice in her analysis of early 20th century cotton mills.

¹⁷ A 1994 survey showed that the educational level of female migrants was lower than that of male migrants. Male migrants with higher education than primary school accounted for 61 percent, while women

Interestingly, Solinger (1999) also reports that the sex ratio changed among migrants who stayed longer in cities: men were significantly more likely than women to return to their home-places after earning money. One explanation of this difference in migration behavior is that more women than men are unmarried at the time of upon migration (cf. Davin 1996). Another explanation is that women find it easier to acclimatize than men. The nature of their work – as maids, nannies, food or various goods sellers in markets – not only puts female migrants in contact with the local population, but they can also learn the local dialect, customs, and ways of living in the city.¹⁸ In contrast, migrant men, who dominate in construction, often lead isolated existences on construction sites, interacting only with fellow villagers or bosses, and strengthening local ties rather than severing them.

For the migrant women working in markets around Wangjing, gender had shaped their lives in various ways. It began by the women being less likely to receive good or higher education in their places of origin, since especially in the countryside boys still experience preferential treatment.¹⁹ Less education meant fewer chances to find employment outside agricultural labor. At the same time, as girls and women, their contribution

accounted only for 31 percent. This kind of educational profile certainly supports gendered employment trends. See Gu and Liu 2002.

¹⁸ One could speculate whether there is a growing development of poor male urban residents marrying rural female migrants, since it is likely that urban women try to marry “up.” With the general lack of women (because of sex-based abortions triggered by the one-child policy), migrant women who would benefit from the husband’s urban hukou might turn into attractive marriage partners. I have not found any evidence for this thesis, but it is an interesting point to follow up.

¹⁹ The preference for sons is related to various issues. Among them is the continued idea that the family line is carried through the male descendants and that women upon marriage cease to be members of the natal family. This latter point in turn produces further economically based considerations: if the labor power of a daughter is lost by her natal family upon marriage, then there is no economic reason to invest in a daughter’s education or training. This ideology has been supported by reform period developments. Since the state no longer provides social services in support of old age, the physical labor power and potentially higher income of a son is more likely to substitute for this loss. See above, IV.1.

to the agricultural household was less likely to be considered vital, and this, in turn, enabled the less educated women in the present reform period to venture into migration and search for jobs in urban areas. Several of them said that they had brothers who worked the land in their home-places. Because of the bleak economic situation there, the women had been encouraged by friends, relatives, and/ or their parents to try their luck in the city. Upon arrival, gender channeled them into specific professions, and subjected them to gender-specific discrimination. As a result, market women frequently found themselves at the place they were because of the combined factors of local origin, educational level, and gender. Greater *nengli* (ability), for example, was the reason migrant market women gave for the dominance of women in the clothing trade.

Nonetheless, in my view, it would be wrong to consider migrant market women simply as passive victims of a growing socio-economically stratified society. Nianwen Shi's study (n.d.) of female migrants to Guangdong, for example, shows that the women entered into a gendered and segmented labor market which channeled them predominantly into the domestic service sector. Nonetheless, as Shi argues, this lowest sector of the urban labor market, in fact, offered for many women a niche where, while pursuing jobs considered appropriate for their sex, they could successfully confront the patriarchal structures they were subjected to. Despite limited choices in the urban labor market, by working as domestic employees in the city women could escape troubled marriages, achieve lighter workloads, and gain access to the world beyond their villages. Indeed, given the demand for domestic employees, migrant women frequently changed employers in a process of finding the best pay for the most comfortable work situation. In that way, they were able to transform the apparently restrictive factors of rural origin and

femininity into human capital that gave them special bargaining power in the labor market.

Similarly, the market women I met around Wangjing had been channeled into their current positions by the factors of rural origin and gender. Nonetheless, most of them had actually gone through a series of other occupations – factory hand, employee of small businesses, for example – before they eventually decided to become private entrepreneurs. After they acquired the necessary capital to start their own businesses, they considered their present work the best choice among the available options. Liang Jiehua, for example, described how she had tried out various jobs, searching for better pay or working conditions, but also to accommodate a new life situation such as the birth of her son:

I worked at Sanyuan Qiao [market] with my classmate's sister. I worked in the green house for a year and one of my coworkers introduced me to her brother who became my husband later. We got married in December 1986. Then I worked in a clothing factory. My salary was very low, it was only 2.5 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 0.31) per day and 0.5 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 0.06) bonus, that is, I had 90 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 11.25) per month. In the clothing factory, I could make 3 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 0.37) for making one suit, I could make 3 a day, that is, I earned 9 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 1.12) per day. It was very hard work so I decided to change my job again after one year. It was in 1987. I had my son in 1988. In order to take care of my son, I took the material back home and made clothes there. I also made some embroidery at home. I went to a shop to sell cigarettes, sugar, tea, and

wine when my boy was one and a half years old, which was too young for him to go to kindergarten, so my mother in law came to help me to take care of him. My salary was 4 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 0.5) a day. After half a year I thought it was not a good job so I changed to go to work in a restaurant. They paid me 5 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 0.62) per day, 150 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 18.75) per month. I worked there for another half year. It was at the end of 1989, my son was nearly two years old, I sent him to kindergarten. I had to bring my son to kindergarten and pick him up again every day. One day I met a girl who came from Henan province in a market which was on the way to my son's kindergarten. She had her own stall and she told me 'Don't go to work. You can have your own business. How much do you make in one day?' I said it was 5 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 0.62) a day, so she told me where to get the wholesale goods. I asked her how much she can make a day and she said 50 to 100 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 6.25 to US\$ 12.5). It was a lot of money. So I resigned from my job and had my own clothes stall at the end of 1991. My business was better than today. [Interview June 4, 2002]

Despite certain risks, "being one's own boss" was considered an achievement. As private entrepreneurs, the success of the women's businesses, the profits they could make, depended solely on their own input, talent, diligence, or effort. They neither had to deal with, nor suffer under an employer, nor did they have to worry about work schedules

or times. As self-employed entrepreneurs they could accommodate their private lives with their work lives without the need to justify absences, for example.

Like the danwei residents and the young, educated women, most of the migrant women affirmed that men and women were equal. Nonetheless, when asked about who took care of specific family and household tasks, in many cases it was women who dealt with their child's educational demands, and who took care of shopping, cleaning, cooking, if the husband could not "help." "I have to do housework, take care of my child, my family. Besides I have my own business. But men don't *need* to do housework" (Interview June 4, 2002).

35-year-old Yang Fengmei, for example, occasionally had to leave her sales stall to either attend school conferences for her son or to take care of her ailing mother-in-law, who (in an exceptional case) had come with them to the city. As a self-employed sales woman, she had no problem taking two hours off at mid-morning to do so. She opened her sales stall in the morning, and her neighbor took care of her business for the time she was absent. As an employee, she would have either not been allowed to take off time, or would have lost money during her absence.

In a situation where gender ideologies considered women to be responsible for certain daily tasks, private entrepreneurship offered significant advantages for the migrants. In addition, while the gender ideologies limited women's work options, or channeled them into specific sectors, within that sector women could turn that stereotype into human capital: because they were perceived as having greater *nengli* for the clothes trade, women gained a position of authority, power, and influence.

4 Space and Gender

Some of the earliest anthropological analyses of women's subordinate social position linked the formation of gender inequalities to social space. Ortner (1974), for example, related ideologies of female inferiority to the concept that men were associated with the "cultural," while women were connected to the "natural" realm. Similarly, Rosaldo (1974) concluded that women held a socially subordinate position because human activities occurred in the socially constructed and separated domestic and public domains. Both authors suggested that gender and power were inevitably shaped by culturally and historically formed social spaces.

While these explanations have long been criticized as too simplistic and generalizing, they appear to reflect the Chinese "traditional" concept of women living "inside" and men being "outside." Bray (1997), however, has shown that the *nei – wai* (inside – outside) dichotomy is different from the one between a less valuable "private" and a more important "public" sphere: Until the seventeenth century, Chinese women engaged in textile weaving and contributed a significant part to the household economy, which also imparted a certain degree of social status. Rofel (1999:72) argues that "inside/ outside as implicit social knowledge of space is not homologous with dichotomies that oppose 'family' or 'domestic life' to 'work' or 'public' life." The question is not *where* women work, but, as Moore (1988) argues, what is conceived as "work" and the social value assigned to it in a given cultural context. This is what shapes women's domestic and societal status.

Throughout history and across cultures, architectural and geographic spatial arrangements have reinforced status differences between women and men (cf. Spain 1992).

Bondi (1999) also points to the interweaving of gender, class, and life course, and emphasizes the patterning of life courses in the articulation of class and gender practices. How, then, were the Wangjing women affected by space, and how did spatial reconfigurations of the reform-period interact with gender?

In the past, elderly women had suffered more than men from the interaction of gender and space because generally danwei provided housing to the husbands, double-burdening women with longer commutes. Today, retired and living a relatively secluded life within the danwei walls, gender did not appear to significantly influence elderly women's lives any longer.

Interestingly, it was especially the younger women who were significantly more affected by new and changing gender constructions in connection to spatial reconfigurations. In many ways, this can be attributed to the growing integration of the Chinese economy into the global capitalist system which introduces new stratifications in Chinese society, among them, some that follow gender lines.

In the case of the young, educated women, gender interacted with space in various ways. While housing is increasingly commodified, distribution still functions mainly through the work unit. Families have developed special adaptive strategies; for example, one spouse leaves the state sector in order to venture into the private economy while the other remains in the safety-net of the work unit. As indicated above, frequently it was women who ventured into the private labor market while their husbands remained in state sector employment. In consequence, the couples often lived in housing provided through his work unit which traditionally gave advantage to the husband in terms of the work – housing commute. Today, however, this gendered relation of housing and employment is

becoming less important as work units often construct new housing at the fringes of the city, in suburban areas where land is available and less expensive than in the inner city. As a result, the state-sector employed spouse and the private economy employed spouse might face similar commuting distances and times to their workplaces. Living in work unit connected housing will therefore play a less influential role in gender discrimination. In addition, rising financial means have led families to purchase housing in the real estate market where residential choices are made on the basis of environment and overall living atmosphere, as well as logistic determinants for both spouses.

Nonetheless, changing/ emerging gender relations intertwine with the present-day restructuring of urban space along socio-economic lines: Gender puts certain educated, urban women with specific skills into a better position in the labor market, offering them well-paying jobs. These, however, required full-time dedication, and consequently young, educated women postpone childbirth as long as possible because they know that a child would interfere with their career paths. Only this commitment to their wage labor enables young, educated couples to financially and logistically afford to live in suburban “zones of affluence.” In addition, the necessary dedication to their wage labor also requires relying on household help – nannies and maids – to deal with daily domestics tasks, which the women in question are only able to afford because of their well-paying positions. In other words, young educated couples’ rising economic means had a series of closely intertwined social and spatial consequences, which from the outside, almost appear like a vicious circle.

In her study of Wenzhou²⁰ migrants' household-based garment manufacturing, Zhang (2001) observes that women's social position was significantly limited by the fact that their work was performed within the household, which was considered a "feminine" sphere. Men performed work outside the home, and were therefore seen as the boss (*lao-ban*), no matter how great a woman's contribution to the business was. Women were thought to be too cowardly (*danxiao*) to venture out alone in order to pursue business. But women's spatial movement was also subjected to an ideology of female virtue: women who stayed out over night or who interacted with many men were "bad women" (*huai nüren*, meaning loose). Nonetheless, the migrant women were in charge of stalls and shops in the market where garments were sold. While these were physically separate from the living quarters, they were treated as extensions of the household. In this way, working in the market did not endanger women's virtue; it merely deemed the work in this space informal and less valuable than men's.

In an interesting contrast to Zhang's study, in my investigation I did not encounter any similar gendered interpretation of space. Neither were migrant women confined to the domestic sphere through ideologies of female virtue, nor were the market stalls considered an extension of the feminine sphere of the household. Further, neither migrant women nor men working in the markets considered women traveling throughout the city or interacting with men as compromising their virtue. Both migrant men and women worked in the market, and the only visible gender differentiation was that men were more likely to sell electronic articles, while women more frequently sold clothes. Nonetheless, there were also a number of husbands and wives who were engaged in the clothes busi-

²⁰ Wenzhou is a municipality in Zhejiang province.

ness together. Among these couples, men often took the part of organizing the supplies, taking care of the sales stall, and so forth, while their wives were responsible for the actual sales. Even though this appears to be a similar set-up as the one described by Zhang, it is important to keep in mind that, since this was not a manufacturing business, in this arrangement the women were the ones who were engaged in the profit-making activity, and they determined a couple's economic success through their special talent for selling clothes. In addition, the many women who were engaged in the clothes selling business by themselves frequently traveled throughout the city in order to find their supplies in whole-sale markets, but also to visit other markets and compare their conditions. The migrant market women in my research were not confined in their spatial movement by gendered ideologies of virtue and domesticity.

The Wenzhou migrants described by Zhang (2001) came to Beijing channeled through networks of kin and native place, and built up a complex community in Beijing. The migrant population I encountered around Wangjing, in contrast, had migrated to the city alone or with a spouse, but not through extended networks of kin and native place. They also held few contacts with their native place, and had become comparatively acculturated to urban life. Zhejiang villagers constructed a community based on native place, transporting customs and adhering to ideologies which bound the migrants together, nurtured by the idea of one day returning to their place of origin, but also as a reaction to the challenges in the urban world. The migrants I met around Wangjing, by contrast, were not planning to return to their native place. They did not live together with other migrants from the same place of origin in organized communities, and apart from having friendly and collegial relations with other migrants at the market, they did not form a tight-knit

community comparable to that of the Wenzhou migrants. The Wangjing migrants I talked to planned to permanently settle in the city and therefore engaged in new strategies which were the most appropriate for permanent urban life.

Among the migrant women in my sample who had husbands working in a danwei, the wives actually gained significant power because of their income's importance for the family economy. It was the entrepreneurial wife who could significantly improve the family's well-being through her successful business. Liang Jiehua, for example, whose husband worked in a state-owned company, repeatedly stressed that while he had a steady income, health insurance which also covered their son, and would eventually receive a pension, his actual wage was very low. The couple was able to afford sending their son to a better school in the Wangjing vicinity only because of Liang Jiehua's business income. When I asked Liang Jiehua if they had considered doing business together, she said that her husband was too timid. It seemed that, in addition to contributing a vital part of the household economy, Liang Jiehua was also the spouse who engaged in what was considered the more "risky," "daring" work of doing business. While this apparently did not change persisting gender ideologies about women carrying more responsibility for household tasks, it surely improved Liang's position within her household/ family.

In sum, gender was clearly a factor that had made all women's experiences in the past different from men's, and continued to influence their lives during the reform period. Gender also reinforced present-day differentiation between the three groups of women discussed here. The effects of present-day socio-spatial re-configurations created differing experiences for young and educated, elderly, and migrant women. In the following

chapter we will see how these differentiations corresponded and interrelated with the growing socio-economic classifications.

Chapter V Emerging Socio-Economic Differentiations

1 Stratifications

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) recently released the results of a ten-year study on contemporary social structure in China in which they divided society into ten classes:¹ people responsible for state and social management, managers, large-scale entrepreneurs (businesses with more than eight employees), specialists and technicians, office staff, small scale entrepreneurs, people engaged in commerce and service, industrial workers, agricultural workers, and the unemployed. These classes are further divided according to five rankings. The upper ranking consists of senior government leaders, managers of large enterprises, senior specialists, and entrepreneurs from large private enterprises. The upper middle ranking consists of middle government leaders, middle management staff of large enterprises, managers of medium and small scale enterprises, medium level specialists and technicians, and entrepreneurs from medium size private enterprises. The middle ranking consists of elementary specialists and technicians, entrepreneurs from small enterprises, office workers, and self-employed entrepreneurs. The lower middle ranking consists of self-employed laborers, ordinary commercial service

¹ This marks a significant departure from previous Chinese Marxist rhetoric according to which social classification consisted of two different systems: that of "social role" (*chengfen*) and that of "social origin" (*chushen*). In the official dictionary published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1973, social role was defined as "a person's most important background or occupational status before entering upon revolutionary work" (*geming gongzuo*), that is, before being assigned to a job. The important point is that "social role" could change. It was not ascribed by accident of birth, and might have been different from that of other family members. "Social origin," in contrast, designated "a person's status as determined by his/her early experiences or his/her family's economic circumstances." Social origin, then, was the designation by which most persons were formally categorized during the early 1950s, for example, "textile workers," or "landlord," which would determine their future in the new People's Republic. Social origin therefore corresponded most closely to "class background," and usually did not change as one's social activities or consciousness changed. See Watson 1984.

staff, laborers, and farmers. The lower ranking consists of those living in poverty and the unemployed (Su 2002).²

While this appears to be a thorough analysis of contemporary social differentiations, I would claim that the above categories fail to take into account the continuing spatial valorization of emerging stratifications. In particular, the CASS proposal omits the differences between any urban, in contrast to rural positioning, and between central places and medium level or low level places. To be a self-employed entrepreneur in Beijing is significantly different in terms of living standard than being one in a small town in China's west. Even more importantly, while unemployed urban residents have access to state-run job centers and training programs to find a new occupation, migrants to the cities are forced out of jobs by these repositioned workers. Some migrants have actually been able to accumulate significant wealth, surpassing parts of the urban population in their economic position.³ Generally speaking, though, migrants have to take the "left-over" jobs, ranging from household employees, to construction workers, paddy-cab drivers, or the collection (and recycling) of garbage – jobs that are socially stigmatized. Migrants' children do not have the same access to education as children with an urban hukou, and, as we have seen above, finding appropriate housing continues to pose a problem for the majority of the migrant population.

In short, the CASS model offers an appropriate description of social differentiations within the *urban* realm, but it does not consider the continuous segregation between

² A similar model of class structure in present-day China is elaborated by Li Chunling (2002). Neither takes hukou as an aspect of social positioning into account.

³ Notably the garment manufacturing Wenzhou migrants in Zhejiang Village in Beijing. Zhang (2001) reports that the average Wenzhou migrant household income is very high. About 80 percent of seventy households she interviewed claimed an annual income above RMB 200,000 (US\$ 25,000), which is roughly twenty times the annual income of a middle-class Beijing household. See also Ma and Xiang 1998.

cities and the countryside which vertically cross-cuts these stratifications. As long as the hukou system persists, I maintain that the distinction between urban and rural residents continues to be the most important one in China, despite the fact that certain rural hukou holders might have prospered in the city. Migrants' social, legal, and political status remains different – indeed, secondary – from the one of urban residents.⁴ Zhang (2002:313) accordingly speaks of urban citizenship as “the site of an enduring spatial politics whose terms have been set by the hukou system, which divides national space into two hierarchically ordered parts: the city and the countryside.”

In regard to the social differentiations discussed here, the three groups of Wangjing residents in my analysis formed three groups of societal positioning that were significantly determined by their age, education, and personal background. These characteristics, however, converged with historic-political factors, the most important of which was the place of origin and/or residential hukou. As we have seen, many of the elderly had actually come to live in the city only shortly after the revolution. After receiving an urban hukou, they gained rights, status, and formed a new “urban” identity which fundamentally differentiated them from rural residents. Even with the reform-period holes in the “bamboo curtain,” this has not significantly changed. My informants' positioning in today's socio-economic transformations of Chinese society had a decisively spatial grounding, magnified by the increasingly divergent standards of urban housing. The difference an urban hukou could make for an uneducated citizen's residential condition was

⁴ *The China Daily* reported on January 10, 2002, that the government planned to replace the hukou system over the following five years by an “employment registration system,” in which social-security numbers would be issued to people as a way to guarantee benefits to help the unemployed find jobs (cf. Jiang 2002). Whether this system will significantly change the employment discrimination against migrant workers remains to be seen.

illustrated by the comparison between Aimei, who lived in an affordable housing project (see above, Ch.III.4.4.1), and migrant sales women in the markets who, even if they had the financial means, had no access to that type of residence.

Turning now to the intra-city realm, with the growing influence of market forces and the consumerization of society, differentiations are also growing among urban residents. These differentiations, in turn, are translated more and more into spatial forms; urban society is undergoing a parallel process of socio-spatial and economic restructuring. My suggestion here is that present-day socio-economic stratification processes are actually reinforced by their growing spatial manifestations. The continued exclusion of migrants from aspects of city life and urban society, together with growing residential segregation of urbanites into separate, distinct, and secluded housing complexes on the one hand, and the on-going processes of social structuration on the other, mutually reinforce and nurture each other. The continued validity of the hukou system underlines migrants' inferior social position. At the same time, by increasingly living in segregated communities, the new middle class and the wealthy reinforce their growing differentiation from other population groups.

These processes of stratification, however, would remain only socio-economic and socio-spatial in character if there was not also a parallel process of emerging differentiation in values, ideas, behaviors. As E. P. Thompson (1966:9 – 10) pointed out: "The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences

are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms.”

