798 ART ZONE BEIJING
Site of ‘Cultural Revolution’ or Showpiece of City Marketing?

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ABSTRACT

This master dissertation is about 798 Art Zone, Beijing, where in the 1990s an old deserted electronic component factory complex was turned into an art district. The central thesis of this paper is “798 Art Zone Beijing: Site of ‘Cultural Revolution’ or Showpiece of City Marketing?” By treating the subthemes outlined below, an attempt will be made to answer the main thesis of this master dissertation.

In the first chapter, the trend of the emergence of art districts worldwide is examined. On the basis of China’s history since the First Opium War, it will be explained how it was possible for an art district to emerge in China. The next chapter is about the rise of contemporary art in China and the relations between artists and the government. The nature of these relations were crucial in the emergence of Chinese art districts. In Chapter 3 it will be clarified how Chinese urban form, due to its characteristics, facilitated the emergence of 798 Art Zone and art districts in general. After this, the transformation process of factory 798 into 798 Art Zone is clarified. The different periods in the development process of 798 Art District will also be treated. In the last section, Chapter 5, the current status of 798 Art Zone will be analysed. This chapter includes a future perspective on what the future may hold for 798 as well.
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INTRODUCTION

The central thesis of this master dissertation is: “798 Art Zone Beijing: Site of ‘Cultural Revolution’ or Showpiece of City Marketing?”. I chose 798 Art District as the subject of my master paper after my promoter, prof. dr. Ruddy Doom, had told me about it. At that time, in total I had already spent over a month in the Chinese capital, but I had never heard of 798 Art District before.

After I had read about 798, I found it to be a very interesting subject for my master paper, even though I had never visited it. After reading about 798, it was a bit difficult to imagine how it would be in reality. This all changed after I visited 798 and Beijing as part of my research for this master dissertation in April of this year. During my stay in Beijing I visited 798 Art District four times. This already suggests that the 798 complex is enormous and that there is always something happening. After my first visit to 798 I realised that it is a very important high light which attracts both tourists and Beijing residents.

In this master dissertation, with regard to 798 Art District, I have chosen to focus on city marketing, art communities and the evolution of large cities in developing countries. The evolution of large cities in developing countries is a topic that I am greatly interested in, especially having attended a few classes of prof. dr. Sami Zemni on this topic. Personally, I really like living in large cities. During my bachelor studies Oriental Languages and Cultures, I got the opportunity to study the Chinese language in China for four months. The fact that this language course took place in Shenyang, a middle large city (7 million inhabitants) in Northern China, was a bonus to me. During my stay in Shenyang, I visited Beijing several times. It is curious that at that time I didn’t visit 798, since the art district is quite well-known and is mentioned in almost every traveller guide.

In the title of this master paper, the term ‘Cultural Revolution’ appears. It is not my intention in this context to refer to the homonymous period in Chinese history. In the first Chapter, the historical period Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) is treated, but this term is used without citation marks. With ‘Cultural Revolution’, with citation marks, I intend to refer to the renewing, modernising and even revolutionary impact art can have on societies. Regarding the Cultural Revolution, the era, several authors remark that there was really nothing cultural about it and that it was more a struggle for power than a revolution, but this will be treated in the first chapter as well.

Another issue that must be mentioned with regard to this master thesis, is that all interviews, photo’s, personal observations and views are intended only as illustration. They are not intended to support the main thesis scientifically.
With regard to 798 Art District, there are several important reflections to make: How does the history of 798 shape its present and future? Is the art which is made in 798 Art District today still as renewing and edgy as in the past? What influence does the commercialisation of the art district have on the local art, artists and residents? What place does 798 Art District have in Beijing city marketing? Besides the main thesis, these are some of the questions I will treat in this master paper.

With regard to art, it should be noted that in this master dissertation, the main focus will be on plastic arts. It is this type of art that internationally is the more accessible, since it is this type of art that in general can be understood by anyone, regardless of one’s mother tongue. It is also mainly this type of art that is produced within 798 Art District.

798 Art District has not always been an art district. It was built in the 1950’s as an industrial complex producing electronics. In the 1980s and 1990s, the factory’s economic performance diminished and the factory complex was abandoned. After several artists, some well-known and others less so, attracted by low rent prices, had moved into the already abandoned factory buildings, the transformation of the industrial complex into an art district began. Today, the art district is well-known in Beijing and is visited by many tourists and Beijing residents every day.