Bourdieu’s much-cited concept of *habitus* (1977) refers to individuals’ internalization of social norms, understandings, and patterns of behavior, which do not determine action, but ensure that people are more likely to act in some ways than in others. Even more, and this is especially illuminating in the process of class-formation, *habitus* is both the product and the generator of the division of society into groups and classes. *Habitus* is shared by people of similar social status, but varies across different social groups. In J. B. Thompson’s (1991) words:

The habitus is a set of *dispositions* that incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are ‘regular’ without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any ‘rule’. [...] Dispositions are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation in which early childhood experiences are particularly important. [...] The dispositions produced thereby are also *structured* in the sense that they unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired. [...] In other words, the similarities and differences that characterize the social conditions of existence of individuals will be reflected in the habitus, which may be relatively homogenous across individuals from similar background. Structured dispositions are also *durable*: they are ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual, operating in a way that is pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification. Fi-

nally, the dispositions are *generative* and *transposable* in the sense that they are capable of generating a multiplicity of practices and perceptions in fields other than those in which they were originally acquired. [Thompson 1991:12 – 13]

Habitus gives individuals a sense of how to act in specific situations, without continually having to make fully conscious decisions (cf. Painter 2000).

There is a problem with the concept of *habitus* in the Chinese case: the concept is based on dispositions that are acquired or developed in a long-term process. In urban China, however, formative structures and institutions, systems of reference, and social relations have radically changed throughout the last decades. The changes of the reform period differentiate groups along lines of generation, gender, and socio-economic position without guiding socio-cultural patterns for corresponding values and behavior. From where do the emerging socio-economic groups get their “dispositions” when the social, cultural, and economic “fabric” of Chinese society has shifted so significantly? This “void” was dramatically expressed to a fellow researcher by a sociology professor from Beijing University, who suggested that Academia should develop a manual of appropriate lifestyles for different income groups in present-day Chinese society since people obviously lacked the necessary knowledge and needed guidance.⁵ While we cannot speak of fully developed classes with specific *habitus* in present-day Chinese society, nonetheless

⁵ Similarly, in 2001, the new magazine “Vision” was published by a Shanghai based artist. At the – for most urban Chinese – steep price of RMB 45 (US\$ 5.62), the magazine featured pages after pages of photos from around the world which were accompanied by short articles about fashion, lifestyle, and travel, all interspersed with advertisement for mainly western consumer goods. In a launch interview the editor revealed that his main aim was to “educate people’s taste.”

a close analysis reveals ideologies, behavior, and values which are increasingly linked to socio-economic positions.

We have already seen changes in gender construction and relations, as well as new forms of community life. In the following, I will analyze changing patterns of identification, behaviors, and values which can further illuminate how the marketization of society affects personal attachments and social relationships. What will become apparent are differentiations in the making. If we understand class as a process, a “social and cultural formation” (Thompson 1966:11), then the emerging group-specific values and behaviors can be understood as markers of difference within this process. The question remains, however, if the structuration process might also lead to the development of group consciousness or basis for concerted action.⁶

2 Danwei-Residents

2.1 Localized in a Different Sense of Time

We have seen that in comparison to the young, wealthy couples who live in commercial housing, danwei residents lead a much simpler life. While they own their apartments, these are small, if not crammed, and often of a low quality. Many have only cement floors, kitchens and bathrooms that are not tiled, and elderly residents whose children still

⁶ Clammer (2003) shows, for example, that in south-east Asia, growing middle classes, created by economic changes in the past decade, have begun to evolve new social patterns. The political visibility of the new middle classes in Asia is due in large part to their pushing for more public goods as the framework and guarantee of the security of private consumption.

reside with them usually did not have a living room. At the time of my fieldwork, the elderly's pensions, and their continued connection to the danwei, allowed them to provide for their living. They did not have, however, the means for any exceptional expenses, such as medical bills or travel. Due to their often low education, few elderly men and women were able to find well-paying jobs after retirement, through which they could improve their standard of living. One of the retired women, for example, sold hats, gloves and scarves in one of the markets in the research area.

The elderly also led a very "localized" life. In contrast to the residents of commercial housing, elderly danwei residents lived in this part of the city because this was where the work unit they had been assigned to was located. Their lives unfolded predominantly within the realm of the danwei compound and its direct vicinity. While they certainly also moved within the larger city, this happened only occasionally. For elderly, retired state-employees, time and space merged in a specific way that set them apart from the other two groups. Their "other-timing" was, on the one hand, related to retirement, that is, a daily life not organized around work hours, but instead around meals and social activities in the compound. On the other hand, this "other-timing" was also caused by their connection to the danwei/ state-owned company, which functioned according to a different time than privately owned enterprises. As Harvey (1990) has observed, each distinctive mode of production or social formation embodies a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts.

Not in the position to actively participate in the current modernization project, elderly, retired danwei residents stand somehow "outside" the new negotiations of space in the urban landscape. This does not mean, however, that they are passive subjects. To a

certain degree, the elderly can choose to withdraw from the newly developing realities of competitiveness because of the continued support they receive from the state. From this position of secured, albeit frugal, retirement, the elderly danwei residents of my study were able to support or assist their children. Either by offering them (cheap or free) accommodation, or by taking care of the grandchildren, these former state-employees actually did take an active part in current socio-economic restructurings as they enabled their children's performance in the free job market and adoption of the new disciplinary regime. Despite their relatively moderate standard of living, the elderly danwei residents I spoke to generally expressed contentment with their living situation.

We have further seen that many of the elderly's life stories in my research centered around the sacrifices they had made, the hardships they had experienced, and how they had overcome various obstacles to receive an education, raise children, and support family members. Since I think this is central to understanding elderly residents' self-identification and position in present-day urban Chinese society, I will here introduce the life-story of Zhu Laoning as an example to illustrate elderly's values and frames of thinking. Zhu Laoning, a retired 63-years-old radio technology engineer, lived in Xin Yuan. Her life, the experiences of hardship in her childhood, living and believing in the ideals of the communist revolution, and her attitude towards the transformations of the last years reflect the sentiments of many elderly women and men I talked to around Wangjing.

2.2 Zhu Laoning, an Elderly Danwei Resident

Zhu Laoning was the oldest of six children. Her father passed away in the early 1950s when Zhu was 13, and her mother had to raise the children by herself. This proved hard since she had no education, but she eventually found a job in a clothes factory. Studying diligently, and enduring much hardship, Zhu Laoning and several of her siblings were nonetheless able to attend university, helped by the socialist system of free education and a small monthly government stipend. “All our fees were paid for, including our food. The government gave us 12.5 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 1.56) each month” (Interview May 21, 2002). Zhu Laoning chose to become an electronics and radio technology engineer. After she graduated from university in 1962, she joined the army which was common at the time, she said. She was sent to Nanjing to work, even though she was married and her husband was assigned to a job in Beijing. The couple lived separately for ten years.

Zhu Laoning delayed child birth for three years after marriage because she felt that she had to pay back the government its investment into her education, and she also supported her younger sister’s university education. Zhu showed a strong sentiment of obligation in this question: “I began to work in 1964 after my graduation. We had our first child in 1967 because I thought that we should concentrate our minds on our work. It was not easy for the government to educate us for so many years and we shouldn’t bind ourselves to our families” (Interview May 21, 2002).

When she had her first daughter, Zhu still lived in the company’s dormitory in Nanjing, and therefore had to take care of the child by herself. Because her job required her to travel, however, she sent her four year old daughter to stay with her mother in

Tianjin. Only after she had her second child, Zhu Laoning was finally able to receive a transfer to Beijing to live with her husband.

I came back [to Beijing] after 1973. Every year there were several positions available to be transferred to in different places. I made a request and waited in line. It was the end of the movement [the Cultural Revolution]. My leader told his supervisor about my situation, being separated from my husband, and it was reported to the National Defense Ministry. After their investigation, and my waiting, I was finally transferred to Beijing. I had an advantage; it was that I had a university degree. It made it easier. Although the political situation had changed, there were still a lot of people who were not allowed to go back to Beijing for four or five years more.

[Interview May 21, 2002]

Zhu's husband had lived in the danwei dormitory in Jiuxiangqiao while she was in Nanjing. After she returned, they had to rent a small pingfang house in the vicinity of their company, because even though Zhu Laoning's husband was a cadre, he did not want to ask for an apartment from the danwei. The number of houses was limited and there were other families with older children who were waiting for accommodation.

My husband was a cadre and he didn't feel like asking for a house because the work unit did not have many. So we had a 10 square meter room until 1975. Then, we got a small apartment in 1979, and afterwards we got this apartment in 1986. At that time the danwei distributed houses according to working years. We were in school for many years, so the workers had bet-

ter and bigger houses than we had. Their children were older than mine, which was also an advantage they had. I got married when I was 25, later than they did. I gave birth when I was 28 and 29. My children were small, that was the reason I couldn't have a big house. [Interview May 21, 2002]

Because of the demands of both her and her husband's jobs, Zhu Laoning arranged for her elder daughter to live with another family to whom she paid a monthly fee. "Our younger daughter went to primary school and our elder child lived in another family. We paid 30 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 3.75) a month for her, which did not include the meals and health care. Altogether she needed 60 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 7.5) a month, half of our family's income (Interview May 21, 2002). The financial burden was oppressive, especially since Zhu Laoning also supported her mother in Tianjin. Because Zhu and her husband were highly paid workers, they did not get financial support for their children's education from the government. "I never got any [money]. We belonged to the high salary class at the time. [University] graduates could earn 56 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 7). We had been soldiers, so we got extra money from the army. Our salary was higher than others', so the government wouldn't give us any special allowance for the children" (Interview May 21, 2002). The couple was fortunate, though, in that Zhu Laoning's father-in-law was able to give them some money, which enabled the family to send the younger daughter to a dormitory school.⁷

⁷ This was a special middle school open to children of cadres.

Since the reform period, educational fees have been reintroduced, and after 1991 Zhu's second daughter had to pay tuition. These, however, were still low in comparison to the present.

My elder daughter didn't cost us money for her school or university. My second daughter's school asked for a little sum of money. Several hundred [RMB], something like that. It was in 1991. Now the students have to pay thousands [of RMB]. The policy was that of free education when my elder daughter went to university. People started to pay for university in 1990. That is nationwide. [Interview May 21, 2002]

After her retirement in 1994, Zhu Laoning continued to work because she liked to, but also for financial reasons. "I retired in 1994 and was re-employed by my danwei for one more year. Then I found myself a job in another company for two more years. I like my work; I was busy and had to do extra work" (Interview May 21, 2002).

Zhu Laoning was content with her life after retirement. While she was not wealthy, she had enough for a comfortable living, especially since she owned her apartment, and her danwei still flourished and was able to provide basic services. In addition, Zhu Laoning's older daughter was financially well-off and was able to support her when she needed money.

My life is pleasant. I have no burden financially, and my daughters and I will help each other when we lack money. My elder daughter has 100,000 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 12,500) per year. She has a house and car [...]. She will send her child to me when the child is on vacation, because my hus-

band likes to go swimming, so does the child. They go to swim at the Lido hotel every day. I have been going to dance in the morning since 1999. [...] We eat steamed buns in the morning and have two dishes for lunch. We also have simple food for dinner. My younger daughter has dinner with us. [...] We travel twice a year. [...] I will meet with my brothers and sisters twice a year. We will go to Anshan⁸ this year. My house is too small to meet them here. [...] I have 1,600 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 200) per month. My husband and I need 1,000 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 125) for our monthly expenses. We save 1,000 Yuan [RMB] each month and the other 1,000 is our travel fund. My elder daughter always gives us money for our travels. [Interview May 21, 2002]

Asked how she overall evaluated the reforms, Zhu gave a positive but critical reflection:

Our living condition is improving. My daughter's salary is very high. Before the reform, whatever you did, no matter if you worked hard or you were lazy, as long as you went to work every day, no matter if you made any contribution or not, you had the same salary of 600 to 700 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 75 to US\$ 87.5). [...] We didn't have much food to eat. We had to use rationing coupons to buy some meat. One kilo was not enough for the entire family. So we had to ride our bikes to go to another market. Now we have so many shops and markets. But today only a few people

⁸ Where her sister lives.

get rich. There is unfair competition. Some people are not honest and get rich. I wonder if they sleep well at night because the money they have is illegal. We are honest people, our money is clean. My daughter earns her salary according to her work. [...] I worked for a private company which was making laser machinery. I told the boss, 'You cannot cheat. Every part of the machine should be made according to the standards.' [...] I also teach my children to respect the truth and to never cheat. [...] But people are becoming more and more practical. The relationships between people are now characterized by indifference. Not like our generation. We preferred to be unselfish and to give [to others]. Now people are working for money. It is said that the amount of money you make is a measure of a person's ability. We never questioned our salaries. Now people are calculating. [...] People earn their money according to their work. There is no charity; you don't get money for nothing. [Before the reforms] everybody was the same. No matter if you worked hard or if you were lazy, you had the same salary. I conducted some research [for my job] but the money that came from it was shared by everybody. Five Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 0.62) each. Our bonuses were the same. If mine was higher, I would have been in trouble. [...] The new system is not the same as the old one. You can earn more money if you do more work. I think it is good. If the lazy people are treated the same as the hard workers, how can society develop? We earned the same, no matter what kind of title you had. The others would talk or argue if you had more money than they had. Now our salary in-

creases according to our title. I am a senior engineer. I could get 50 to 60 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 7.5 to US\$ 8.75) increase. As for common workers, they could get 20 to 30 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 2.5 to US\$ 3.75). Now they don't longer argue. We had low salaries before the reform, while the state took care of our houses, pensions, and medical insurance. No matter if we worked hard or not, the result was the same. Now we have to work hard for our future, otherwise we won't have as good an apartment as other people have, we won't have enough money when we get ill, and our old age won't be guaranteed. Our hard work can buy us a good future. There won't be any lazy people. [Interview May 21, 2002]

Several themes emerge from Zhu Laoning's narrative, which were common among the elderly who still lived in work unit compounds: First, Zhu Laoning was old enough to have had at least some childhood memory of the time before the Communist Revolution in China, and she definitely experienced the difficult early years of the People's Republic. She grew up with a strong sense of obligation to work, and to support her younger siblings, as well as to pay back to the country which enabled her to study. From this point of view she accepted the ten year long separation from her husband, the burden of working and raising children at the same time, and even giving her daughters away for some time.

Now in her retirement, she felt relatively secure because her danwei was still flourishing and she could rely on the payment of her pension. In addition, she had at least one daughter who was able to help her out when she was short of money, or in need of

help. This was the background for her perception of the current transformations, which she evaluated as overall positive. Nonetheless, we can also read out of her statements a strong sense of difference between her life and those of her daughters.

While Zhu Laoning's experiences were characteristic of the group of elderly residents of old danwei compounds, there were also important differences among them. For example, supported by a family which valued education, Zhu Laoning had been able to finish high school and to receive a university degree. Many others of my informants of the same age had not been able to do so because of their bleak economic situation or, in the case of women, because of a gender bias. Zhu Laoning's high level of education, however, did not matter much in the era before the economic and social reforms, as salaries and the distribution of houses were based on years of work experience. That is to say, several people in this group who had received a lesser education still had a very similar lifestyle as hers, based on the provisions made by the danwei. Some elderly with fewer qualifications, Zhu Laoning pointed out, actually had a better house and pension than she.

2.3 Speaking Bitterness, Evoking Progress and Modernity

The elderly commonly began their life-stories with a traumatic memory. As described above, women often recalled how gender biases had kept them from going to school. Other men and women described the poverty that forced them to work, instead of pursuing higher education. A third theme was recollections of the atrocities committed under warlords or the Japanese occupiers before the communist revolution.

Fang taitai, who lived in Xin Yuan, one day invited me to her apartment to tell me her life-story. She led me into her combined living and bedroom with cement floor and

barren walls, where she offered me a seat and tea. Then she sat down in a huge armchair, and looked at me expectantly. Please, tell me something about your life, I asked her, and she started without hesitation:

I am a retired worker, I am 68 years old. My life is very well, while it was not good when I was a child. My hometown is called Xibaipo. It is in Hebei province, and was one of the base areas of the revolution. The Japanese Army treated us according to the policy of 'burn all, kill all, loot all'. So my father and my grandfather were killed by them. [Interview May 31, 2002]

Here, Fang taitai started to cry. It took her about two minutes to compose herself again before she continued:

My life was very hard, our house was burnt down to the ground; we had nothing to eat but grass and wild herbs and we had to pick up the firewood by ourselves. I was 7 years old in 1941. In 1946, it was better, because the Japanese invaders surrendered. We began to plant in our field and I went to school which was free, the government even gave me money for it. After I graduated from middle school I went to work. [Interview May 31, 2002]

In this statement we can already see a second recurrent theme in the elderly's accounts: wage labor. After the establishment of the People's Republic and the introduction of the centrally planned economy, urban residents were usually assigned to state-sector

jobs which they kept throughout their entire work life, such as Ding taitai, who told me “I was a turner for 20 years. We were taught that we should love our work and be stable with it” (Interview May 17, 2002). Fang taitai expressed even more clearly that her own dreams and wishes regarding work had not been important in the socialist project: “No, I never dreamt to be a worker, but I was. I would have liked to be a teacher or an accountant, or to be in sales. But I was transferred to the workshop to be a worker, the state asked us to do it. I never thought that I could have other choices” (Interview May 31, 2002).

Dedication to work, no matter on what, indeed proved to be central to the elderly. 68-year-old Wang Lianzi, for example, explained this attitude by quoting Mao: “As Chairman Mao said ‘Love Your Work, Whatever You Do, and Be an Expert in It’⁹” (Interview May 31, 2002). Despite the demands the regime made to its workers, and in the case of women, despite the double burden of wage labor and housework, the elderly all tried to convey that their lives improved considerably in comparison to a more or less explicitly drawn past – either “before the revolution,” or “in the countryside”. In some statements there was almost a sense of gratitude towards the regime. To illustrate this point, I return to Fang taitai’s narrative.

While working, Fang taitai’s daily life was very busy. She described how she not only had to take care of her four children, but also to attend political meetings.

We woke up and prepared breakfast for our children; we went to work at eight o’clock and were off from work at 5 p.m. But at that time, we couldn’t go back home as soon as the work was over, we had to stay and

⁹ “Reai gongzuo, chengwei beng hang yede nengshou.”

attend meetings. Lateness was not allowed. It was a very busy time. [Interview May 31, 2002]

Nonetheless, she immediately counterposed this description with a comparison that made her situation appear relatively better:

No matter how hard it was, I was glad to live in the city. I came from the countryside and I thought my life was much better here. I was struggling for the best and took the factory as my home; my work was first, my family was second. We were taught to do this; on my graduate diploma was written 'Serve the People!' So I never thought about myself. I was very busy and sometimes I had no time for breakfast. [Interview May 31, 2002]

Until 1986, when she moved into the current apartment, Fang taitai and her family lived in simple pingfang houses where they shared the bathroom with other families. I wondered if she had any regrets or bitter feelings about her life. Working in an assigned job that she would not have chosen herself, the burden of taking care of children while at the same time having to put work first, in addition to the endless political meetings people had to attend, and living with six others in very cramped conditions – how did she feel about her life, and the role the communist regime had played in it? In contrast to my expectations, Fang taitai had nothing to complain about. "I am always satisfied with what I have," she assured me. "I think [about the fact] that some people don't have a house [apartment in a building] like this. I am just in the middle class."

For Fang taitai there were and are three “classes” of people in post-reform China: peasants who lived in pingfang houses, the middle class who lived in danwei provided apartments, and the wealthy who could afford to buy commercial housing. Compared to where she had come from – the countryside – her evaluation of her life was positive:

I am very satisfied with my life; we have enough food to eat and we play every day. I feel very happy. Nobody dares to bully us now, my country is strong. The burning of my house left a deep impression on me; it was all the fault of the Japanese. [Now] the country is rich and we are getting rich too. [Interview May 31, 2002]

Writing about reference points in East German women’s life stories, John Borneman (1997) observed that they either dwelled on the hardships and obstacles encountered in the decade after the war or emphasized their own distinct contributions to society. Borneman relates this to the East German state’s influence on the identity construction of its citizens: According to Borneman, the state “set the ideational and aesthetic framework in which individual citizen’s experiences could be related to the larger group narrative of Germanness” (Borneman 1997:109).

The elderly people’s accounts in my research can be related to a similar framework as the one Borneman suggests for the East German case: Under the Communist Regime, up unto the reform period, much of the regime’s political legitimization was constructed in opposition to the horrendous atrocities committed under the Japanese occupation of the mainland, as well as the hardships suffered by Chinese people before the Communist Liberation. The claim to end the social and political injustices of the imperial

and nationalist regimes, as well as to turn China into a modern nation that would be able to fend off intruders such as the Japanese, was the basis for legitimizing the Communist Party's rule, the explanation for its political campaigns and for the required sacrifices in the name of the Revolution.

While I expected the elderly danwei residents to feel bitter about their life experiences, their "missed chances" and the hardships they had suffered, the sacrifices they had made, in their own accounts the elderly had done comparatively well. They escaped a life in the countryside, had a house, were able to provide for their children, and could now enjoy a relatively good retirement. As one of them said: "My life is better than before. Our life was hard. In fact, it is really better than before. We can only compare with our past, can't we?" (Interview May 15, 2002)

This attitude not only reflected the frame of identification that the Communist regime had provided, but also showed the elderly's subjective positioning in relation to history that Lisa Rofel (1999) writes about. In Rofel's research, elderly women's accounts of the past, of their sacrifices and the hardship they experienced, were regularly recounted by means of "speaking bitterness". Speaking bitterness, Rofel explains, was a political praxis perfected and dispersed by the Communist Party in the process of revolution. Party cadres used it as a fundamental method to teach peasants and later workers how to speak as socialist subjects of the new nation. "Speaking bitterness, in other words, provided a means of interpellation; it led people to conceive of themselves as new kinds of subjects, as subaltern subjects" (Rofel 1999:138).

Rofel eventually understood that the older women workers in her research population cast their lives in this mode of speaking bitterness in order to assert certain political claims, to express a certain nostalgia.

By speaking this bitterness now, [...] they implicitly expressed a longing for continued recognition that would lend a heroic quality to their identities as women workers. They spoke *as if* they still deserved to be seen as heroic, even though the whole interpretative frame of their actions has been brushed aside as part of the wrongheadedness of Maoism. [...] The nostalgia, then, is for the political frame that lent a larger-than-life importance to their laboring activities. [Rofel 1999:144 – 5]

The elderly danwei residents whom I interviewed were similar to the elderly women in Rofel's research, albeit in Beijing and more than 10 years later. However, speaking bitterness in my investigation had given way to a discourse of "progress and modernity." Elderly danwei residents recounted the hardships and sacrifices they had experienced, and felt importantly defined through these experiences, as is shown in the centrality of these accounts, similar to the ones in Borneman's research. Nonetheless, in Beijing by the year 2002 these tales had been turned into something else: proof of how far China had already come, of the difficulties it had surmounted, and of the conviction that the nation was on its way to a bright, new future called "modernity."

My mother lived in the old society. A lot of children, her life was hard. My life is different from my son's and my daughter's. My life was hard, but it is improving. [...] Now it is good. My daughter is 33 and my son is

28. Their living conditions are good. We only had 20 to 30 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 2.5 to US\$ 3.75) per month to support the entire family. Now they can make several thousands Yuan [RMB]. [...] My life is better than my mother's; my children's life will be better than mine. [Interview, May 15, 2002]

The elderly had fully embraced the notion that “modernity feeds on the idea of overcoming the past” (Rofel 1999:153). Their accounts embodied the heart of the modernist projects as identified by Rofel (1999:153): “In creating a self-portrait as a triumphal march through time, [modernity] gathers up the memories of the past into tidy linear narratives that act as mythical guides to that overcoming.” While the elderly portrayed themselves as disinterested in politics, dwelling on their social activities after retirement and the success of their children, they also repeatedly stressed the amazing changes Beijing had gone through since the beginning of the reform era. At the same time, though, they presented themselves as content, if not grateful, citizens, who – standing a bit back from current processes – mainly wanted to maintain a quiet life, to guard their health, and who wished the best for their children.

The elderly's “standing back” was caused by perceiving themselves left out of the dramatic changes in society, of feeling themselves behind present-day developments. One important topic which brought this sentiment to the fore was the work ethic. 62-year-old Ling Dawen, expressed the differences in the following way:

The people of my generation were very naïve in their thoughts. Nobody asked for extra payment if the leaders asked us to do extra work. Now

people like to know how much you can pay if you want them to do something. We are different. I think it [the changes] is to increase the productive forces. Our thoughts are old. [Interview May 22, 2002]

Li taitai also reflected on the changes that the reforms had brought upon the generations. Her statement, however, contained a certain sense of feeling lost in the new economic system:

After the reforms and opening [*gaige kaifang*], there are a lot of good changes. It has little influence on our generation. We are studying it little by little and try to understand it. We are used to the state controlled economy. At first, we couldn't get on well with these changes. But the new system has already taken its shape, so we have to adapt ourselves to it. [Interview May 31, 2002]

While several of the elderly stressed that among themselves relations had not changed, they did perceive growing differences in attitudes and values between theirs and their children's generation. Zhu Laoning assured, for example, that within their residential community there were no perceivable changes in solidarity. "Nobody has a note on their door to mark if they are rich or poor. In this area [*xiaoqu*], we [actually] don't have many rich people. We can help each other" (Interview May 22, 2002). This, however, stood in strong contrast to remarks such as the following by Wang taitai, who claimed: "Children [today] don't care for their parents as much as they should do" (Interview June 17, 2002). And Li taitai observed:

My mind is more open than my mother's. But I cannot catch up with the young people today. We are between these two generations; we are more conservative than the youth, while more open than the old. We have more traditional opinions in terms of daily affairs and how to get along with the others. Sometimes I chat with young people. For example, if someone is drowning, I would jump into the water and save him or her. But they [young people] think a lot about themselves, whether they can swim well enough to save others, or will they drown while saving someone? I think the young people think most of themselves. [Interview May 17, 2002]

I detected a sense of separateness, of detachment, if not rupture, between the two generations in the elderly's reflections. While most of them evaluated the reform process as a positive development, they also critically observed the results of the new competitive climate on society. They obviously felt a sharp contrast to the – real or perceived – solidarity of the socialist period during which they grew up and matured.

3 The Young and Educated

3.1 "One Only Has to Pay Some Money"

One evening that I spent with Zhang Jie and her friends (see above) we drove to a newly opened Sichuan restaurant, designed and run by an internationally known Chinese artist, and which was one of the latest hot-spots of the Beijing entertainment scene. Liz and her

husband in their station-wagon had a hard time keeping up with Liang Yang, who raced across the city in her Jeep Cherokee while listening to popular Chinese pop music on her high-tech, fashionably colored, stereo, and wrapped in the smell of the “Armani” perfume dispenser on the front console.

After dinner, we went for a beer in a bar next door which served as a clubhouse for the Beijing Jeep Exploration Team – a group of young people driving around China in their Jeeps in search of ever more extreme roads and trails. The bar was decorated with car parts and memorabilia from previous tours, namely to the Southwest of China and Tibet. All the while, three monitors showed videos of the tours and extreme car races in the Australian outback.

Maybe it was the surrounding decoration, but somehow we started to talk about Chinese people who emigrated to other countries. Liz and her husband thought about emigrating to Canada which was supposed to be easy. “One only has to pay some money” (*zhi dei fu qian*) they assured me. Liang Yang, however, got very upset about the issue: “I always want to keep my Chinese passport; I am proud of it (*jiu mian zihao*). I won’t leave the country!” (Notes March 10, 2002) Liz weighed in that they wanted to have at least three children which would be impossible in China. But Liang Yang rebuked her “Of course it is possible! You just have to pay the fine! That can’t be an argument to emigrate!” (Notes March 10, 2002)

I describe this scene because it strikes me as a good illustration of the life style of the young educated couples I met throughout my research, especially in contrast to my experiences in China less than ten years before. In 1993, a lot of Beijing people still wore the blue and green army clothes that had been the standard uniform during the Maoist era,

stared at foreigners, at times pointing with fingers and calling out “*lao wai*” (“foreigner”),¹⁰ while the more daring ones asked to take a picture together. As a foreigner, one was continuously approached by young Chinese who wanted to practice their English. For something like chocolate or ice-cream, one had to go to the *youyi shangdian* (Friendship Store), which specialized in imported goods and catered to foreigners and Chinese government employees. The recently opened McDonald’s flagship in Beijing drew hoards of people who had to wait for hours on the street to be able to get inside, where many of them took a bite of the unknown food and left it uneaten.¹¹

With these memories in mind, the style, sense of fashion, and the indeed international air of the group of young people described was astonishing, almost overwhelming. But the short vignette of our evening also evokes several of the common characteristics that I found in the young educated couple’s lives: weekend social activities that included meeting with friends, visiting restaurants, driving around the city, and buying consumer articles; the interest in travel, or “exploration,” as my Chinese friends called it; a concern

¹⁰ “Lao wai” literally means “old foreigner”. The “lao” in this context, however, is a respectful address. Nonetheless, there has been considerable discussion – among scholars in and outside China, as well as among my friends – whether the term is indeed a positive or negative one. I always had an ambiguous feeling about being called “lao wai,” and several of my friends insisted on talking about their “*deguo pengyou*” (“German friend”) instead of using the phrase, even correcting others who referred to me in that way.

¹¹ When I lived in Beijing in the summer of 1993, the recently opened McDonald’s flagship at the corner of the traditional main shopping street of Wangfujing drew crowds of people. They stood in a line over a hundred meters long that wound down the street in front of the restaurant. Observing that various people tried only a few bites of the coveted, but at that time disproportionately expensive fast food items, and left most of it to be thrown away, a friend and I conducted a small investigation interviewing the manager of the franchise as well as several customers about what attracted them to come to visit. Several reasons were mentioned; the most important was, of course, curiosity. But apart from that, a major incentive to visit the restaurant was that this was considered the kind of food “big, strong foreigners” ate, and the Chinese visitors hoped to gain some of that strength. Another factor was that it had become a kind of “status symbol” or, better, proof of affluence to be able to visit McDonald’s restaurants. It was considered “chic,” and an appropriate place to bring a “date,” to celebrate a child’s birthday, or even to take out the family on a special occasion. Last, but not least, another “pull factor” was the desire to change the diet, to have some variation in cuisine, to find a different, new taste. McDonald’s in Beijing has since become focus of scholarly attention. For a discussion of the consumption of Americana see, for example, Yan 1997.

about property and investments; and an ambivalent feeling about China, which manifested itself in a quite strong nationalist pride mixed with doubts about being able to realize one's individual dreams, for example, to have more than one child. These were issues repeatedly brought up by the young educated couples I talked to.

To further illustrate young, educated couples' identifications, values, and frames of thinking, in the following I introduce the life-story of Wei Hong, a young educated woman who lived in a new danwei complex.

3.2 Wei Hong, a Young, Educated Woman

Wei Hong was 31 years old, married, and had a six year-old son. In 1990, she had come to Beijing from Kaifang city in Hebei province to study philosophy. After she graduated in 1994, she joined the army, and later worked at several public technical and financial research institutes. When I met her, Wei Hong was a secretary in the President's Office of the Foreign Economic and Trade University (FETU). At the same time, she was preparing to take the exam to become a certified lawyer.

Wei Hong and her husband lived in an apartment they had been able to purchase at a favorable i.e. non-market) price from her danwei, the State Educational Bureau. According to her own account, she was one of the last persons who benefited from this policy which ended in December of 1999. In the beginning of the year 2001, the family moved into the newly built complex while renting out their old apartment, which they had bought from her previous danwei. They chose to purchase the new apartment because they preferred the living area, especially its location and the transportation facilities.

Wei Hong's husband was a manager at the Stock Exchange Market. His company was located in Chaoyang district. The couple recently bought a car, and her husband drove to work. He had to leave the house at 8 a.m. to be at the company at 9 a.m. Some days, Wei Hong's husband gave her a ride to work which was on the way to his company. Other days, Wei Hong took the university's shuttle bus, or the public bus which brought her directly to her office in about twenty minutes. When the weather permitted, Wei Hong rode her bike to work.

Throughout the week, the couple's son stayed in a kindergarten which was located near Wei Hong's workplace. Wei Hong's husband brought him there on Monday mornings and picked him up for the weekends by car. I asked about the kindergarten of their son and Wei Hong explained:

The kindergarten of our son is private. It's the most expensive one in Beijing. It's owned by a Doctor of Philosophy who graduated from Beijing Normal University. He lays stress on developing children's potential. My child changed a lot since he started going to that kindergarten, and his changes surprised us. When he was three, small as he is, he could skate. Maybe it's normal in foreign countries. Yes, he can skate very well, he knows a lot of words, and he can count from 1 to 100 and from 100 to... He can count odd numbers and even ones. We could hardly believe it. [But] it's so expensive, about 3,000 Yuan [RMB] a month. [...] My husband's salary is among the highest in China, so he can support the whole family. My salary is my own pocket money, not for the family expense, and sometimes I take money from his pocket. So it's easy for us. Another

reason is that we did not pay too much for this apartment. It was not sold according to market price. Financially we have no pressure to support a child and we want him to have the best education. But the price of the kindergarten is really too high for the average income in China and its quality is not worth the price. But it's the best kindergarten. No one is as good as it in Beijing. So we chose it. [Interview February 19, 2002]

When their son was small, the couple employed a nanny since Wei Hong's parents and parents-in-law lived in the south of China and were therefore not able to help with the child. Housework was entirely Wei Hong's domain; her husband was only concerned with their son's education. Wei Hong had therefore hired a domestic servant on an hourly basis to organize their household.

I am managing the home, including hiring the maid. He [the husband] does not do any housework, except joining in the education of our child. If I ask him to do something, [...] he will take care of it. [But] he doesn't worry about the management of the home. [...] We have an *ayi* [household help] working for us by the hour. My husband is busy with his work and I want to study. We are very satisfied with our *ayi*'s work. She comes to our home two or three times a week and helps to clean the rooms. [Interview February 19, 2002]

Despite the household help, the couple had dinner outside the house most days of the week. Wei Hong's daily life looked like this:

I usually wake up at about 7 a.m. during the week and go to bed at 10 or 11 p.m. I get off from work at 5 o'clock. I arrive home at about 5:20 p.m. My child is not home and my husband comes back home late, so sometimes I come home late too. I often go to the swimming pool near the university where I work, or I stay in one of the classrooms to prepare for my exam. My husband will call me if he has time; we'll go to a restaurant or somewhere to play. Then, we go home. Sometimes we go to the movies; we don't like to go home directly. [When I go out] I take the buses. I like the new buses which can take you anywhere you want to go directly. [Interview February 19, 2002]

Sports was an important item in Wei Hong's weekly schedule: "I am doing sports for my health. I go to a health club in another neighborhood once a week to dance. I keep up a certain amount of exercise. I also go swimming once a week" (Interview February 19, 2002). During their holidays and most weekends the couple traveled, or tried at least to go out of the city.

Exploration is very fashionable. [...] My husband and I want to go to a different place each year [during the holidays]. Our child is growing up. Soon we will be able to go to some tourist cities together. We went to see some historical places in the north of China and some beautiful scenic spots in the south. We go to the mountains around Beijing if we do not have too much time or have a rest at home for a few days. [Interview February 19, 2002]

When I asked Wei Hong how she felt about the changes in Beijing, she brought up various issues: the new availability of household service, her living environment and house.

We are new here but we already feel the great changes. When I was young there were no housework services in society. [Now] housework can be divided into tasks [to delegate]. A woman does not need to bind herself to the home. I like this change. The household workers are reliable. Whenever you call them, they will be there and do the job well. As regards cleaning and doing the laundry, they will finish it on time. When you come back after one or two hours the room is clean and perfect. As for eating, I don't like to spend most of my time cooking. I would rather play with my child and take him to fast food restaurants, both Chinese and western food; not very expensive; these problems are solved. And the bookstores, we have several good bookstores in Wangjing New City. You can take your child there and read. But we really lack sport facilities, both for adults and for children. [...] We wanted to move to the east of the city even before my work unit offered these apartments. The reason we want to move to Shanghai is because the headquarters of my husband's company is moving to Shanghai. We want to sell our old apartment and buy a big new house. This apartment is too small, we want a better one. We will sell one apartment in 5 years. We need one more room. But it is hard for us to realize now. We have to wait. [Interview February 19, 2002]

Asked how she liked Beijing today, Wei Hong expressed mixed feelings about it. She seemed to think more of Shanghai which might have had to do with the family's plan to move to that city. Nonetheless, reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of Beijing, Wei Hong's sentiment conveyed a special appreciation of the new, modern, bustling city atmosphere.

In Beijing I like the universities, the atmosphere of studying. Culture, media are well developed, newspapers and theater are outstanding. But regarding work conditions, they are bad. Another thing is that there are plenty of opportunities for hard-working people, but the working conditions and services are not as good. I feel these are short-comings in this city. [But] this city is grand and magnificent. [...] The Olympic Games are going to be hosted here; the city is better every day. If we don't have the chance to go to Shanghai, staying in Beijing is also a good choice, compared to other cities. For work, for life, for friends, it's a good place. The original Beijingers are rare, though. We often meet people who come from other cities. Both the people from the south and the north are energetic people. They are not satisfied with the old life. They like changes. It's interesting to get to know them. I think that is something special about Beijing. I believe most of these people are excellent. [Interview February 19, 2002]

In the ten years since Wei Hong had first come to Beijing, she experienced incredible changes which she described to me.

The third ring road had not opened when I first came to Beijing. It was in 1993. My husband was my boyfriend at that time, and we circled around the third ring by bike. Beijing was surrounded by villages. Da Zhongsi and the People's University were out in the fields. The city double-extended in these years. Another outstanding change is the public transportation and the infrastructure facilities which are much better than before. [...] Another thing is the girl's clothes changed a lot {laughs}. Beijing was covered in deep blue, black and gray, but now there are all kinds of colors in the streets; very beautiful. The way of living has changed too. There were few people who went to restaurants during the Spring Festival; but now the [restaurants] and tourist spots are filled with people during the holidays. People pay more and more attention to the quality of life. [Interview February 19, 2002]

She continued to reflect on the changes in Beijing's urban landscape:

I agree with the design for Beijing [...]. Beijing is the capital of China and has a long history. I believe Beijing should maintain its traditional construction and morality. I believe Beijing will go back to its own style [...]. No matter if as a tourism city or historic city, Beijing should make improvements in its culture. I know a couple who live in a *siheyuan* [traditional courtyard house]. But the *siheyuan* are being replaced by skyscrapers. [...] I hope we will have a place to show our Chinese culture and let

others see the true essence of China. China is losing her character. [Interview February 19, 2002]

This made her talk about her current living area:

This area is developed by several investors. They don't have a long term plan and design, and it is not a high level living place. It is just an economical department complex for teachers. The interior design of the apartments is lacking, and the distance between the buildings is too close. I think it's a bit disorderly. The developers lack cooperation; they work for their own best interest and have no plan for the whole area. I don't hope for great changes but partial changes are possible. [Interview February 19, 2002]

Even though Wei Hong still worked in a state owned company and her good financial situation was based on her husband's income, I chose to present her account here because her sentiment, and her thoughts, and her discourse reflected the ideas of other young, educated couples with whom that I talked in and around Wangjing.

Wei Hong's thoughts and concerns showed that she was a woman with education who did not have to worry about immediate survival, and had options and possibilities to form profound opinions and ideals which I would associate with an emerging middle class. There was, for example, the awareness and concern about the child's education beyond the ideal of good grades; the concern about body, fitness and health, but also self-fulfillment; the ideal of traveling, "exploration" as Wei Hong called it. Other themes in-

cluded an environmental consciousness, thoughts about the way China will develop and retain its traditions, an interest in politics; a strong sense of a need for self-improvement, in this case by studying law after work to receive another degree and further her career; meeting friends in restaurants and public places; planning activities and trips together; considerations about where to live in the city, that is, considerations beyond the price of an apartment, such as environment, design of the place and area, accessibility, and facilities. All these were topics the young and wealthy dwelled upon.

In contrast to other young, educated, wealthy residents I met around Wangjing, what was special about Wei Hong was that, despite coming from a peasant background, through hard studies she had managed to enter university and, as a result, received an urban hukou which guaranteed a number of privileges and rights. But most importantly, it turned her into a fully legitimized urban citizen in contrast to a poor market woman such as Liang Jiehua (see below). In her early thirties, Wei Hong was part of the last generation of Chinese who received a free education, the only way a person with her family background could afford to get a university degree.

A difference with other women was that she already had a six year old child, which was rather unusual among the young, wealthy couples. The demands of a career in the free market had put so much pressure on women to work hard and perform well that most of them had postponed, although never questioned, childbirth. As regards Wei Hong, employment in the public sector presumably enabled her to have her child while working at the same time. Only now that the child was old enough to stay in a boarding school kindergarten was she planning her career lifetime career, seeking employment in the free market as a lawyer.

3.3 Citizens of Modernity

Young, educated, and wealthy couple's presentation of self focused mainly around work. They portrayed themselves as diligent and dedicated workers who would bear the burden or stress that came with the responsibilities and demands of jobs in the private labor market, or with the need to, and urge for self-improvement through additional education. In other words, young, educated couples had transformed into, and presented themselves as, "modern" subjects who organized their lives around busy work schedules.