In the first chapter, the phenomena of the emergence of art districts worldwide will be discussed. In the past, this phenomena mainly took place in western industrialised countries. At first glance, it may seem curious that it was possible for an art district to develop in China as well. Using Immanuel Wallerstein’s theory about countries in a core, semi periphery and periphery position, I will examine how it was possible for an art district to come into existence in China. Based on the history of China since the First Opium War (1939 - 1942), I will try to elucidate how China, although a developing country still today, managed to ascend from a periphery position in the past to a core position in the global world system today. I will also demonstrate how China’s integration in the global world economy since the 1980’s was crucial for the emergence of 798 as an art district.

The second chapter will cover the development of contemporary art in China. Contemporary art is a quite recent phenomena in China. Why the reason for this can be found in China’s eventful history will be further explained in this chapter. The influence of China’s history and present on the art scene will also be treated together with the relationships between the artists and the government. Why the relationships between the government and artists has caused a trend of artists quitting their jobs and moving to more remote locations where art villages come into existence will be explained. The popularity of contemporary art in China will be treated in this chapter as well.
Chinese urban form and planning will be elucidated in chapter three. Chinese cities underwent great transformations in the 19th and 20th century. These transformations will be explained based on China’s history of this period. I will also clarify why urban form in China has been heavily influenced by Chinese politics and the scarcity China faced in the past and present. Urban planning and the history of Chinese urban form have a decisive influence on the shape of present-day 798 Art District. I will clarify how several policy changes and global trends have enabled the rise and preservation of 798 as an art zone.

In the fourth chapter, I will shed light on the history of the development of 798. Such history starts bit after the declaration of the People’s Republic of China by Mao in 1949. In this part, it will become clear that the 718 project (of which factory 798 was part) was a special project in comparison to other industrial projects between China and other communist block countries. The transformation of the old factory into an art district started when the production had ceased and the factory had been abandoned by most workers. After this, several artists moved into the factory buildings to live and produce art there. In the history of the new born art zone, three distinct periods can be discerned. These are also treated in chapter four.

Chapter five will look at 798 Art Zone’s current status. Topics will be addressed such as how the favourable location of 798 forms a risk to the future of the art district. The fact that 798 Art Zone became a tourist attraction will also be discussed. In addition, I will evaluate how 798 became a brand name with a certain image. The consequences of the popularity of 798 are covered in this chapter as well. Last, a future perspective of 798 Art District will be given, although the future can not be predicted of course. But based on several current trends, it is possible to get an idea what the future may hold for 798.

By treating the subjects mentioned above, I will try to answer the main thesis of this master thesis, namely whether 798 Art Zone still is the site where “revolutionary” artworks are made or whether it has turned into a tourist attraction where artistic renewal no longer takes place.
1. CHINA’S CRUCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

1.1 The Art District Phenomenon

The emergence of art districts is not a new phenomenon. In several western cities, such art districts already exist for some time, like Montparnasse in Paris (since the 1880’s), Chelsea in London (since the 1920’s) and Soho in New York (since the 1960’s). 798 Art District is often compared to these art districts in local and international media. In many cases, art districts are located in old industrial buildings beyond the city centre. According to J. Currier, the reason why these art districts could emerge, has been the impact globalisation has on city landscapes.

With regard to globalisation it is M. Duffield’s view that certain areas do have access to the economic meaning of globalisation, while other areas don’t. Duffield refers to the existence of an economic network between metropolitan regional trading zones, in which certain metropolis are included, while other (non-urban) areas are excluded from these trading zones. Trade, finance, investment, production and technology are all concentrated within this economic network. The areas that are not included in this network are confronted with diminishing investments. According to Duffield, globalisation is connected to the capitalist logic of development and this type of development leads to internal consolidation (within the network itself) and exclusion of areas outside economic network of metropolis. If one combines Currier’s view on art districts being the result of the impact of globalisation on urban landscapes with Duffield’s view on the global economic network between metropolis, it can be concluded that an art district can only emerge in those areas that do have access to the economic dimension of globalisation and which are part of the global economic network of large cities.

In these metropolis there is, in accordance to their being part of the global economic network, a free market process on the housing markets. In the city centre, because of the favourable location, housing prices are rising. For many young artists, but also for poorer city dwellers, the housing prices in the city centre are too high. These groups tend to move to the locations where cheaper housing is still available: in the suburbs. More wealthy people and companies who can afford the high housing prices remain in or move into the city centre. This trend is called gentrification.

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2 Kong Jianhua, 2009, p. 27.  
3 Currier, 2008, p. 239.  
7 Harvey, 2008, p. 10.  
To clarify why the art districts trend, which hitherto mainly took place in western countries, is also surfacing in non-western countries like China today, I. Wallerstein’s theory with regard to core, semi periphery and periphery is of great importance. Wallerstein was among one of the first academics who stated that the world is divided into countries in core, semi periphery and periphery positions. According to Wallerstein, countries who possess the biggest economic power belong to the core. The countries who possess little or no economic power belong to the semi periphery or periphery. On the topic of exclusion of the periphery / the areas outside the global economic network, there is a striking resemblance between Wallerstein’s theory about core, semi periphery and periphery and Duffield’s theory about globalisation.