After the opening and reform, friends are not easy to get together with. I guess it is because people are too busy with their own work to communicate with others. We only have time to talk with colleagues at work. It's dark when we go back home and its dark when we go to work, so we have little time for friends. [Interview January 22, 2002]

In addition, the young and educated had fully internalized the changed time-space of the reform era. Interviews with them were very much to this point. They expected concrete questions which they answered concisely. Further, they subjected the exchange to a rigid time schedule. After about one and a half hours, the young and educated made clear signs that they considered the interview over by looking repeatedly at their watches, or answering only with "yes" or "no". Overall, the young and educated couples presented themselves as people well-positioned in modern, capitalist time.

Furthermore, property or housing, not to mention where and how they lived, had become a very important topic in the lives of the young and educated, as we have seen in the quote by Liang Yang in Chapter IV.2. They spent a good deal of time on this issue,

continuously investigating the real estate market, visiting housing fairs, but also individualizing and decorating the house itself once they had bought it.

Interestingly, while the “quality” (*suzhi*) of residents was a criterion for choosing a residential area, this was obviously a relative concept. Zhang (2001) compares the Chinese notion of *suzhi* to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. She points out that *suzhi*, like *habitus*, refers to a person’s “disposition, ability, and way of acting” (ibid: 142), characteristics which are conditioned by a person’s upbringing and are therefore hard to change.¹² The changes in newly wealthy urban residents’ evaluation of people’s *suzhi* appeared to reflect their own changing perspectives, and were therefore an indicator of the emerging class structuration of Chinese society. This became evident through the experiences and narratives of Lili, Cao Xiangjun, and her husband Zhou Tianxin, who lived in the mid-level Wangjing residential complex.

Lili, a thirty-something single graphic designer who had worked for several years for a foreign advertising company and was now studying art, had lived in various places throughout Beijing. Two years ago, however, she bought an apartment in the Wangjing residential complex, and she was delighted about her new living place:

Wangjing gives me the best impression of all the places I have lived in.

First, it’s clean, second, it’s well greened. Third, the people have a high quality (*suzhi gao*) in Wangjing. I seldom go out anymore since I have moved to Wangjing. I cannot bear the sight of narrow dirty hutongs [small

¹² Zhang’s point in the context of her study of the Wenzhou migrant community in Beijing is that *suzhi* is a fluid and vague concept that is manipulated by people to serve their own interests. The concept gains specific importance in the process of stereotyping migrants as a homogenous low-*suzhi* group which is inherently different and eternally juxtaposed to the modern Beijing citizen. See Zhang 2001.

alleyways in the inner city] and smelly public toilets. I want to run back home. [Interview, November 24, 2001]

Cao Xiangjun and Zhou Tianxin had bought their apartment in the Wangjing residential complex one year before Lili. Zhou explained how at that time they did not have many choices in the incipient real estate market. Wangjing struck them as a good compromise: “The house was comparatively good, although we did not have as much choice as there is today. The people who could afford to buy a house here [in the complex] were white-collar workers and had good incomes, and we felt that the community and people were good” (Interview June 15, 2002).

To really understand why new commercial housing has become so important in urban residents’ lives, we have to look at their previous living situation. Cao, for example, spent her youth in school and university dormitories and was therefore longing to have her own house. This desire was only reinforced by living for more than four years in a damp basement apartment provided by Zhou’s danwei. But besides the low quality of the apartment itself, it was the life in the danwei that she considered unfavorably in contrast to their current place:

My old neighbors worked in the same company as my husband. We cooked and ate together. Your home was mine, mine was yours. We felt happy, although the house was not good. But now we are far [away] from our [old] neighbors, we are no longer just one big family. [...] We were happy to be with friends [in the old apartment], but whenever friends came

to ask you to eat with them you couldn't refuse, even if you actually wanted to read something, for example. You couldn't refuse even if you felt tired or wanted to study. Now I can do everything I want; I have plenty of time of my own. We knew each other when we lived in the old place; there were no strangers. We knew each of our neighbors. You were afraid to be seen if you were doing something wrong. But now, nobody knows us here, people can do whatever they want. [Interview June 15, 2002]

When I asked Cao what owning a house meant to her, she said, "I feel, I have my own house. I decorate it in my own way and I feel comfortable to live in it. I think it is my home (*jia*). I don't take it only as an apartment (*fangzi*)" (Interview June 15, 2002). Fangzi (apartment) here obviously stood for something exchangeable, non-personal, to which one did not have an (emotional) connection. Jia (home), in contrast, signified something one had an emotional attachment to, but also a sphere where one felt free, independent, at ease. In the continuously repressive political climate of China, housing has become a new-found valuable private space, an inside, which is importantly outside of official surveillance. Even more, through choosing their own apartments, the young and educated made this private sphere a space where they felt they could live and express individuality and freedom. Cao Xiangjun's description of the changes in housing conveyed this very clearly:

In my grandparent's generation, all of the buildings were the same; no character, no decoration. Bare cement floors, a wooden bed, wooden

chairs, and tables; every family was the same. But in my generation we have decorated walls, wooden floors, sofas, and all kinds of other decorations. It's more similar to the pictures in the foreign magazines and movies [Interview June 15, 2002].

At the time when Cao Xiangjun and Zhou Tianxin bought their apartment, their respective careers were just beginning to take off. Cao, with a Ph.D. in Sociology, was promoted at the Japanese investment bank where she had started to work two years before. Zhou had sold his expanding IT company to a state-owned group while continuing to work as its director. The move provided him with guaranteed salary, pension, and social benefits. When I met the couple in 2002, their financial situation had significantly improved, and they were thinking about buying a new apartment. Interestingly, now they pointed to the “low quality” (*suzhi di*) of the other residents in their living complex as one of the reasons why they wanted to make a change. As their friend Tian Ping put it: “They [Cao and Zhou] are not new money like the other people [here] who got rich over night. They depend on their stable salary and they are well educated” (Interview June 15, 2002). Apparently, Cao and Zhou had “outgrown” this middle-class residential complex.

In sum, in terms of their financial means, young, educated couples were the best positioned among the three groups discussed here. In a more general evaluation of urban Chinese, or more precisely, Beijing salaries, their income levels positioned them in the

medium to high stratum of emerging income classes.¹³ The financial well-being of the young, educated was illustrated by their newly acquired life-style: not only did they live in new, relatively spacious apartments that were predominantly equipped with modern, western-style furniture; they also used their financial means to frequently visit restaurants, to travel, or buy selected consumer goods, such as computers and, increasingly, cars. In addition, Wei Hong and other couples I talked to all had domestic employees to help in the household, they frequently sent their children to boarding schools during the week, and commuted to their work places by private car, company shuttle buses, or taxi.

Based on their financial means, the young and educated couples led a life organized by, and based on choice. They lived in the Wangjing suburban area because they had chosen to. That is, the couples had investigated the property market and decided on this residential neighborhood because they considered its position in the north favorable to meet their newly developed values of a more spacious layout, privacy, and a clean environment. In addition, they frequently cited the neighborhood's convenient location in relation to the inner city, especially the new CBD, where many of them worked. Even the

¹³ According to the *Beijing Statistical Bureau* (2001), in 2000 high income households had an average yearly cash income of RMB 22,622.01; medium high income households had RMB 13,964.29, and medium income households RMB 11,699.46 per annum (See Appendix B for complete data). The Chinese Academy of Science reported that in 2004, 19 percent of Chinese people (49 percent of urban Chinese) belonged to the "middle class," defined as families with assets of RMB 150,000 to 300,000, up from 15 percent in 1999 (Wan 2004). Other studies, however, find that only 5.04 percent of the Chinese population can be considered "middle class" as defined by earning a minimum of RMB 80,000 per annum. These kinds of statistics, however, are questionable and likely to be politically influenced. In January 2004, Communist party leaders decided that RMB 5,000 income per month should qualify a household to be considered "middle class." This figure is needed to achieve the Party's set target that by 2020 a "considerable portion" of the population will be categorized as "middle income" earners. Keeping the minimum income for middle class status at RMB 80,000 per annum would prevent the fulfillment of the plan (cf. SCMP, 1/20/2005). The background for lowering the minimum income definition of "middle class" is that income inequalities in China are actually rising. One measure of inequality, the Gini coefficient, has risen sharply in the last years. Between 1988 and 1997, the Gini coefficient rose from 0.35 to 0.4 (Wang, Hu, and Ding 2005). In Beijing in 2000, the average annual per capita salary for employees and workers was RMB 15,600, up 13.2 percent from the previous years. The annual per capita disposable income of urban households reached RMB 10,349, up 12.7 percent from 1999 (*Beijing Statistical Bureau* 2001). In order to meet the RMB 60,000 per annum target, salaries will have to continue rising at least at the current rate.

couples who had purchased the apartment from their danwei, that is, who did not have as much choice as the others who looked for an apartment in the free real estate market, said that they had wanted to live in the area even before they were offered the house through their work unit.

The young educated couples were able to choose their work, where and how they lived, and according to which life-style. They also chose when and how to move throughout the city. Despite the stress that young educated Chinese felt from their competitive work lives, they frequently exhibited a “being-on-top-of-the-world” attitude. Financial independence and career success put them in charge and in control of their lives, and they were quite confident about their future.

I do not want to suggest, however, that the couples did not also feel constraints and limits. Their thoughts about China’s place in the world, about emigrating, and their wish to have more than one child all expressed a difficult positioning in society, a positioning that required negotiation between a modern urban Chinese identity and the framework set by the regime and individual desires. In this negotiated identity, specifically, they felt the limitations set by the regime. However, as I have demonstrated, housing had become a new space of individuality and freedom outside the official confines; one into which the young couples poured a great deliberation and attention.

Housing had indeed become so important that the young and educated were even willing to challenge authority. In the course of the transformations within the city and the development of new residential areas such as Wangjing, there have been several conflicts between developers and home owners. In consequence, previously unknown public protests are being held, which sometimes even turn violent. While I conducted my research,

in “Atlantic Place” various windows were covered with huge protest posters. I asked Wang Xing, who lived in the complex, about it when I visited her, and she told me that there was a conflict between the developer and the homeowners over particular unfulfilled promises.

After I left China, newspaper reports about similar disputes in the research area soared. In July of 2003, for example, there was a series of scuffles between homeowners and construction workers in one complex. Several people were injured and many cars destroyed. Clashes broke out after developers and city planners altered the original layout of the complexes. Three days later, homeowners drove along Chang’an Avenue in a 48-car convoy, equipped with banners and slogans, to protest outside the city construction commission (cf. Josephine Ma 2003a, 2003b).

Chaoyang district, to which the Wangjing area belongs, has become a battleground for homeowners and developers. Many property disputes take place in mid-range residential complexes where most residents are middle class. The protesters are well-educated, with sophisticated organizing power, and many operate their own websites and chat rooms. Whether such collective actions by middle-class homeowners will grow into more lasting class-based action, however, is questionable in the light of residents’ obvious appreciation of the new-found anonymity of commercial housing complexes.

In sum, the young and educated, wealthy residents of Wangjing are hard working, ambitious, and studious. They are very aware of the need to make money in order to secure their own, and their (prospective) child’s future. At the same time, they enjoy their financial independence and the possibilities money has opened up in the transformed urban environment.

4 Migrants

4.1 Liang Jiehua, a Migrant Market Woman

I have already described the migrant woman Liang Jiehua's coming to the city (see Chapter II). To recall, her poor peasant background gave her little chance of receiving higher education because of the overall difficult situation in the countryside. After failing the university entrance exam, Liang decided to migrate to Beijing to escape from farm work, earn a little money, and marry better than in the village. Once in Beijing, she frequently changed jobs either to find better conditions and higher salaries, or to accommodate a personal life situation, such as the birth of her son. These were all characteristic experiences that Liang Jiehua shared with other migrants her age.

After her marriage, Liang Jiehua lived with her husband, who had an urban hukou, in a pingfang house which belonged to his work unit. Two years ago, the house was torn down to make way for a new road. The couple moved to their current place, another pingfang house provided through the husband's danwei, which lay even further out of the city, beyond the fifth ring road. Even though the house was very simple, Liang Jiehua considered her living situation better than in the countryside where she came from. But it was said that even her current home would be torn down soon. Liang Jiehua was sure, however, that her husband's danwei would help them find a new house, maybe even help them buy a small apartment.

Liang's husband worked for the Beijing City Horticultural Department, which took care of the green spaces throughout the city. As a public sector unit, the employer guaranteed his medical insurance, pension, and housing allowance. This policy, however, only extended to their son and to the husband's mother, not to Liang. When I asked her

what happened if she became ill, Liang's answer was quite sober: "If you have money you can get treatment. If not, you have to bear it" (Liang Jiehua 2002). Accordingly, Liang's biggest worry was to get sick.

I am afraid to get ill when I am growing old. I have rheumatism already, and I have to pay for it endlessly. Rheumatism is just like cancer which cannot be cured, although it is not a matter of life and death, but it makes my life very uncomfortable. I am afraid of what I will do when I am old and all my money is gone. [Interview June 4, 2002]

Despite the limited social benefits the couple received through the husband's danwei, his real take-home salary was very low, first, because it was not a profit-making company, and second, because Liang's husband was not old enough to receive seniority benefits. With growing living expenses, the family was therefore struggling financially, especially since Liang Jiehua also had sent money to her mother until she passed away, and their son was now attending a better, but more expensive middle school around Wangjing.

His [husband's] salary is very low. I had to send money to my mother at that time because it had not been easy for her to bring me up. I sent 50 Yuan [RMB] each month to her during the first year. [I sent] clothes. I paid for my mother's medical expenses and for her operation. I could make 90 Yuan [RMB]. With the rest of the money I paid for my food and clothes. [Interview June 4, 2002]

Since her parents had both passed away three years ago, Liang had not visited her hometown. The way she supported her siblings was by helping her nieces and nephews who came to Beijing in the hope of finding better living conditions than in their hometown. Especially the girls stayed with Liang Jiehua until they got married, and some also worked at times with her in the market.

When Liang Jiehua decided to set up her own sales stall, she began by selling socks, underwear, and small stuff. Only after she had earned some money, she ventured into the clothing business. After she became a private entrepreneur, she changed markets several times. This, however, was less because of choice than because of necessity.

I worked in many places. I was at Xinqiao Dashijie near Chongwenmen, at Tianqiao, at Dongzhimen, and at Dashanzi. It is always because the markets were torn down. Otherwise I would not have left. I was at Dashanzi [in the north-east of Wangjing] for six years; it was torn down in 1996. After that I went to Tianqiao [in the south of the city] for a year. Then I went to Dongzhimen [in the east] for a year before I came here. They would inform us one month before the destruction, so we would start to look for a new place. [Interview June 4, 2002]

Changing markets was not easy, she explained. In the beginning she always had to learn anew what kind of customers lived around the area and what would sell. Closeness to her house, however, was never a factor in selecting the market where she worked since there were not enough options. "It took two hours by bus from Tianqiao to my

home. I didn't find a good place in my area, so I had to move somewhere far" (Interview June 20, 2002).

Asked what she thought about her life, Liang said that in comparison with her siblings she was busier and more tense. Her siblings worked in the fields and could take a rest whenever they wanted to. But she had a higher income and her life was more comfortable. Not surprisingly, she considered the reforms a positive development: "They made my life better. In every way I am better off than before" (Interview June 20, 2002). Liang Jiehua's dream was to buy a car, but even more, that her son would attend college. She thought that he had much better chances in life if he would receive higher education.

He can only be good in society if he learns a lot. Yes, it is true that some book-learned men don't make money but nobody can make money without knowledge. That small group of uneducated people gets rich only by chance. Well-learned people can make more money than others. Why do laborers do the hard work? Because they have no knowledge and skills. [Interview June 20, 2002]

Liang Jiehua's account illustrates many of the recurrent themes in market men and women's lives. There is, for example, the unstable, sub- or low-standard living condition, and moving further and further out of the city; the search for jobs and housing which was not guided by location within the city, but ruled by limited availability of places; in addition, the support of parents in the countryside, and the feeling of improvement in contrast to life in the countryside. Finally, like many migrants to the big cities, Liang Jiehua supported nephews and nieces who followed her to Beijing.

While Liang emphasized that the reforms had improved her life, she also felt tense, stressed, and tired. This was connected to her worries about the future, especially in regard to her health once she grew older. Shared with many other migrant women, her dreams for the future centered around her son for whom she wished a better life based on education and knowledge.

Liang Jiehua's experiences, however, while illustrative of this group of women, were in important aspects also different. For example, Liang Jiehua's situation was considered better than other women's because she was married to a man with Beijing hukou and danwei which gave her a certain safety net to fall back on. Independently of what she was able to earn in the market, her family could rely on her husband's salary. Other women who came to Beijing together with their husbands did not have such an option. They relied entirely on their labor power and what they were able to sell in the free market. Furthermore, based on the fact that she had the highest education among the women working in the market with her, and her many years of experience in Beijing, Liang Jiehua had assumed a role of advising and supporting other women. With a high school diploma, and having even tried the entrance exam for the university, she seemed to other women to have success in selling clothes because of her superior educational level. They often came to Liang Jiehua to ask her to write sales signs for them, saying that they either could not write, or at least not as well as she did.

4.2 Business *Hai Keyi* (So-so), Feeling *Hen Lei* (Very Tired)

Market men and women repeatedly talked about how tired they were. Not surprisingly so, since their lives centered completely around their jobs. They worked every day, from

seven in the morning until seven or eight at night. They hardly ever took a day off, not to speak of a vacation, since every missed day meant no income while they still had to pay for their stalls, rent, and daily expenses. Correspondingly, the most frequent answer to the question “How are you?” was “*hen lei*” (very tired).

One day Liang Jiehua wanted to know what I thought about her life, which I found hard to answer. She specified, “Do you think, my life is *kunnan* (difficult), *tongku* (painful, suffering), or *lei* (tiresome, fatigued)?” Instead of answering, I asked her how she felt, and she said: “I feel very tired. I am always tired. I don’t rest all year long. Only during the Spring Festival [Chinese New Year] for a couple of days. Do people in other countries also work so hard? How is that in Germany? How in the U.S.?” (Notes May 27, 2002)

In the course of talking about their difficult, insecure, and exhausting situation, the migrants at the market and I got into a discussion about the effects of the reform period on people’s lives. I wondered if they had any negative feelings, which they denied. “Life is much better today than before the reforms. Now it is up to you to make something out of your life” (Notes February 26, 2002). Nonetheless, a little later one woman also said: “People in China develop in two ways today: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. But there is nothing to do about that. I don’t think the government can change anything about that. We have too many people in China” (Notes June 11, 2002). This was a characteristic statement for the market women: a sense of liberty to determine one’s own fate that was combined with a certain resignation about the results of their struggle to secure a better life for themselves. Nonetheless, I never heard any bitterness or com-

plaints. On the contrary, the women appeared to feel to a certain degree that they deserved to be where they were.

Migrant market women actually showed a certain sentiment of inverted blame. They all referred to themselves as “*nongcunren*,” that is, people from the countryside, no matter for how long they had lived in the city. In addition, they repeated the current societal and governmental discourse of migrants’ lack of education and culture by referring to themselves as “dumb” (*hen ben*) and “uncultured” (*mei you hua*). Nonetheless, the way they used this identification was less negative than matter-of-factly. At times they even joked about it.

In contrast, they had built a very strong sense of moral virtue, of being good women who worked hard for their living, and, specifically, who enabled their children to have a better future. Market women, for example, frequently pointed to female customers who were allegedly prostitutes, remarking, “They are bad women. I would never do *that*, no matter how poor I was. I would rather die than do *that*!” (Notes August 15, 2002)

Several of the market women I talked to, also prided themselves in being honest sales women. They did not try to convince someone to buy something that did not fit or did not look good, they were willing to exchange products that customers returned, and the customary bargaining was conducted according to very specific rules.

Migrants are generally not treated very well, or seen in a very positive light by the permanent residents of Chinese cities. On the contrary, it has become quite common to blame crimes and problems in the metropolis on the migrant population. For example, both the elderly danwei residents and young educated couples I interviewed frequently

blamed the dirt and pollution in the city on the “uncultured” migrant population who did not know how to behave properly. Reports of crimes in the city committed by people from the countryside were standard fare in local newspapers. I asked the market women if they had experienced any form of maltreatment, or if they felt looked down upon, and one of them said: “Some [people] look down on me, but I can look down on them the same and I can give back in words. I think it is all about who you are, not where you are from. If you are a good person or not” (Notes, June 7, 2002).

“Its all about who you are,” “if you are a good person or not,” these statements reflected a general attitude that I observed in the migrants I talked to throughout my research: they had adopted a discourse of diligence and honesty as regards their work and lives which was intended to position them in contrast to the official and public discourse on the “*liudong renkou*” (floating population).

As Solinger (1999) and Zhang (2001) have elaborated, migrants are frequently described as a homogenous mass which is inherently juxtaposed to modern urban citizens. Their portrayal as a flood-like, formless mass has stirred fears of urban residents that migrants “take over” the cities. Further, since a stable people-place relationship is largely regarded as a normal way of living and as a basis for social stability, migratory flows are considered destabilizing, abnormal, and even pathological. Spatially mobile and allegedly rootless migrants are almost synonymous with criminals, since detachment from any urban community is believed to create a lack of moral responsibility. Chinese language reinforces these cultural interpretations. The word *liudong* means to be rootless, unstable,

and dangerous.¹⁴ Since rootedness has been considered the normal state of being since imperial times (and continued in the socialist household registration system), mobile people (*liumin*) tend to be associated with destructive images. They are considered to be unstable and dangerous social forces. Zhang (2001), therefore, points out that given the history of the cultural semantics of floating, calling migrants floaters conveys a host of derogatory meanings.

I maintain that it was in contrast to this discourse of the “floating population” that the migrants in the markets around Wangjing portrayed themselves not only as hard-working, but also as honest sales-people. In addition, I assume that this was also the background for their tendency to downplay their business success. I am not suggesting that the migrants in the markets I visited made big profits. Nonetheless, it struck me as odd that no matter how much they had sold, when I asked sales people how business was going, they always answered “*hai keyi*” (passable, so-so). There appeared to be a strong reluctance to boast about one’s business success. On the contrary, migrant entrepreneurs in the markets in Wangjing had developed a culture of “downplaying” and a new form of “speaking bitterness,” one that stressed the hardship and effort they put into improving their living conditions without complaining. This, together with a self-representation as morally valuable persons, functioned as identity in the face of societal scorn and discrimination.

¹⁴ Zhang (2001) points out that the word *liudong* actually has another meaning: to be lively and unencumbered. Dominant discourse, however, emphasizes the negative meaning, drawing connections to other terms such as *liumin* (vagrants, homeless people), *liumang* (hooligans), and *mangliu* (an unregulated flow of people). See also Solinger 1999.

In sum, migrants who worked in the markets around Wangjing had made one decisive choice in their lives, although one that was majorly influenced by economic need: to migrate to the city. This decision now marked their lives. Without an urban hukou, migrants were prone to live on the edges of the city proper, where they rented simple pingfang houses of uncertain viability. These residences, indeed, were under constant threat of being torn down to make way for new development projects. Similarly, migrants could only work menial jobs that urban residents did not want, such as in construction or as household employees. The alternative was to sell their physical labor by operating transport-bicycles, for example, or to venture into private entrepreneurship, selling goods in markets.

Generally, the migrants had the fewest choices to determine their lives among the three groups discussed here. Their lives were strongly marked by the struggle to “make ends meet,” to provide for their children, and to save as much money as possible to secure their financial future as they did not have any insurance or social securities. Yet, despite this unpredictability in their lives, the migrant market women considered themselves fortunate in comparison with their classmates and families in their hometowns.

Conclusion

The young, educated couples living in commercial housing, elderly danwei residents, and migrant market women, as discussed here, were part of the emerging socio-economic stratification process of Chinese urban society. Wangjing residents were set apart from one another by age, education, status, residence, access to resources, and the amount and kind of choices they had to design their lives. In addition, the three groups of residents

showed attitudes, convictions, sentiments, and ideologies, born from their individual trajectories and influenced by shared experiences which in turn reinforced the socio-economic divisions that existed between them.

In addition to forming distinctive groups that we could describe as emerging socio-economic classes, the differences among them also translated into diverging circles or scales of movement. Specifically, young, wealthy couples who lived in Wangjing traversed between their residences, their place of work in the inner city, and places of leisure and entertainment throughout the urban area. Migrant market women circled between the markets within the research area, the places where they bought supplies that were spread throughout the city, and their residences, which most often lay further out from the built-up zone. Elderly danwei residents, in contrast, predominantly moved within the suburb, gravitating around their residential danwei compound and its vicinity. The Wangjing area as a whole was marked by the crosscutting of these circles, the movements in and out of the area, into the inner city, and the hinterland.

Chapter VI Consumption and the Geography of Space and Social Status

1 Consumption

1.1 A Relatively Well-Off Society

Bourdieu's work on lifestyle and *habitus* (1984) argues that a close study of domestic investments can identify social boundaries and hierarchies. This points to an important area of socio-economic differentiations, namely, consumption.

The introduction of capitalist goods, ideas, and practices in reform period China has triggered a consumerism that "reconfigures relationships and self-identities from the ground up" (Chen et al. 2001). Especially the 1990s have been characterized by a state-sanctioned and transnationally produced valorization of consumption. Consumption has, in fact, become a central aspect of Chinese (urban) life, and one that is actively supported by the government. The achievement of a "well-off society" is equated with a "relatively comfortable life" (*xiaokang*)¹ (Hooper 1998). This includes improving people's working environment and housing, but also raising the level of personal consumption. Premier Wen Jiabao recently called for expanding consumer credit and boosting consumer confidence (Collier 2004). To this end, public holidays have been increased and public-sector salaries were raised (cf. Becker 2001). Further stimulating consumer spending by Chinese citizens are advertisement agencies. Non-existent until the reform period, by 1994

¹ Lu Hanlong (2000) explains that the notion of a *xiaokang* society derives from the Confucian "Book of Rites" where the expression indicated the transformation of an equal society (*datong*) in which "all under heaven is public" (*tianxia wei gong*) into one where "all under heaven belongs to the family" (*tianxia wei jia*). The Chinese government's use of the term *xiaokang*, therefore, reflects its acceptance of an economically stratified society.

their number had already grown to over 30,000, with an annual turnover of over more than RMB 9.6 billion (US\$ 1.2 billion) (Hooper 1998).

Urban residents have experienced significant financial improvements since 1978. Per capita income doubled between 1978 and 1990, and had increased another 50 percent by 1994.² Personal savings of city households reached RMB 1,536 billion (US\$ 192 billion) in 1994,³ and per capita consumption rose 7 percent annually since the beginning of economic reforms (Davis 2000). By 1994, an estimated 4.3 million Chinese earned over RMB 30,000 (US\$ 3,750) per annum, enough to allow people to enjoy many of the material benefits offered by China's modernizing society. In addition, over 100 million people with an annual income of more than RMB 8,000 (US\$ 1,000) were aspiring to the new middle class. By 2000, this figure was assumed to have reached 270 million (Hooper 1998). In Beijing, annual per capita income in 2000 was RMB 15,000 (US\$ 1,875), while the annual disposable income of urban households reached RMB 10,349.7 (US\$ 1,284). At the end of 2000, saving deposits in Beijing totaled RMB 292.32 billion (US\$ 36.54 billion), of which RMB 266.33 billion (US\$ 33.29 billion) belonged to urban households (*Beijing Statistical Bureau* 2001). A new development plan for the city has set as its target the increase of per capita income by an annual 6 percent in the next five years. If successful, the annual per capita income of Beijing residents would reach nearly RMB 20,000 (US\$ 2,400) by 2008 (*China Daily* 2002).⁴

² Hooper (1998) points out that the average per capita income of RMB 5,240 (US\$ 655) actually remains one of the lowest in Asia. Nonetheless, this disguises a Purchasing Power Parity which amounts to RMB 31,560 (US\$ 3,945).

³ Up from RMB 14.8 billion (US\$ 1.85 billion) in 1978 and RMB 500 billion (US\$ 62.5) billion in 1990. See Davis 2000.

⁴ It is, however, important to note that at the same time that overall per capita income is rising in Beijing, income disparities are growing too. A survey of salaries in 86 occupations conducted by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics in 2001 showed that employees in some of Beijing's more lucrative occupations

As a result of these developments, formerly scarce consumer goods such as washing machines and refrigerators have become customary purchases, and a host of once exotic products are now commonplace in retail outlets throughout urban China. In 1990, there were 20,000 cellular phones in China, but in 1995 the number had already risen to 3.4 million (Davis 2000). Between 1990 and 1999, the number of cars bought by individuals grew at an average annual rate of 23.2 percent. In the first four months of 2002 alone, 78,000 new cars were registered at the traffic administration department, a 43 percent rise from the previous year (Ye Jun 2002a).⁵

Ownership of a private car today holds allure for millions of Chinese people. While in the 1970s it was bicycles and sewing machines, and in the 1980s and early 1990s it was a TV and a refrigerator that were perceived as status symbols, today the car and home have replaced them. These are the products a man must be able to offer a woman in order to have a chance at making a good marriage match (Carmel 2001, Ye Jun 2002a).

1.2 Stratification through Consumption

While many objects have a practical value, in many ways their significance is linked to the status they symbolize. Objects are not simply consumed. More than satisfying simple

earned almost seven times as much as employees in low-end professions. The gap is, in fact, widening by 160 percent year-on-year. About four million people, that is 39.4 percent of all workers in Beijing, earned more than the average, while 30 percent earned less than RMB 15,000 (US\$ 1,875) per annum. Employees in the financial and insurance sector experienced the biggest increase in 2001: a 63.2 percent jump brought their salaries up to an average RMB 37,000 (US\$ 4,625) in 2001. See *Business Beijing*, April 2002.

⁵ The government itself has embraced the new car-mania. In its Tenth Five Year Plan it promotes the ownership of cars as a means to boost the domestic car industry. See Carmel 2001. As a result of the current "car-frenzy", among other reasons, Shenzhen China Bicycle Company, which is one of the world's biggest bicycle manufacturers, producing 2.5 million bicycles annually, experienced a net loss of two billion RMB for 2001. See Koh 2002.

needs, they are also produced to signify status, which is possible because of their differential relationship with other objects. In a fully developed consumer society, objects become signs of status, while the aspect of necessity is secondary. Consumption does not homogenize, but, on the contrary, it differentiates through the “sign system of objects” (Baudrillard 1981). Not only economic needs, but life-style and values are the basis of social life (cf. Lechte 1994).

Douglas and Isherwood (1979), suggest that consumption behavior at once expresses and also generates cultural patterns, and that consumption is a form of communication among individuals and groups. Thus, goods are “less objects of desire than threads of a veil that disguises the social relations under it” (ibid. 202). Consumption activities are statements about people, “moral judgments about what a man is, what a woman is, how a man ought to treat his parents, how much of a start in life he ought to give his sons and daughters” (ibid.: 58). Decisions to consume are embedded in and shaped by the culture of which the person is a part.

Douglas and Isherwood also show that consumption patterns delineate social classes in complex societies. In fact, the proposition is advanced that consumption, usually accompanied by information exchange, promotes exclusivity and group boundaries. The authors link consumption of goods to consumption of time by showing how differential use of time distinguishes social classes.

Consumption, however, is often seen as a mere passive act, where agency and creativity are located only in the act of production: the consumer appears to be a “mindless creature” that follows the lure of the object, and consumption is merely the recognition or misrecognition of the aesthetic intention. From a different perspective, consump-

tion can be understood as a symbolic act of creativity. As Storey (1993:121) puts it: “Commercially provided culture [...] is redefined, reshaped and redirected in strategic acts of selective consumption and productive acts of reading and articulation, often in ways not intended or even foreseen by its producers.”⁶

While I don’t want to exaggerate the “creative” aspect of consumption, I think it is important to note that consumers exert a certain amount of agency in the process of consuming, and that consumer articles can be turned into “messages” beyond their original intention. A case in point, which I will discuss in the following pages, is the way commercial housing in China today is consumed by middle- and upper urban income groups to underline emerging socio-economic differentiations in society.

Housing, in fact, is the point where consumption interacts with the new class structuration of society. To understand this relationship we can use Max Weber’s distinction between classes and status groups. In addition to classes, which are formed on the basis of people’s relationship to the system of production, Weber introduced the concept of the “status group,” which further differentiates social classes. Status groups tend to be held together by common lifestyles and patterns of consumption. (cf. Bradley 1995). In the reform period in urban China, the consumption of housing is connected to the real or perceived lifestyle associated with different residential complexes and locations and is integral to the formation of discrete status groups.

The purchase of commercial housing in specific locations points to another important aspect of consumption: its link to place. Not simply for the obvious reason that we must consume things in place, but in the more important sense that consumption is a

⁶ See also Storper (2000) for a discussion of consumer culture, globalization, and inequality.

place-creating and place-altering act (Sack 1992). Taking the “creative aspect” of consumption into account, we can in fact see consumption as among the most important means by which we become powerful geographical agents in our day-to-day lives. In the Chinese case, the way urban residents consume goods, housing, and indeed lifestyles today has an important effect on the reconfiguration of space and society. The preference for certain places and styles, for example, is influenced by a variety of factors, not all of which are necessarily rational. In addition, these choices transmit specific messages. Adapting Douglas and Isherwood’s (1979) point of the consumption of time as an expression of the distinctions between social classes, I would suggest that, in fact, the consumption of space has turned into a marker of difference, an indicator of new class “structuration” as Zhang (2004) has called the emerging socio-economic differentiations of reform-period China. In this way, consumption behavior takes an important part in the reconfigurations of social space in present-day urban China.

2 Consuming the City

2.1 Decorating Modernity

In Borneman’s (1997) research on East and West German’s identifications, he found that West German people, in contrast to East Germans, related their life stories to events such as the monetary reform after WWII, the purchase of a private car, and vacation time – signs of a growing prosperity of the FRG as a country, as well as of the West German people individually. In my conversations with elderly danwei residents in China, I could observe the emerging identification with similar topics of prosperity. Fang taitai, for ex-

ample, referred to post-reform China as a country that was becoming rich, and other people mentioned their own improving life situation, or the growing wealth of their children. In the exceptional case that they owned a car, that was one of the first things the elderly mentioned after introducing themselves. In this way, the elderly danwei residents' accounts not only reflected the growing trend of consumption, but also the fact that in contemporary urban China socio-economic differentiation and social status are increasingly linked to consumer goods and identified with consumption power.

Unlike the German case, these identifications are intimately connected to a specific cultural context: the modernization project on which China has embarked since the late 19th century. China's semi-colonial experience of the 19th century spurred modernization attempts such as the "May Fourth Movement," but in the early 20th century also gave birth to the Communist Party. Developing a nation-state and society that was on a par with, or "as modern as," the former western colonizers was one of the main driving forces behind the Chinese socialist project and its appeal to the people. Socialism held the promise to reach that "modernity" faster than these nations had themselves, if not to overtake them. Since the reform period, the unacknowledged disappointment in the alternative project of socialism has popularly been converted into a desire for wealth, symbolized by consumer goods and consumer spending, as an indicator for the arrival in "modernity". This sentiment has been aptly put into words by Rofel (1999), which I will here quote at length:

The ruptures of China's successive imaginaries of modernity mark a desire, begun within a history of semicolonialism and repeatedly deferred, to position China as a nation-state that has fully arrived in the selfsame iden-

tity as former western colonizers. Indeed, the answer to why the project of modernity presents itself as so compelling in China, why it has been pursued so persistently, lies in the specter of China's exclusion, which serves to construct a Eurocentric universalist modernity. The strength of socialism in China derived, in part, from this history of semicolonialism and the search to make China a vigorous nation-state. This deferred desire lives on, now motivating postsocialist pursuits of wealth and power. [ibid. 8]

Since few of the elderly had the economic means to engage in conspicuous consumption, the elderly's sense of personal life improvement, of arrival in "modernity," majorly centered around the type and size of housing they lived in. After the years of residing in small, cramped, and damp pingfang houses, often without running water and outside toilets, to now live in, and *own* an apartment – no matter how simple these were in standard – was a considerable and tangible improvement of their living condition. 62-year-old Shao Xiaolei, who lived in Xin Yuan, lucidly described this process of improvement:

I feel great. I was worried about my food, clothes and house. The houses before were small, wet, and dim, now we have big bright houses. People did not dare to think about good houses at that time. Now the government is trying to meet the demands of the citizens who want to have better apartments. People are happier. [Interview May 22, 2002]

Especially since the 1990s, an additional indicator of success or improvement is the way a house is “decorated” (*zhuangxiu*), which can mean anything from a picture on the wall to the installation of a western-style toilet. Fang taitai, for example, appeared to consider the quality of “decoration” as a proof of the life improvement of her children: “Their houses are decorated very well.” (Interview May 31, 2002).

While the “decorating fever” (Tang 1998) is certainly the result of the lures of a growing consumer culture, for danwei residents with limited financial means “decoration” has also served to improve their houses and living conditions. In addition, decorating one’s house has become a way to express personal tastes and preferences, individualizing private spaces in an almost symbolic act of rejecting the Maoist standardized aesthetic of austerity. In this process, *how* much the elderly could invest in the “decoration” of their house did not matter as much as the act itself. Xia taitai (age 62), for example, related:

I have always been living in the dormitory, but the first place I lived was in the countryside after I got married. My window was facing the field and I had to go outside for the toilet and to wash myself. A lot of flies in the summer. Now we live in a building and have our own toilet. Our standard of living is rising. We have decorated our house, although in the most simple manner. [Interview June 5, 2002]

Despite the desire for better housing and decoration, generally consumption was not an important aspect of the elderly’s lives, for two reasons: First, the elderly did not have a lot of spending money, and second, under the socialist system they had also been

trained to save and be frugal. This pattern of consumption behavior was expressed by Liu Wenhong (age 56), an elderly retired worker who was now a consultant to his former company. "The ways of spending money are also different. They [his children's generation] spend money easily. We seldom buy anything" (Interview August 19, 2002). 61-year-old Hen Xiewei's statement, however, brought the economic restrictions on consumption more clearly to the fore: "Our life is simple. I seldom take the taxi. I take buses in order to save money. I don't go to restaurants, because it's expensive. I can eat fast food." (Interview June 17, 2002). Limited financial means significantly reduced danwei residents' choices in life -- in regard to participating in today's consumer society, as well as in regard to their living situation. When I asked Wen Haitian (age 65), a retired factory worker, what he thought about his danwei compound his answer strongly brought out the lack of choice he had in this question. "The environment is okay. I'm very good at adapting to all kinds of environments. It's not a question of liking it or not. I cannot change it, so I have to adjust myself to it" (Interview August 19, 2002).

In sum, while elderly danwei residents were susceptible to the "lures" of consumer society, their limited financial means, but also their different socialization restrained their full-scale participation in it. Rather, they invested in modest "decoration" of their houses, which not only objectively raised their living standards but to them was also an appropriate indicator of life improvement. Generally, instead of paying too much attention to personal acquisitions, more important to them was the overall rise of living standards in China, a symbol of its arrival in "modernity."

2.2 The Consumption of Housing

Independently of their present financial situation or of the type of housing they actually lived in, my young and educated informants around Wangjing all indicated that they considered their present residence a compromise, a solution for the time being. Notably, couples who had significantly improved their financial situation, such as Cao and Zhou, but also Wei Hong (see Chapter V), seemed to be self-conscious about the neighborhood, pointing out its short comings and indicating that they were thinking about moving somewhere else – better by implication.

To the young and educated with well-paying jobs, consumption of housing had apparently turned into an ever-lasting “hunt” for a better place. What they were looking for, they said, was a more convenient location, more amenities, better environment, bigger space. In a stratifying urban society where socio-economic differentiations are only becoming apparent, housing has turned into one of the prime markers of new found status. Besides the ownership of a car, travel and leisure activities in general, children’s schools, and clothing styles, where one lives is an indicator of one’s financial well-being. This circumstance is surprisingly apparent when the young and educated talk about the time it takes them to commute to their places of work. While many of my informants said that the convenient traffic connection was one of the attractive points of Wangjing, in reality they spent a lot of time between their homes and their companies. Wang Xingmei, for example, lived in Atlantic Place and worked in the CBD. By taxi, she needed a little less than an hour to get there. Xuan Wei, in contrast, who also worked in the CBD, lived in a special development zone in Beijing’s south and needed only twenty minutes to half an hour to reach her workplace by car. With the increasing construction and development

in Wangjing, actually several of the young and educated reported that traffic jams were becoming more frequent in the north-eastern part of the city. Residential neighborhoods in the south of Beijing, which have not been very popular, therefore might in fact offer more concrete advantages in terms of traffic convenience and connections than Wangjing. Nonetheless, my informants insisted on living in the northern part of the city.

During my research, whenever Beijing people asked me what I was doing in China, and my answer was that I was conducting an investigation in Wangjing, most often their reaction was similar to the one of my friend Weilin: “*Ay, furen qude difang*” (Ay, the place of rich people’s communities). Within Beijing’s social fabric, “Wangjing” had become a marker of wealth, and apparently this was an important reason why the young and educated couples chose to buy an apartment in this part of the city.

Within the research locale itself, there existed even more differentiations among the various xiaoqu, and to say one lived in “Atlantic Place” made it clear to anyone that one was financially better positioned than somebody who lived in “Hua Yuan.” In fact, the name itself already suggested whether a residential development was danwei or privately financed. All the former all had names such as “Xin Yuan,” “Hong Yuan,” or “Hua Yuan”; *yuan* meaning “garden” or “a place for public recreation.” Commercially financed properties, on the other hand, had names such as “*Xinghai Mingzhu*” (Star-sea Jewel), “Saint Angel *Shengxin*” (Saint Angel Holy Fragrance), or “*Daxiyang Xinchengzhi*/ Atlantic Place.” (I will come back to the symbolic significance in these names in the following section.)