In Wallerstein’s view there is an essential division of labour between the core, semi periphery and periphery. The core countries develop and produce technologically complex products. The periphery provides raw materials and cheap labour to the core countries, but this only contributes to the prosperity of the core, the periphery has almost no gain. According to Wallerstein, this division of labour is a result of the fact that the world economy and capitalism are coinciding and one cannot exist without the other. The global world economy is in need of an overall structure, since it lacks political unification. This overall structure is provided by the division of labour between core, semi periphery and periphery.

Core, semi periphery and periphery are not static entities: it is possible for a core country to slip into (semi-) periphery and the other way round. In China’s history since 1842, there have been great changes in the position of China within the global world system. This history and the changes in China’s position within the global world system since the 19th century will be further elaborated in Chapter 1.2.

1.2 China 1842 – 1945: Country in the Global Periphery

As has already been mentioned in the above, the phenomenon of art districts is also present today in areas that traditionally were not part of the global core. An example of a country that traditionally belonged to the periphery is China.

Although China has never been colonised, the country did have to deal with strong dominance by several western countries and Japan in the 19th century. After China lost the First Opium War (1839 -

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9 Wallerstein, 1974, 349.
1842), the country was forced to sign the *Unequal Treaties* in Nanjing in 1842. By these treaties, western powers obtained free access to certain areas of the Chinese territory, China was required to pay reparations for the war damage suffered by the western powers in the First Opium War, and it lost Hong Kong to the British. The fact that it was possible for the western powers to force China to sign these treaties, which included extremely disadvantageous conditions for China, shows that China in the 19th century was in a very weak and peripheral position. With regard to Wallerstein’s essential division of labour between the core countries and peripheral countries, this also existed in the relations between China and the dominant foreign forces. China was required to produce products like China, silk and iron on behalf of the foreign powers. To keep the trade balance in balance, China was forced to buy opium from India.

The situation of China, due to foreign exploitation and diminishing strength of the Qing dynasty, became more and more unstable by the end of the 19th century. Especially the Taiping Rebellion (1851) and the Boxer Rebellion (1900 - 1901) demonstrated the weakness of the Qing government. Therefore, the collapse of the Qing, about ten years later, did not come as a surprise.

In 1912 the *Republic of China* was declared by Sun Zhongshan (also known as Sun Yat-sen), after Xuantong Puyi, the infant emperor, was forced to abdicate by the Xinhai-revolt (1911). Soon after this, rivalries aroused in the newborn republic between different (regional) groups: a period of civil war and warlord rule started.

In 1919 China was gravely disappointed by the outcome of the *Versailles treaties*, in which it was decided that the German concessions in Shandong would not be given back to China, but instead were granted to Japan. This event gave rise to the *May Fourth Movement* (Wusi Yundong), also in 1919. This movement was an anti-imperialist protest against China’s weak position and the bad treatment of China by the western powers. During the May Fourth Movement, Chinese nationalism grew very popular. An ideology that was able to benefit from the popularity of Chinese nationalism was communism. The rise of communism in China was not the result of Russian/Soviet support. The existing general discontent about China’s weak position and the enormous poverty gap within Chinese society were bigger contributors to the success of communism. In 1921 the *Chinese Communist Party*

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15 Doom, 2004, p. 44.
18 This period is called Beiyang-period 北洋时期 Beiyang Shiqi, 1912 – 1928. The Third World Institute, 2001, p. 166.
19 In the Versailles-treaties (1919) it was decided what should be done with Germany’s colonies, after this country had lost the First World War (1914 - 1919). Berndl, 2005, p. 502.
20 The concessions of western powers in China were a direct result of the unequal treaties (1842).
CCP (中国共产党 Zhongguo Gongchandang) was established in Shanghai. Together with the more rightist-nationalist Guomindang-party GMD (国民党) of Sun Zhongshan, the CCP formed an alliance to fight the Beiyang warlord regime. They succeeded in 1928.

The alliance had already proven not to be very solid, since 40,000 communist trade unionists were murdered by GMD militias in 1927. As a result of this event, there emerged a direct conflict between the leader of the CCP, Mao Zedong (毛泽东) and the leader of the GMD, Jiang Jieshi (蒋介石 also known as Chiang Kai-shek). Again a period of civil war began in China’s history, which lasted until the occupation of large areas in Eastern China by Japan in 1937. It was at this moment, when China was again overrun by a foreign power, that the CCP and GMD felt the need to bury the hatchet and to form an alliance again to fight the Japanese during the Second Sino-Japanese War (also called the Second World War in Asia, 1937 – 1945). Although Japan announced its capitulation on August 15, 1945, the Second Sino-Japanese War lasted until the surrender of the Japanese forces in China on September 9, 1945. After this, a renewed battle between CCP and GMD continued.