Zhang (2004) points to the fact that in present-day China it is a social taboo among the newly rich to ask exactly how, and how *much* money one makes because

many business transactions are done outside of the official realm. It was indeed remarkable to note the difference between danwei residents, who immediately revealed how much they earned or how high their pensions were without being asked, and the wealthy couples living in commercial housing, who remained vague even when asked directly about their incomes. In this circumstance, Zhang (2004:11) notes that if “it is the case that the production of wealth is kept secret and intentionally made opaque, then the viable way to assert and maintain one’s status is through conspicuous material consumption.”

Consumption, indeed, had become a major aspect of wealthy urban residents in China. So much so that my friend Zhang Jie repeatedly noted that she was happy that her husband was an artist who was not interested in “shopping, fashion, movies, and all those things. All he buys is books” (Notes May 27, 2002). Nonetheless, based on my interviews with the young and educated in Wangjing, I would claim that for the majority of them consumption actually extended less to consumer goods than to a lifestyle. In fact, many of my informants stressed that they did not have the time to go shopping for clothes, and so forth. They were too busy working and studying in the after-hours. This stands in slight contrast to Zhang’s (2004) findings in “rich people’s” communities. Nonetheless, the reason might be that my investigation concentrated less on the most upscale residential complexes and, therefore, the wealthiest urban residents, and more on the emerging middle class. Although they engaged in various new, and costly leisure activities (such as traveling, joining gyms, taking in movies and expensive restaurants), saving money to buy better housing was higher on the agenda than excessive consumption.

Tong and Hays (1996) noted that “housing is the material symbol of having a family and has always been viewed as the source of safety and happiness in Chinese life.”

This relation is reflected in the language: in Chinese the character “*jia*” means “family” but also “home.” Fraser (2000) observes that housing is a key element in the social, political, economic, and cultural configuration and in the discourses that reflect and shape relations between people and places, goods and power. With the background of Maoist era surveillance of public and private life, embodied in the *danwei* compound, and the fact that housing today offers private – personal, non-public – space, it is not surprising how important residence has become in the reform period. Location and the type of housing was the subject of much deliberation among the young and educated couples in my investigation. Physical position in the reconfigured urban landscape had indeed become a marker of status in the emerging socio-economic differentiations of present-day Chinese society.

Miller (1998) has criticized anthropological studies of consumption such as above-quoted Douglas and Isherwood (1979), Baudrillard (1981), and Bourdieu (1984) as too mechanical in their focus on the relationship between an individual and society (or social space) within which individual expressions derive meaning and potential. Miller points out that these studies overly concentrate on possessions, and the communicative functions of possessions. He notes, in contrast, that shopping (which we can here read as consumption) is neither about possessions *per se*, nor about identity *per se*. Instead, Miller claims, that consumption is concerned with obtaining goods, or imagining the possession and use of goods. Since many goods are consumed in a short time, however, consumption is of a “transitory nature” (:141). Miller therefore suggests that consumption should rather be understood as a social process which is born from, and relates to specific social relations and historical moments. Shopping, which Miller studies, becomes a quin-

tessentially social act: an act of sacrifice, a means of saving through thrift, and a way of expressing and constructing bonds of love and devotion. Rather than creative, cognitive, “cultural” resistance, shopping is a socially meaningful, powerfully affective practice which builds and expresses strong bonds of love and devotion.

It is in this sense, as I will show in the next chapter, that apart from a status marker, housing has also become a major constitutive element in new identity formations, especially among the young, educated and wealthy Wangjing residents.

2.3 Saving for a Child's Future

Migrants from the countryside who worked in the markets around Wangjing had the least financial means to participate in today's consumer culture. One day I asked Liang Jiehua why she only drank hot water all day long. I felt ashamed when she told me that she could not afford to buy tea all the time. Nonetheless, in other conversations she revealed that she had bought a computer for her son, even though she stressed that it was a very cheap and simple one. In addition, she also sent her son to a more expensive middle school in the Wangjing vicinity, instead of the cheaper one close to the village where they lived. She thought that this school was better and would give her son a greater chance to pass the university entrance examination.

This kind of indirect spending, not on themselves but on their child, was a very common pattern among the migrants I talked to around Wangjing. None of them owned any of the common signs of the new urban Chinese consumer culture: no cell phones, no beepers. Even in the worst summer heat, when the temperatures in the non-ventilated market hall rose to 40 degree Celsius or more, the sales people did not invest in an elec-

trical fan. They did not frequent restaurants, always took the cheapest buses, and when buying their vegetables on the attached open farmer's market, they bargained "for their lives." On most of the women I saw two, or maybe three, different outfits despite the fact that they were in the clothing business. The only consumer article some of them had bought was a television set for their house.

I wondered whether the migrant market women were actually able to put some money aside to save, but also if they had any insurance in case they got sick, or any form of provision for their old age. Liang Jiehua told me:

Once my husband retires, he will get a pension from his danwei, as his father does now. But I don't get anything. I don't count on my son to support us one day. That is the problem of the one-child family. He will have his own family to support; his wife has her parents, and then us too? That would be a big financial burden for him to support both parents. We try to put some money in the bank to save for later. [Notes August 6, 2002]

When I asked if they were really able to save money, she said that they tried to but actually did not have enough to put something aside. In this aspect, Liang Jiehua, for once was in a less favorable position than other migrants since her husband's danwei salary was very low. Other migrant couples who both worked as private entrepreneurs usually earned more and were therefore able to save money. Nonetheless, the downside for them was their lack of any kind of social security; their *need* to save was higher than in Liang's case.

A large part of migrants' money, in fact, appeared to go into the education of their children. Without urban hukou, the choices for schools were limited, but with the payment of higher fees at least some were accessible to migrants' children. Most small children were left with parents or parents-in-law in the migrants' home provinces because they did not have the time to take care of them. Once they reached school age, though, the migrants often tried to bring their children with them to the city.

This was the situation of Ling, who had a three year old son whom she had left with her parents in Hubei province. During a 2002 summer vacation Ling brought her son back with her to Beijing. After he had lived with her for two month, she decided to let him stay and was planning to send him to kindergarten in Beijing.

I am not going to send him back home. The educational system there [home province] is very bad. I want to send him to a kindergarten here in Beijing. But I have to bring him there and pick him up every day, so I have to find a place close by. I found one, but it's not so good. It's okay. It costs 200 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 25) per month. There is a better kindergarten for 400 Yuan [RMB] (US\$ 50). I am not sure yet what to do. [Notes, August 17, 2002]

As a result of the strong divide between countryside and city, which the explosive growth in the (coastal) cities has only exacerbated, migrants who work in cities realize that the only chance for their children to have better prospects in life is to receive a good education. This, however, is less likely in their home provinces than in the city.

In September 2002, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission released a new rule which allowed migrant workers' children to attend public schools for a "moderate trans-regional schooling fee." Fees for non-hukou holders used to be very high and came with so many troublesome procedures that many migrants who could not rely on family members to take care of their children had to send them to urban private schools of questionable standards, or at times even took them out of school completely. The new policy presented migrant families with a better option. Difficulties, however, continued to arise through the hukou system. Local governments are responsible only for residents in their own regions and do not have the budget to provide education and health benefits for children from other regions. Even though some schools are willing to accept migrants' children, they are charged extra fees which their parents cannot afford.⁷ Nonetheless, the migrants in my investigation made every effort to have their children attend schools in Beijing. Not surprisingly, school performance and costs of education were a repeated topic of conversation among the migrants. One woman revealed: "I am worried about my son. He does not study. He still has four more years in school. I don't think he studies hard enough to get into university. If he does, though, we will have to pay for his university. The better the school, the more expensive the tuition fee" (Notes May 27, 2002).

Migrants' "investment" in, or dedication to their child's future surely had also a certain degree of self-interest; who else could they possibly rely on in their old age? The migrants also knew, however, that they could not necessarily count on their child's support. With the one-child policy, couples now have to attend to four parents – a significant

⁷ A survey of 7,817 migrant workers' children under 18 years, conducted by the National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council in the fall of 2003 in China's major cities, found that 9.3 per cent of the children interviewed had either dropped out of school or had never gone to school. See Verna Yu 2003.

burden that not all of them will be able to take on. Why, then, did migrants put their limited resources into the education of their children with no guaranteed returns?

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a squatter neighborhood outside of Ankara, Turkey, Üstüner and Holt (2003) use Veblen's 1899 *The Theory of the Leisure Class* and Bourdieu's 1984 *Distinction* to explain how social class patterns consumption. They suggest a model that consists of different processes of social construction, which I find particularly illuminating in the context of migrants' investment in their children's future.

According to Üstüner and Holt, the contradictions of the new social context of squatter life created particular ideological desires in the migrants who were seeking to construct a viable class identity. The migrants deployed a city – village binary to make sense of their new lives, to guide their actions, and to attribute new types of value to things and activities. In this process, and based upon their viability as symbolic resources to fulfill ideological desires, particular consumption objects (and associated practices) were selected to perform symbolic work. For example, the squatter women selected hand-knitted sweaters because to them these symbolized the village in a particular way. The particular association of making sweaters in the village served as a crucial cultural “raw asset” that the squatter women used to create a powerful ritual “antidote” to the alienation of city life. “What Barthes calls myth – second-order connotations in which are buried potent socio-political contents – proved crucial in the creation of class consumption patterns” (Üstüner and Holt 2003:282).

As we have seen above, migrants around Wangjing engaged in a discourse portraying themselves as “uncultured,” “uneducated” peasants, through which they effec-

tively justified the socio-economic position they were in, only to juxtapose this narrative with one that centered around hard-work and honesty. It would be too strong to claim that the migrants had “ideological desires” in the sense of Üstüner and Holt, that is, as a means to reconstruct a class identity. Nonetheless, the education of their children became their object of consumption because it embodied their desire to become integrated into urban society. Since they themselves did not have many chances and opportunities to significantly improve their own living conditions, education would provide the “cultural capital” that might enable their children to do so. The projection of a significantly different and better future for their children was the mechanism that the migrants used to create a powerful ritual “antidote” to their alienation from urban residents, even if they themselves might not directly benefit from it. This sentiment was expressed by Honghua, a 40 year old sales woman from the north-west of China, who felt that her own living situation, her work options, her education, her life was influenced by being from the countryside. But as regards her son, she was convinced that they had overcome the rural background and that she was able to provide him with the necessary education that would enable him to advance in life (Notes June 7, 2002).

Besides being a very real instrument to improve their socio-economic situation, the ideal and pursuit of education for children had also become a symbolic strategy, which in tandem with migrants’ self-portrayal as hard-working and honest people became a means to counter the public and official discourse of the “floating population” as the inherent “other,” in opposition to the educated and cultured – “modern” – urban residents.

3 *Beijing Ren Shi Shijiede Pengyou* – Beijingers are Friends to the World

3.1 Modernity and the Global Scale

Studies of the relationship between spatial and social organization frequently refer to Bourdieu (1977), who suggests that spatial and temporal experiences are primary vehicles for the coding and reproduction of social relations. Symbolic orderings of space and time provide a framework for experience through which we learn who and what we are in society. In his study of the Kabyle house, Bourdieu (1990) shows how social relationships and people's conceptions of the world are shaped by and inscribed in the spatial organization of the domestic realm (Zhang 2001). It is, suggests Bourdieu, through the dialectical relationship between the body and a structural organization of space and time that common practices and representations are determined. Precisely out of such experiences (particularly in the home) enduring schemes of perception, thought, and action became inscribed.

Harvey (1990), however, alerts us that Bourdieu's conceptualization is too static. Instead, he stresses that value and meaning are not inherent in any spatial order, but must be produced. Similarly, in the context of women's subordinate position in society, Henrietta Moore (1988) has pointed out that it is not work per se but what is conceived as "work," and the social value assigned to it in a given cultural context, which shapes women's domestic and societal status. Zhang (2001) extends this idea to argue that gender domination and the value of women's work are closely linked to the construction of gendered spaces (household, workshop, marketplace, bar and hotel, etc.), and to the cultural perceptions of what is proper or improper, domestic or wild, pure or dangerous, productive or unproductive.

Based on this train of analysis, I suggest that in the specific cultural context of reform-era China, it is not only the way space is reconfigured which influences social relationships, but also the value that is assigned to specific spaces (cf. Lefebvre 1991). In the reform period, access to space and the social value that these spaces are perceived to have play a central role in people's social status.

In the process of moving from plan to market in China, space has become commodified. As an effect of the introduction of scales of value, space, which was formerly largely undifferentiated in terms of function and value (apart from the distinction between city and countryside), has become graded or scaled along parameters such as west and east (or interior and coastal areas), rural and urban, urban fringe and urban center. During the Maoist era, Chinese citizens were immobilized through the household registration system and fixed in specific places in a national development hierarchy with Beijing at the top. Today, however, space and people are redefined and repositioned through qualities such as young/ old, educated/ uneducated, inside/ outside, and backward/ progressive, and are ranked in a hierarchy of modernity and exchange value (Chen et al. 2001). At the same time, wealth, consumer power, and monetary value are increasingly translated into indicators of status, and by implication, of modernity. As Jeffrey (2001:25) suggests: "Whereas Maoism equated capitalism with immorality, today we find a discourse (both official and popular) of the market as a civilizing practice that implies and confers proximity to the modern."

Various scholars (cf. Ballew 2001, Rofel 1997, Schein 2001) have pointed out that the new modernity of consumerism in China has a decidedly global twist:

In the era of enthusiastic and officially mandated ‘reform and openness to the outside world’ (*gaige kaifang*), the reproduction of space is a consummately global process, one proceeding for its own re-representation to the ‘evaluative gaze of foreign capital,’ in Anagnost’s phrase (1994:279). This evaluative gaze of global capital represents a primary principle which gives shape to the space in Chinese metropolises. [Balew 2001:255]

Cities, in fact, are increasingly the sites where the new consumer culture, modernity, and global capital intersect. Especially metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou are, in Schein’s imagery (2001:225), “widely viewed as glittering markets of a world of goods imported from the catalogs and store shelves of global modernity.”

At the beginning of the 21st century, more than fifty years after the Communist Revolution, and 25 years after the initiation of economic reforms, the city of Beijing is notably marked by the signifiers of international commodity chains. From American franchise pizza restaurants and ice-cream parlors, to the establishment of international retail sellers such as “Carrefour” and “Wal-Mart,”⁸ and the venture of multinational cosmetic brands such as L’Oreal into the Chinese market, Beijing today is a “truly international metropolis” in terms of product offerings and brand representation. Over the last few years, even the Seattle coffee-chain “Starbucks” has successfully penetrated the major cities of the “land of tea.”

⁸ A 2001 survey by A. C. Nielsen about changing shopping habits of Chinese urban residents showed that consumers increasingly choose new hypermarkets over small, local stores to shop for their groceries. In contrast to an old conviction that fresh food should be bought daily, over a quarter of households surveyed predominantly visited the new super- and hypermarkets to buy in bulk. See *MetroZine Beijing*, September 2, 2001.

This internationalization of the consumer market, however, does not necessarily signify a simple emulation of “Western” or more poignantly, “American” culture, as Yunxiang Yan (1997) has shown. As we saw in Chapter V.3.3.1, in the 1990s, a visit to McDonald’s fast food restaurants, symbolizing Americana and modernity, became highly fashionable among the emerging middle class as well as among ordinary citizens who were curious about American food. The consumption of “Americana,” however, took on a new, local face: Hamburgers and fries, ordinary daily fare in the United States, were converted into precious and stylish foreign cuisine in Beijing. But McDonald’s has also flourished in China because the chain came to represent an extension of America. Ordering a Big Mac provided a “bridge” to the affluent, industrial West and thereby allowed Beijing customers to realize, if only temporarily, their emergent identities as discerning, modern individuals (Davis 2000).

Evidently, not everybody has the same access to this globally envisioned modernity. To add complexity to the ways in which time, space, and mobility are experienced in the current phase of global capitalism, Doreen Massey (1993) introduces the dimensions of class, ethnicity, and gender into her “power geometry” model. She writes that “different groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility; some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it” (1993:61). Similarly, in China, access to, and consumption power over the new modernity with its global twist increasingly differentiates Chinese citizens, and defines social status beyond mere economic potency.

Schein (2001) calls the present Chinese urban sentiment “imagined cosmopolitanism,” which appears to be an almost egalitarian notion since even window shoppers can dream that they take part in the new global consumer culture. In contrast, I would maintain that the growing integration of China into global economic flows is just another aspect of how Chinese society is stratified today, or of how citizens are differently positioned in the new socio-economic reality. Economic limitations kept a good number of my informants from engaging in any kind of “imagined cosmopolitanism” because, living on the urban fringe, they could not even get physically close to the center of the city and of the new consumer culture without making an effort. Nonetheless, all three groups of Wangjing residents/ workers in my study were in some way influenced by “the evaluative gaze of foreign capital” (Anagnost 1994:279). What makes this point important is that it was only the young and educated who could *negotiate* this “gaze,” which further and importantly differentiated them from other Chinese citizens.

As we have seen above, Chinese citizens’ reform-period redefinitions are increasingly turned into “repositionings,” that is, socio-economic differentiations which are translated into spatial differentiation. In addition, as I will show in what follows, Chinese citizens are not only differently positioned in spatial terms, but at the same time, through these redefinitions and the reconfigurations of space and society, Chinese citizens today also have differential *access* to, and *control* over space. The study of this process of reconfiguration produces what I call the social geography of space and status, which makes evident the relative position of Chinese citizens in terms of space, power, and socio-economy.

3.2 “I Wish my Children Could Live Like Americans”

As I have discussed above, the elderly most commonly compared today’s living situation with the lives they had when they were young, or even with their parents’ generation – a contrast that was most likely favorable to the present.

My mother was a worker in a Cigarette Factory. [...] My father also was a worker, looked down upon by others. [...] We didn’t have money to see the doctor, it was the old society. Now we have hospitals. The vicious old society. [During that time] the people were at the bottom of the world; now we are the owners of society. It is a difference like between sky and earth. How can you compare it? [Interview May 15, 2002]

But a few elderly also evoked “the world” as a measure: “It will be better and better. The Chinese people will have a better social position. Friends from all over the world will trust China and become our friends. China will be stronger, and have more and more friends” (Interview May 15, 2002). What we can read out of this statement is the wish for China to be accepted in the international arena, to be an equal partner to other countries. Again, this reflects China’s quest to liberate itself from the subordinate status it was subjected to during its semi-colonial period in the 19th century, and out of which also grew the communist project of modernization. Evoking this theme today, for many of the elderly the comparison with “the world” predominantly signified reaching “western” living standards, as Fang taitai expressed so clearly: “I wish that China will be as well developed as the U.S.A., and our life as good as Americans’. We still have a long way to catch

up with them. I wish my children's lives will be as good as theirs. I can hardly wait for that day" (Interview May 31, 2002).

"American life" here stood abstractly for a certain – imagined – living standard fed by the news and media. This, however, was the only kind of "scale" that the elderly applied. They hardly distinguished in terms of importance between different cities in China, or different places within Beijing itself. It was, on the contrary, the young and educated residents who cited the saying about the preferable living environment in the north of the city, not the older generation. Having been socialized during the Maoist era, the elderly viewed urban space as a continuous and relatively undifferentiated entity. They did not ascribe value or status to physical locations within the city, and they were indifferent to the glamour that the world beyond China had in the eyes of the younger generation. While many of them studied English in their community classes, citing the upcoming 2008 Olympic Games as their motivation, this was not due to an "imagined cosmopolitanism," but something the government encouraged the population to do. Protected by continuing state benefits, "the gaze of global capital" for the elderly danwei residents was not evaluative, but relative. They did not feel subjected to it.

From the outside, the elderly in their state-provided safety net were certainly influenced by China's growing integration into the global economic system. Even state-owned companies have to compete in the market today, and un-profitability will lead to inevitable lay-offs and closings, which in turn will clearly affect the elderly's lives. Nonetheless, as regards their self-perception, the elderly worried about the "evaluative gaze of global capital" only in relation to their children.

3.3 *Not To Be Somewhere Else*

According to Rofel (1997), the Chinese state aspires and claims to enact a faithful reproduction of Western modernity. Yet, she alerts us, the state carries out its program in sites and through bodies that hold memories of past spatial relations. The wealthy, young and educated residents of Wangjing, however, were too young to have clear memories of the time before the economic reform period. They repeatedly stressed that they grew up during the reforms. In their early thirties, they had actually spent their first ten years of life during the Mao era. As discussed above, they remembered when they were able to buy a refrigerator, or other consumer goods, but that would certainly not have left them with a specific idea of the life and politics of the period. If they did not have concrete memories of time past, how then were young, educated residents interpreting modernity in the Chinese context?

When I asked Cao Xiangjun what “modern” meant to her, she answered: “It means a richer life. Yes, our life has greatly improved. [...] Chinese are getting closer to the international society. More opportunities and more freedom” (Interview June 15, 2002). Indeed, young, educated and wealthy Wangjing resident’s “modernity” had a very decisive international aspect to it: They either spoke or studied English (or other foreign languages, for that matter), and several of them had traveled abroad. They read magazines about western life-styles, decorated their apartment accordingly, and followed international politics and China’s role therein. Based on their “cultural capital” (knowledge and skills) and their “economic capital” (financial resources) (Bourdieu 1984), their physical space of maneuvering had practically no limit. They did not only travel widely through city, nation, and beyond, but also claimed to have chosen to stay in China, even

though they had the means to go abroad. Emigrating might have been more difficult to realize than they portrayed, but the fact that the young, wealthy Wangjing residents considered going abroad to be an unwanted possibility indicated that they were quite aware of their power of choice in the global negotiation of place. To me, the western student, they presented a version of deliberate preference for China over the rest of the world, and through this discourse they performed a political act: they valorized their Chinese reality as equal or even better than my “western” possibilities.⁹ This sentiment was also evident when Wei Hong explained her rooted-ness in Beijing and China:

I remember that going abroad was hot when I was in university. Chinese believed that the ground was covered with gold in foreign countries. But nobody thinks so anymore. People are going abroad to study the latest management knowledge, feel the great atmosphere, and then go back to make China better. A lot of companies send their staff abroad to study. As for me, I would rather earn more money in China and travel abroad, or study there. I could never put all my hope and future, all my career ambitions in a foreign land. People my age experienced the “going abroad-fever”. Many overseas students now want to come back home. It shows that Beijing is very attractive. Some people say that there are more opportunities in China; building up one’s career in America is very hard. With China’s entering into the WTO, the position of this city is rising in the world, the partition between countries is disappearing. Beijing is more and

⁹ This point reverberates Liu’s (1997) findings in his study of strategies of Shaanxi peasants and overseas scholars in the “geographic production of social relations” (Massey 1993: 60 – 61). Liu argues that mobility and imagination of new social-spatial hierarchies have become important sources in the negotiation of power in everyday life in China since the reform-period.

more international. The changes of Beijing show the great changes of China. [China] surprised the world by its fast speed of development. [Wei Hong 2002]

This kind of “global orientation” of the young, educated, wealthy residents in Wangjing was underlined by the character of the new commercial housing development they either lived in or aspired to. Giving commercially financed properties names such as “Saint Angel Shengxin” (Saint Angel Holy Fragrance), or “Daxiyang Xinchengzhi/ Atlantic Place” (see above), brought to mind a world beyond China. Even in the complexes which had only Chinese names, these were metaphors laden with meaning beyond mere residence: “Star-Sea Jewel” (Xinghai Mingzhu) obviously represented a special treasure, an exclusive fantasy of great riches and glory.

Commercial housing complexes did not have names that included the word “yuan,” meaning “garden” or “a place for public recreation,” as had the danwei connected complexes.¹⁰ While the highly supervised danwei compounds were not as “public” as their names pretended, the new commercial housing complexes did not even engage in the illusion. Their names were intended to convey exclusivity, individuality, but also to invoke specific images and imaginaries. Using foreign, or partially foreign names only underlined this exclusive character by evoking a globally imagined modernity. To the majority of the population, meanwhile, these names underlined the separateness of this

¹⁰ Some of the most exclusive gated communities, often located far outside of the city, in the rural hinterland, actually had names that contained the word “yuan.” In this case, however, the word was usually combined with other evocative words, such as “King,” as in “King’s Garden” (*guowang yuan*). In this combination, the word yuan related more to green space and vastness of territory, than in the danwei complexes, where the word yuan stood for “enclosed space.”

realm, and reinforced differentiations between residents of these exclusive complexes and residents of other less expensive and less ostentatiously designed and named ones.

As Bourdieu (1991:236) has pointed out, the “labor of categorization, of making things explicit and classifying them” is a central mechanism for defining the meaning and order of the social world. Various scholars (e.g. Borneman 1991, 1997; Foucault 1972) have shown that naming and framing in fact not only describe, reflect, or represent social order, but in turn shape and reshape power relations among different groups (cf. Zhang 2001).

New commercial developments, with gates and surveillance cameras, commonly used the word “*cheng*” (city) in their advertising descriptions. But they did not only claim to form complete cities; these were secluded entities as well. “Cheng” in Chinese also means “wall.” While the traditional Chinese city was a walled one, one of its specific characteristics was that, in contrast to European cities, there was no mental or ideological distinction between “the rural” outside and “the urban” inside of those walls, but a rural-urban continuum (cf. Mote 1977, Sit 1995). This, of course, changed under revolutionary rule which fixed people in country versus city locations. Today, new commercial housing developments use various technologies (walls, gates, surveillance cameras, and guards) in tandem with the foreign names to magnify such distinctions. The new living areas are supposed to offer more than just exclusive living: they symbolize entire lifestyles, as promised by their advertising prospectuses, which claim, for example: “To choose a home means to choose a lifestyle” (*xuanze jia xuanzi shenghuo fangshi*). This is further reflected in the various architectural styles that new, privately invested residential projects offer, for example, “European Romantic” or “Modern International.” The slogan is

especially evident in the design which, with its large living rooms, I was told, aims at Chinese DINKS – white collar working couples without children.

In Tatlow's analysis (2004), the popularity of foreign-name luxury residences is an expression of the circumstance that for China's new rich, living in Beijing today is all about pretending to be somewhere else. As a real estate agent said, "A lot of people who come to see these apartments say it's not like living in China, it's like living abroad" (ibid). In contrast to Tatlow, I would maintain that the current "foreign craze" among newly wealthy Chinese is not about pretending to be somewhere else but, on the contrary, exactly about being *in* China, but being able to live the lifestyle of the "modern world." The "foreign craze" is less a blind copying of western images and goods than an evocation of such "signs" suited for the Chinese context. In this evocation, architectural styles, images, and periods are mixed in an almost "postmodern" fashion, since their function is not to emulate, but to symbolize and construct. Foreign names, foreign styles of architecture and construction, are used in the national Chinese context for their symbolic and constituting values. Through them, consumers are marked as different, and of a higher status, since they not only have access to the symbols but also understand them. Through them, too, the consumers themselves feel elevated and empowered.

This point was supported by advertisements for new commercial housing complexes. "Saint Angel Holy Fragrant," for example, started its advertisement in the following way:

Dance with Shengxin, and we accompany each other in freedom.

Shengxin's style, dedicated to old European flair, proud quality and status

of world rank, it is filled with the spirit to be Wangjing's present and future.

Faith in the finest artworks created the majestic outer appearance; knowledge, wealth, achievement and passion are its character; Shengxin – eagerly looking forward to be a trendsetter; Shengxin earth – Wangjing's pride. [*Shengxin Real Estate Development Ltd. 2000a*]¹¹

As described in chapter III.1.2, and indicated in this advertisement, the “Saint Angel Holy Fragrant” complex combined various European architectural styles, topping the apartment towers with golden figurines. But this text also reflects the use of the “foreign” to assert a special, and superior status and way of being. This claim became even more evident in the life-style booklet that the developer of the complex had published.

Just getting out of the airplane, leaving the airport, I can immediately sense Wangjing's aroma; having thought of that soft and sweet name – Holy Fragrance, I impatiently long for already being in her embrace.

A very short fifteen minutes car drive later, I already have the kettle in hand and water the orchid below the window; having been away for a month on business, my wife has attended to it very well, and a newly

¹¹ Yu shengxin gongwu yu ziyou xiang ban. Shengxinde qiyu, oufeng yueban gongxian, pinzhi he zunrongde ao shijie zhi, qiguan “wangjing” de jinxi yu wailai. Jingpinde xinnian zhuzao zhuangmeide wai guan, zhishi he caifu chengjiu jiqingde gexing jian, shengxin – yinling fengshangde xiandao, shengxin dadi – wangjingde jiaobao. 2000 nian, shengxin fangdichan kaifa youxian.

developing leaf is faintly visible. [*Shengxin Real Estate Development Ltd.*

2000b]¹²

We can see how this text adroitly invokes a whole array of imagery and messages, full of assumptions about gender and class: The wealthy male resident, owner of a private car, is returning from a month-long business trip. The airport here symbolizes the world beyond Beijing, which nonetheless is very close by. Wangjing's "smell" invokes images of "home," and a wife who is waiting patiently for her husband. The orchid which has grown during his absence, conveys a rooted-ness of the resident in China, or more specifically in the Wangjing neighborhood.

Other advertising brochures lure customers with the better environment in Beijing's north, and the more ample space in the suburban location. In addition, the proximity to the airport, "the gateway to all China, and the world," is a selling point, as is the alleged convenient traffic connection. "It is as if the remotest corner of the world is the neighbor, but no matter from where you come back, Wangjing's convenient traffic network is awaiting you in every direction" (Beijing City Xinxing Real Estate Developing Head Office 2000).¹³

While these examples of housing advertisements appear in glossy brochures that one would expect would reach only potential buyers, at a Beijing housing fair, I observed urban residents indiscriminately gathering up on this kind of print material, ensuring its

¹² Gang xia feiji, zou chu jichang dating, jiu xiudaole wangjingde qixi, xiang dao neige wenxinde mingzi – shengxin, wo jiqie eryou panwang, sihu ziyi yijing tourule tade huaibao. Duanduan shi wu fen Zhong cheng yihou, wo yijing nazhe shuihu, jiaoguan chuangbiande lan, chuchaide zhe yige yue, qi ba ta zhaoliaode hen hao, fadade yemai yixi kejian.

¹³ Tianya ruo bilin wulun nin cong nali guilai, Wangjing bianjiede jiaotong wangluo zai gege fangxiang dengdaizhe nin.

wide circulation beyond the people who could really afford such development projects. Through the various messages that commercial housing developers put into their advertisements, they, therefore, actively participated in the reconfigurations of urban space. The brochures created images of residents and their lives which included values and tastes, and in that manner turned indeed into manuals of lifestyle, teaching potential residents about nutrition, exercise, community living, and so forth. Importantly, the lifestyles described were based on private housing as the center of social interaction and consumption.

To conclude, wealthy young and educated residents of Wangjing embraced the “foreign” as a means to underline their social differentiation and their understanding of themselves as modern. At the same time, they negotiated the “evaluative gaze of global capital” to position themselves in the Chinese context. Since new danwei complexes offered living standards that were more comparable to the commercial housing complexes, the “foreign” component had a central importance. One of the distinctive characteristics of danwei housing complexes remained – their name. “Hua Yuan,” for example, continued the nominal connection with the old danwei living style. But they were also built in much more simple, utilitarian styles, in contrast to which the new commercial complexes, with their mix of various European architectural referents, already signaled on the outside that they were different, in fact, “a world apart.”

3.4 The Hierarchy of the Market

The effects of global capital on rural migrants, and especially on women, have been primarily discussed in the context of mainland joint venture factories (e.g. Lee 1998). But how are migrants in the cities, who work in shops and markets, affected by the growing integration of the Chinese economy and society into the global economic system?

As we saw in Chapter II.2.4, throughout Wangjing there are various markets, some of which are more established shop-like structures, while others are rather temporary affairs: a quickly put up hall from corrugated iron, or even outdoor markets on a field. Among the more permanent places at the time of my research was a soccer-field sized hall with shop-like partitions inside that was specialized in housing decoration and refurbishing supplies. One could buy everything from bathroom appliances to curtains, carpets, and picture frames. Here, salespeople were of varying age, and many of them were Beijingers. Most were employees of small entrepreneurs who had various shops throughout the city, or of the companies which produced the items on sale.

The majority of markets I witnessed around Wangjing, were, however, more make-shift affairs. Some were set up on empty lots that were destined for development, and various of these emerged and disappeared during my research. In some places, farmers from the rural hinterland offered their produce, and in others a mix of people – migrants, local Beijingers, and farmers – offered a variety of foods and goods. Several of these markets also offered clothes.

The saleswomen in the market where I spent most of my time, which was located on the western side of the Capital Airport Highway, far into the Wangjing neighborhood, were predominantly migrants from different provinces in China. Some of them had been

laid off from their state-jobs, others had never been able to find employment; most of them had middle school education or less and had tried several jobs before settling on the sales business. When I asked the migrant market women why they did not work in any of the obviously better-located markets further into the city proper, where there was a higher customer frequency, they explained that they could not afford to do so:

We work in this market because [in other, better located markets with higher profit margins] we would need more money to start out, I mean, to rent a stall. We don't have that money. Our customers are people who live around here, not the people who have money. Those buy their things in nice places like the Lufthansa Center or at Wangfujing [in the city center].

[Notes August 15, 2002]

In fact, there appeared to exist a hierarchy of informal markets within the city: generally, the further inside the city the market was located, the better the quality of items, the higher the prices, and the more expensive the rent for the stalls. Interestingly, the center of this hierarchy lay in, or close to, the area designated to be the new CBD, the area of foreign company headquarters, and embassies. Correspondingly, the further inside the city the markets were, the more English the sales people were able to speak – from nothing at all, to sales people who could negotiate prices in English without any problem.

On the other side of the airport expressway, for example, opposite the Lido Hotel Office and Residential compound lay another market specialized in fashion brand knock offs and Chinese curios. In this market, which catered to the tourists from the hotel, the sales people were predominantly young women from Anhui province. They formed a

relatively close support group and not infrequently they substituted for one another in the stalls when one had to leave the market. In addition, as they were dealing predominantly with foreigners, most of them had taught themselves some English; some of them were almost fluent. The women from “my” market considered this market out of their league. Asking specifically why they did not rent a stall in this market, since they complained about low customer turn-out, they assured me that the rent – about RMB 2,000 (US\$ 250) per month – was unaffordable to them. But more importantly, they could not do so because they did not speak English which appeared to be a requirement. Physical closeness to the western world, here in form of tourist customers, in combination with the mastering of a foreign language, obviously put the sales women from Anhui into a privileged position, giving them at least an economic advantage if not also a higher status than other sales people.

3.5 Conclusion

Today migrants from the countryside can move widely throughout the country. Nonetheless, their access to certain “privileged” spaces remains limited. These spaces include public housing, but also more and more often the inner cities with their new high-tech development. City centers have in some cases been declared “beggar-free zones” (cf. Savadove 2003) and at the beginning of 2005, Beijing was even debating whether to completely curb the inflow of migrant workers (*Agence France Presse* 2005). Less extreme, but equally symbolic, informal migrant markets in the inner city area are increasingly either destroyed or regulated, such as the Sanlitun street market in Beijing, for example. Here make-shift stalls on the sidewalk were torn down, but after a couple of

months the district government erected a market hall close by and rented stalls to private entrepreneurs – at a rate which many of the former sales people could not afford. But it is also the “privileged space” of equal citizenship which is limited through the public and official discourse on migrants’ “otherness”. Through this “technology,” in Foucault’s (1979) sense, which juxtaposes migrants as the inherent other to civilized, urban, and therefore modern residents, they are indeed kept out of the state project of modernization itself.

(Elderly) danwei residents, in contrast, while restricted in the consumption of physical space because of their limited financial means and perhaps their age, are nonetheless continuously granted access to certain “privileged spaces,” such as state-provided housing and other public sector social benefits. But as a result of the growing marketization of society, today they remain more or less confined to the spatial orbit of the work unit compound.

Chuppies, Chinese urban professionals, finally, travel city-, nation-, and world-wide. Growing wealth allows these urban Chinese to live “in the world” in contrast to their country’s seclusion during the Mao years. “The world,” by implication “the West,” in turn, is also increasingly the scale with which they measure everything, or to put it differently, it is the imaginary modern world that urban wealthy Chinese are aspiring to. Their access to this highly privileged space in the state project of modernization is what most decisively differentiates young, educated, and wealthy urban Chinese from the rest of the population.

China’s growing integration into a global economic system, however, affects all Chinese citizens, from rural to urban, from poor to wealthy, from state sector to private

sector employees. Especially since joining the WTO, and in Beijing since the successful bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games, China as a country, and the people therein, have to compete and compare with the global realm. It is in the face of this challenge that the state sector provides some citizens with a “padding” that softens the harshness of their “landing” in the market. Others, the vast millions who work in the burgeoning export industries of the coastal manufacturing zones, and in the tragically neglected agricultural and mining sectors of the interior, are increasingly vulnerable to, and restive about, the harsh conditions they face. Wangjing as a whole, although differentiated, is a space that is relatively insulated from these realities.

Chapter VII Conclusion: The Citizenship of Consumption

The city of Beijing is made up of an intricate weaving of different layers and circuits which represent the various players and actors in the continuous production of urban space. These layers consist of the national, municipal, and district governments, politics, city planning, the economic system, the built environment, history, ideology, the international arena, and last but not least, the people living within these realms. As the present study has shown, the negotiation between these forces is a complex and dynamic process. In this concluding chapter, I first summarize the most important insights gained through the present investigation and put them into the broader context of the Chinese state's modernization project. I then discuss the dual role that the state plays in present-day social and spatial transformations. Finally, I show how the consumption of housing has become a new mechanism of Chinese citizens to position themselves within the stratifying society of reform-period China.

The economic policies and modes of social organization introduced by the Communist government after the 1949 Revolution not only drew many of my older informants to the city, but through the system of state-assigned jobs, also placed them in the Wangjing locality. The establishment of the hukou system, in turn, gave these early migrants a new identity as urban residents, and effectively segregated cities and countryside into separate realms.

For the elderly, the experiences of war and violence before the revolution, and the zeal to create a new society during the early years of the People's Republic, had a deeply formative effect that continued to influence their generation in the reform period. Certain

newly introduced forms of social organization, such as the danwei, and ideologies, such as the liberation of women through wage labor, for example, brought significant life improvements in people's subjective experience. Especially for many elderly women, the communist transformation of society signified liberation and equality since they compared themselves to their mothers who had been confined by Confucian dogmas.

The specificities of state – society relations during the Maoist era led to people's dependence on state services – they became supplicants to the state. The period was characterized by social differentiation according to politico-ideological factors (one's revolutionary background) rather than socio-economic ones, and a vertical relationship of obedience between subject-citizens and party or government officials. At the same time, citizens were subjected to extreme social supervision through the various institutions of control.

With the reform period, Chinese citizens' social and economic conditions, their daily lives, have been dramatically affected and transformed. State-sector employees have to accept lay-offs, as well as significant cut-backs in social services and benefits, which are replaced by the market. The growing private sector offers new employment opportunities and potential financial gains, although access to these is highly disparate. Chinese citizens confront the challenges of the reform period with various strategies. Urban residents either "moonlight," that is, work two or more jobs, or engage in the strategy of "one family, two systems," that is, one spouse stays in the state sector while the other one enters the private economy. Migrants, in turn, accept a semi-legal, or second-class existence in return for the chance to get their share of the new wealth in urban centers. In

this manner, people carefully negotiate the advantages and disadvantages of safety and risk that come with the new opportunities, which enables them to maximize their gains.

The land and housing reforms of the 1990s have significantly altered the urban landscape. In connection with the influx of FDI, space has been valorized in a center-periphery hierarchy of land and property prices. Downtown areas are rebuilt around the headquarters of multinational companies, high-value shopping and office complexes, and retail centers. Lower land prices in fringe areas, in turn, have attracted new residential developments. It is in the quickly developing suburban fringe, in neighborhoods such as Wangjing, where the contradictions, the conflicts, and problems of current transformations become highly visible, where they find a physical expression in everyday life. It is here that the emerging middle and upper class find new commercial housing based on choice and individual preferences. At the same time, the fringe also continues to be the place where older danwei residential complexes still exist and where migrants from other provinces in China find cheap if temporary accommodation and places to work. The suburb is the arena of negotiation between the expanding restructured city and the receding pre-reform built environment, a zone of drastic and continuous transformation processes, which is shared by young, educated, wealthy residents; inhabitants of old and new danwei compounds; and migrants.

Wangjing residents were set apart by the type of jobs they held and their income levels. But the analysis of gender, for example, has also shown that diverging gender constructions and ideologies further differentiated the three groups discussed. In addition, age, education, and residence status played an important role in social positioning – in

people's access to resources, in the choices they had to design their lives, but also in their perspectives on life. All these factors, in turn, intertwined and mutually reinforced each other. Born from individual trajectories, but influenced by shared experiences, the residents indeed showed group-specific attitudes, convictions, sentiments, and ideologies.

The interaction between these different groups was minimal. The wealthy lived in secluded residential complexes, commuted to work places within the city proper, where they also spent leisure time and took care of their daily business. The commute rarely "exposed" them to the average Chinese urbanite, and even less frequently to the migrant population, since they were able to choose more convenient means of transportation, such as the taxi, or their own cars. The immense possibilities and transformations of the reform-period became especially visible in the lives of the young, educated urbanites in contrast to the relatively localized lives of the elderly residents of danwei compounds, as well as to the migrants, who were pushed into the rural hinterland as the suburb further developed.

In comparing the three groups of Wangjing residents described here, we can also observe the growing impact of the economy's marketization on the social fabric. Wealth is undoubtedly beginning to generate social stratifications in the urban realm. While – at present – financial prowess cannot provide migrants with access to residency-connected rights, it can significantly improve their subjective living experience. For all Chinese citizens alike, today's greater financial means can provide access to better health services and education, but also the possibility to secure one's future through insurance and savings. In addition, money opens a whole new world of consumption of a previously unknown amount and variety of goods. In general, greater financial means, consumption,

and the emerging socio-economic differentiations increasingly blur Maoist-era social demarcations.¹

Despite the growing influence of marketization, however, the state continues to exert significant influence on Chinese society and people lives. Indeed, as has been argued by Verdery (1996) in the case of Eastern Europe, and by Elizabeth Perry (1994), Oi (1989), Solinger (1999), and Zhang (2001), among others, in the case of China, today the state is not simply replaced by the market, but instead they intertwine in complex ways, differently influencing urban residents' daily lives. Based on the present investigation, I would suggest that in the present-day transformations of society and space in China, the state plays two specific roles.

First, the state's project of modernization is based on the idea of progress, of a linear development towards modernity, which now guides the plans to transform the city into an "international business center," "the Manhattan of Asia" (Cheng 2003a, 2003b), a city worthy of hosting the Olympic Games, among other things. In this vision, and imposed undertaking, a modernist aesthetics, or a veneer of modernity, is applied especially to the center of social, economic, and global interaction – the inner city. Here, the old is

¹ A survey of 700 citizens in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou conducted by the China Economic Monitoring Center analyzed Chinese urbanites' attitudes towards the division of society into different social classes. Over 78 percent of the surveyed admitted there was an inequality among people in different social classes, but they believed that people should not use these to maximize their individual benefits. However, nearly 25 percent highlighted the negative effects of such inequalities, and wished that the government would solve the conflicts they saw as inevitably arising from them. Meanwhile, 70 percent of the surveyed said that there was nothing wrong for people in different social classes to have diverging social status and wealth. But 31 percent of the surveyed insisted that people should have equal resources. They believed a disparity in the division of social resources would endanger the basis of a socialist society. The survey also found that nearly 63 per cent believed that wealth was the most effective resource in terms of dividing social classes, followed by 60 percent, who considered education and personal capability as the most important distinguishing factors. In contrast, slightly over 50 percent said the nature of employment was more important and thought power was embodied in money and social status. 44 percent of the surveyed said that the division into social classes was a matter of personal trust. They pointed out that in present-day China more people emphasized social relationships and were concerned with their reputation. See *Beijing Today*, April 26, 2002. See also Liu Xin (2002), who offers a study on strata consciousness in present-day China.

mainly destroyed and replaced by glass and steel office towers, designed by internationally known architects. In addition, the government pushes the development and application of technology, such as broadband internet access, and logistical features such as a light rail train, all of which have become markers of status, and are implemented as tokens of “modernity.” The emerging urban form, the new “global city,” signifies and embodies what it means to be a modern urban Chinese citizen.

In this process of reconfiguration, *hutongs*² are razed, informal markets are either torn down, or regulated and covered, inner cities are declared “beggar-free zones,” and migrants are pushed further out of the central urban areas – out of the new, modern face of the city – to the lower visibility of the suburban fringes. In official and public discourse, migrants serve as the “other,” against which the new state-project is defined and exemplified. “Uncultured,” “uncivilized” migrants are blamed for disturbances of the new aesthetic of modernity; they are the embodiment of that which is to be left behind.

The portrayal of migrants as “uncultured,” “uneducated,” the source of dirt and crime, the “floating population,” with regional dialects and differing customs, who work in menial jobs, resembles remarkably the discourse on unwanted urban subjects by city-reformers ranging from Baron Haussmann in Paris (cf. Harvey 2003), and Robert Moses in New York (cf. Caro 1974), to planners in Washington’s 19th century make-over (cf. Farrar 2002). In the framework of Kristeva’s (1982) concept of “the abject,” migrants to the city are “the other” that is needed to define modern citizenship and modern urbanity;

² Old alley ways in the inner city with traditional courtyard houses.

they are a symbol of what is to be left behind on the path to the future of modern nationhood.³

But with their “backwardness,” poor peasants and uncultured migrants are also what threatens, or endangers, the modernization project in the eyes of the regime, because they represent what the government wants to abolish. Therefore, while inherently necessary for the project – both for their labor power and for their symbolic “otherness” – migrants have to be kept under control, pushed ever further out of the restructured urban landscape to the suburban fringe and beyond. It is against this social “othering,” or “fringing” that the migrants in Wangjing have constructed their identities as honest, diligent, and modest sales people, whose striving is for a better future for their children, derived through the ideal, indeed the trope, of education.

As Harvey (1990) has pointed out, Gramsci considered Americanism and Fordism the biggest collective effort to quickly and consciously create a new type of worker and a new type of man. He observed that the new methods of work were connected to a new mode of living, thinking, and feeling. “Questions of sexuality, the family, forms of moral coercion, of consumerism, and of state action were, in Gramsci’s view, all bound up with the search to forge a particular kind of worker ‘suited to the new type of work and pro-

³ The “othering” of present-day migrants has an interesting parallel to the state- and identity-construction during the early decades of the twentieth century. As Cohen (1993) argues, in order to facilitate change in the country, China’s intellectuals, Communists and non-Communists, created an image of the old society that had to be rejected. Key to this image was the redefinition of traditional Chinese culture and of the vast majority of people who still adhered to it, especially in the countryside. China’s elite came to regard the rural population as “backward” and as a major obstacle to national development. Rural China was considered a “feudal society” of “peasants” who were intellectually and culturally held back by “superstition.” “Farmers” were transformed into “peasants,” “tradition” into “feudalism,” and “customs” or “religion” into “superstition.” This was the invention of the “old society” that had to be overcome. The new ideology, however, also created the basic negative criteria which designated a new status group – peasants –, which by definition were considered to be incapable of participating in China’s reconstruction. See Cohen 1993.

ductive process” (ibid.: 126). Similarly, in the context of reform-period China, Anagnost (1997) observes that the readying of the Chinese population for participation in global capitalism has taken place through a state-initiated civilizing process which is aimed at remaking subjectivities into those appropriate for a disciplined, efficient work force. The question is, what kind of citizen is “produced”?

It is in the process of creating new citizens that we can discern the second role of the state in present-day transformations: as part of the same project of modernization, the state is actively encouraging and facilitating consumption. Consumption is where the state project of modernization meets the growing force of “the market,” and consumers are what the state wishes to “produce.” The government aims to upgrade, to ignite (literally, as seen by the recent space mission!) the economy to a western level of living standard. Part of this project is to transform “suplicants” to the state into self-reliant individuals. The regime needs Chinese citizens to consume in order to cut costs and to counter the extremely export-oriented economy, in turn an outcome of the off-shoring of production through foreign companies to Special Economic Zones in the mainland, and of foreign investment into companies producing export articles. Citizens who are willing and able to consume are, therefore, considered modern, valued citizens, while those who do not are obstacles in the way of development and of the bright, new future of modernity.

In many ways, the remaining state sector supports the emergence of “the market” in reform-period China. Some of the market halls in Beijing, for example, were put up by district governments which filled the city coffers by renting out the sales stalls. In other

cases, local officials just looked the other way when make-shift markets sprang up on empty lots.

One area where the continuing influence of the public sector becomes strongly evident is housing. Elderly Wangjing residents continue to receive certain benefits through their danwei, the most important of which are houses at significantly discounted prices. Similarly, many younger Wangjing residents have bought new housing through their work units, again providing them with relatively high-standard residences at prices substantially below the market price. Even couples who live in commercial housing often do so after they have profited for several years from danwei discounted housing.

Where the state recedes, for example, as regards social services, either family or money has to substitute. The newly wealthy couples in my research increasingly relied on paid services, which in turn significantly altered family relations and dependencies. Many young adults, however, were actually financially and organizationally supported by their danwei connected parents. Migrants, in contrast, unless they are married to urban residents, remain excluded from the multiple advantages of the state-sector and danwei provided housing.

In many ways, the state sector provides a niche or a "padding" that softens the harshness of Chinese citizen's "landing" in the market. This "protection," however, only extends to a selected group. For them, the state sector can at times indeed become a stepping stone, enabling them to significantly advance their social and economic position. Citizens who remain outside this realm, especially the migrant population, must, in contrast, rely on their own efforts to secure a living.

In the context of urban socio-spatial reconfigurations, the state's involvement in these processes supports or even enforces growing neo-liberal tendencies and the reemergence of class differentiations in the reform period. It is in this sense that I speak of the "citizenship of consumption,"⁴ since citizens' rights, their social and economic position in society, is increasingly intertwined with their power to consume.

The present study has also shown that housing has turned into a special arena of consumption. Housing, in fact, serves as the subject of private and commercial discourse on space. It is an item on which Chinese citizens spend a great deal of thought, deliberation, effort, and financial means. The reason for the importance of housing in people's lives are manifold: new houses not only bring better living standards, but with the background of Maoist surveillance of public *and* private spheres – as embodied in the *danwei* compound – today housing also offers privacy, that is, personal space. This new space provides previously unknown intimacy, freedom, and individuality. Housing in the reform-period is an "inside," a realm "outside" of the state's intrusion, a new private sphere.

The time that young, wealthy residents put into deliberations on *where* to live points to an important aspect of the new Chinese consumer society: people use consumption for their own purposes of constructing themselves as modern citizens and of status gain. Physical location within the urban landscape has assumed significance because of the combined factors of the reintroduced monetary value of land, and the ideational valorization of space caused by China's integration into the global capitalist system. Close-

⁴ I derive the phrase "citizenship of consumption" from Zhang Zhen (2000), who talks of the "democracy of consumption" in her analysis of the gendered aspects of current economic and socio-spatial transformations.

ness to the global realm, the “world,” as symbolized by the consumption of foreign-named and -framed new commercial housing complexes, imbues consumers with higher status in the transforming social make-up, in the class structuration of Chinese society.

This spatial valorization is, of course, part of the state project of modernization. Nonetheless, exactly where people chose to live does not matter so much to the government as the fact that they take part in the marketization of the housing sector. It is people themselves, assisted by advertising and promotion, who assign status to specific locations, who perceive advantages in one part of the city over other parts. It is residents who justify their not always rationally based choices with the old saying about the preferable north of the city, which refers to the traditional, cosmologically inspired city structure, and which they even alters to serve as justification.

Throughout the present-day process of transformation, while socio-economic differentiations are only emerging and class is less structure than “structuration,” consumption has become a practice to position oneself in contrast to others, a way to claim, and derive, greater social status. For their subjectively chosen new housing, residents are even willing to fight, facing authorities regarding what they perceived to be rightly theirs. In this manner, young, wealthy – consuming – citizens do not just follow blindly the “lure” of the market, but actively engage in the production of space.

Residential advertisements present residential communities not simply as places to live, but as providing a “cultural milieu” (cf. Fraser 2000; Zhang 2004), which is necessary for shaping subjectivity and for sustaining a distinct social group. Over and above conspicuous consumption of goods, the consumption of life-styles and space has therefore become one of the foremost arenas of social differentiation processes.

In various studies, Miller (e.g. 1997, 1998) has shown consumption to be a political act. Writing about Trinidad, he observes that peanuts and soft drinks have “become fundamental to the daily lives of the mass population as consumers, who use such commodities and a vast rank of other goods in order to construct themselves in terms of historical projects of value and identity creation” (1997:334). In an emerging consumer society such as China, after 30 years of anti-consumerism and anti-individual socialization, it may not be surprising to find conspicuous consumption breaking strongly to the fore in the present reform period. After all, as Borneman (1991:81) aptly observed, “socialism had trained them to desire, capitalism stepped in to let them buy.” The interesting point, however, is that it is the young generation, which came of age during the reform period, which engages in the most evident consumption. Even more significant is the form that their consumption takes.

The present study demonstrates that we have to look at the time- and place-specific circumstances to understand *who* buys *what* and *why*. More than just functioning as a symbolic marker of differentiation, the consumption of housing can be understood as a reflection and constitutive aspect of emerging social relationships and differentiations. In the current state project of modernization in China, aimed at producing consuming citizens through a mix of state and private economy, what emerges is a class structuration that is based at least as much on communities of consumers as on groups of producers. Social status, identity, and *habitus* are formed in the context of local socialization patterns in residential neighborhoods at least as much as in the workplace. It is in this sense that housing, and especially the consumption of housing, has become one of the prime arenas of the dynamic processes of social and spatial reconfiguration in contemporary

urban Chinese society.

Appendix A

Glossary of Chinese Terms

Ayi – Female domestic employee.

Baomu – Nanny.

Chaoyang Qu – Chaoyang District.

Cheng – City; wall.

Chengfen – Social role (as differentiated from social origin, *chushen*, see below).

Chongjian fazhan bu – Office of Redevelopment.

Chuppies – Chinese urban professionals; usually “white collar” workers.

Chushen – Social origin.

Cun – Village.

Danwei – Work-unit. Social, political, and residential unit based on the work-place, established in the 1950s.

Danxiao – Cowardly.

Dao – “The Great Unity” in Daoist religion.

Dingtì – Replacement system under which elderly workers pass their job on to their child.

Fangzi – Apartment.

Feinongye hukou – Non-agricultural residence status.

Furen qu – Rich people’s residential compound.

Gaige kaifang – “Reforms and Opening”; official phrase for the economic reforms initiated in 1978.

Geming gongzuo – Revolutionary work.

Geti - Private household.

Gonganju – Public Security Bureau.

Guanxi – Personal networks; used especially in the early years of the reform period to gain personal advantages, usually through a complex reciprocal exchange of gifts, attention, favors.

Guanxiwang – The art of establishing and nourishing *guanxi*.

Hai Keyi – “So-so.”

Hen Lei – “Very tired.”

Huai nüren – “Bad women.”

Hukou – Residence permit.

Hutong – Small urban alleyway.

Jia – Home; family.

Jiaoxian – Suburban counties.

Jiedao banshi shu - Neighborhood committee.

Jingji shiyong fang – Affordable housing projects.

Jinjiaqu – Near, or semi-urban districts.

Juweihui – Residents’ committee.

Laoban – Boss.

Lao wai – “Old outsider”; foreigner.

Lingchao - Careful, clever.

Liudong renkou – Floating population.

Nei, wai – Inside, outside; description of socio-spatial positions in the Confucian family.

Nengli – Ability.

Nongcunren – “Country-side people”; peasants.

Nongye hukou – Agricultural residence status.

Paichusuo – Branch office of the Public Security Bureau.

Pingfang – Simple, one story, brick house, often without internal bathroom and kitchen, typical of the rural population in urban areas.

Putonghua – Standard Mandarin Chinese.

Qingchunfan – The “rice bowl of youth”; jobs geared towards young, beautiful women in urban centers that emerged especially in the late 1990s.

Qu – District.

Renminbi – Official name of the Chinese currency, popularly called “Yuan.”

Shengchan chengshi – Producer city.

Shinian haojie – “Ten Year Calamity”; present-day official description of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

Shiqu – Commercial housing community.

Shixiaqu – Old inner districts of Beijing’s center.

Siheyuan – Traditional courtyard house.

Siyang - Private sector.

Suzhi – “Quality”; people’s innate character.

Taitai – Mrs. / Ms; respectful address for elderly women since “*tongzhi*” (comrade) is no longer considered appropriate.

Tie fan wan – “Iron rice bowl”; state-guaranteed employment and social benefits.

Waidiren – “Outsiders.”

Wangjing Xincheng – Wangjing New City.

Wangluo jiating – Networked family.

Xia hai – “Jump into the sea”; venture into the private economy.

Xian – County.

Xiansheng – Mister; male equivalent to *taitai*, see above.

Xiaofei chengshi – Consumer city.

Xiaokang – “Relatively comfortable life.”

Xiaoqu – Small district, neighborhood; usually a danwei.

Xinjiang – Province in the west of China.

Yijia liangzhi – “One family, two systems”; one spouse is employed in the state sector, while the other ventures into the private sector.

Youyi shangdian – Friendship Store.

Yuan – Garden; place of public recreation; enclosed space.

Zhejiang – Province in the coastal area of China, south of Shanghai.

Zhongchan jieceng qu – Middle-class residential compound.

Zhuangxiu – Decorate.

Appendix B

Table 7: 2000 Annual Cash Income Per Capita of 1000 Beijing Urban

Households (RMB)

	Average	Low In- come	Medium Low In- come	Medium Income	Medium High In- come	High In- come	2000 as % of 1999
Cash Income	12,560.32	7084.28	9040.03	11,699.46	13,964.29	22,622.01	117.9
Real Income	10,416.39	5824.6	7972.4	9685.31	11,932.44	17,931.36	112.7
Discretionary Income	10,349.69	5774.64	7916.37	9624.04	11,861.15	17,831.19	112.7
Staff and Workers	6816.34	3905.31	5089.16	6388.42	7902.9	11,610.96	110.3
Individuals	119.4	49.2	49.74	154.7	121.31	241.3	181.9
Re-employee after Retire- ment	252.74	108.7	171.17	236.62	318.1	467.72	106.4
Other Em- ployee	9.14	16.99	4.86	13.5	-	9.29	176.1
Other Income from Work	244.28	147.24	155.51	240.67	188.16	524.54	127.6
Property In- come	112.25	17.07	64.97	81.29	72.71	356.36	122.1
Transfer In- come	2862.24	1580.09	2436.99	2570.11	3329.26	4721.19	116.0
Pension	2429.74	1386.82	2152.23	2226.88	2960.18	3667.19	117.1

Source: *Beijing Annual Statistical Yearbook 2000*

Appendix C

Table 8: Land and Housing Reforms on the National and Beijing Municipal
Level

Year	National Level		Beijing Municipality
	Land Reform	Housing Reform	Housing Reform
1979	* <u>Law of Sino-Foreign Joint Venture</u> → stipulates levy of land-use fee from joint ventures		
1982	* Shenzhen first city to charge land-use fees, initially from foreign and overseas investors, subsequently from domestic land-users		
1984	* National trial on land-use fees launched in other cities		
1987	* <u>Land Reform</u> → introduces land values concept through land leasing and charge of land-use fees * <u>Ordinance of Arable Land Occupation Tax</u> to protect limited arable land * <u>First Session of the Seventh People's Congress</u> → paid transfer of land-use rights (<i>tudi youchang zhuanrang</i>) made official		

(Table 8, continued)

1988	* <u>Amendment of Article 10 of the Constitution</u> → “Land-use rights are allowed to be transferred according to the laws” * <u>Ordinance of Urban Land-use Tax</u> → stipulates that land-users within urban areas and industrial zones are liable for urban land-use tax * Shanghai starts conveyance of Land-use rights in state-owned land	* <u>State Council Plan for Housing Reform in Urban Area</u> → formally sets guidelines for reform of housing rental and promotion of home ownership	
May 1990	* <u>Ordinance of Conveyance and Transfer of Land-use Rights in State-owned Urban Land</u> → stipulates that LURs can be conveyed and transferred by methods of private treaty, auction and tender		
1992	* <u>Regulations of Administratively Allocated Land-use Rights</u> → stipulates that LURs in administratively allocated urban land can be transferred subject to approval of a local Land Administration Bureau and a premium paid to the state		* <u>Housing Reform Plan</u> involves: → Housing Provident Fund, → sale of public housing, → rent reform, → setting up of municipal and work unit housing funds, → encourage housing cooperatives
1993			* <u>Kangju (healthy living) Project</u> → build low-cost housing estates

(Table 8, continued)

1995			* <u>Peaceful Living (<i>anju</i>) project</u> → subsidized commercial housing for low- and middle-income families
1994	* <u>Urban Real Estate Administration Law</u> → consolidates earlier regulations on transfer of administratively allocated land		* <u>Adjustments to 1992 reform plan:</u> → three different price mechanisms → required rent increase planned by local authorities
1998	* <u>Land Administration Law</u>, → stipulates that administrative land supply still remains as a legal approach of land allocation for specific purposes	* <u>New housing policies:</u> → end direct housing distribution by employers → introduction of cash subsidies → creation of diversified housing supply system with state-supported affordable commercial housing as the main form → new housing finance system to help developers and individuals with loans and mortgages to facilitate urban housing market	* <u>Implementation Plan of Central Government Reforms (1999):</u> → abolish housing distribution by employers by end of 1998 → introduction of cash subsidies → consolidation of housing provident fund system → continuing house sales → further rent increase * <u>Affordable Housing (<i>jingji shiyong fang</i>) Project</u> * <u>Policies towards affordable housing</u>, encouraged → local government-organized unitary schemes → work-unit schemes for their employees using land under their control → joint schemes by two or more work units for their employees

Sources: Wang Ya-ping 2001; Wu and Yeh 1997; Xie, Parsa, and Redding 2002; Zhu Jieming 2000.

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