During the Second Sino-Japanese war, the GMD had gained military support of both the United States and the Soviet Union in the war against Japan. This meant that the GMD troops had much more advanced weapons at their disposal in comparison to the weapons that the CCP forces possessed. But the CCP was better organised, less plagued by corruption and had more motivated forces at its disposal. The CCP was also viewed to be morally superior to the GMD, which led to more popular public support for the CCP. The CCP was able to win the civil war in 1949. In the same year, Jiang Jieshi and other GMD officials had left mainland China for Taiwan. Mao Zedong declared the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949 in Beijing.

1.3 Post-1949 China: on the road to semi periphery

The actual dominance of China by core powers lasted until the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War, with the capitulation of Japan in 1945. This is why it is Lu Duanfang’s opinion that China entered the post-colonial era in 1949. China had never been directly colonised, so in a strict sense China can not enter a post-colonial era, but the strong dominance and exploitation by foreign powers ended in 1949.

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22 Flores, 2003, p. 86
23 Flores, 2003, p. 84 – 85.
24 The Third World Institute, 2001, p. 166
25 Gamer, 2008, p. 211.
26 Doom, 2004, p. 68
27 Berndl, 2005, p. 495.
and it was the first time that China entered global history voluntarily. After 1949, China made itself modern, instead of being made modern by external forces. This “Chinese” modernity translated itself in a new national identity. According to Lu Duanfang, this coincided with a post-colonial time lag: the Chinese leaders and the general public became more aware of the marginal position their country found itself in, in relation to the American-European centre.

Four years and a civil war later, in 1949, China was a penniless country, ruined after decades of foreign occupation, war and civil war. This is why China remained dependent on foreign support to rebuild the country after 1949. Due to its dependence on other countries, China also remained in a peripheral position after 1949. But, as will be described below, important changes took place which made possible the later transformation of China into a global core-country.

After 1949, the foreign support to help China rebuild the country mainly came from the Soviet Union. In 1950, China and the Soviet Union agreed to sign the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance (中苏友好同盟互助条约 Zhong Su Youhao Tongmeng Huzhu Tiaoyue). Although Mao declared this treaty to be the first treaty signed by China voluntary, China did not have much choice, because the Second World War was followed by the Cold War. This meant that all countries world wide were divided into two blocks: a capitalist and a communist block. According to F. Ninkovich, the Cold War was a contest between competing forms of internationalism to decide which brand of modernism would hold sway. The leaders of both blocks, the United States and the Soviet Union, both profiled themselves as ‘super powers’, which competed with each other on a military level. Both super powers also used financial aid to gain the support of other countries.

China did not have the possibility to request the United States’ help for financial support. After the Second World War, the west was afraid of communism spreading. After 1945 the United States granted support to Greece and Turkey to prevent these countries of becoming communist. Also the financial support which a lot of West-European countries obtained from the US under the Marshall plan was partly intended to stop the advance of communism in Europe. China was already a country with a strong communist party in 1945, and especially after the communist victory in 1949, China was seen in the west as part of the ‘Red Danger’. It was also (wrongly) suspected that China was behind the march of communism in Southeast-Asia, particularly in the case of Vietnam. In the west it was

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29 Lu Duanfang, 2006, p. 4.
31 Ninkovich, 1994, p. 133.
32 The theory that European countries would become communist unless the US granted these countries (financial) support, is called the Truman Doctrine, after the American president who implemented this theory in his foreign policy making. Berndl, 2005, p. 636.
feared that if one country in Southeast-Asia would become communist, others would surely follow. So China was forced to request the Soviet Union for support, and it gained this support after the signing of the Friendship and Alliance Treaty of 1950.

Although China and the Soviet Union were both communist countries, whom had fought side by side with North Korea during the Korean War (1951 - 1953) against South Korea and the United States, relations between the two countries were not well at all. Especially bad was the relationship between Mao and Stalin. Mao wanted to pursue a more Chinese version of communism in China, because in his opinion a more Chinese version of communism would be more easily accepted by the Chinese people. Mao pictured communism as a tree with one trunk and the same roots, but with different leaves and branches, by which he meant that several types of communism can coexist and that all types of communism have the same origins. Stalin, in contrast, was very much against the Sinification of communism and feared that a more nationalist form of communism would jeopardise the unity within the communist block. Particularly after Tito’s insubordination in 1948, Stalin became very suspicious of dissidence within the communist block. In Stalin’s view, Mao was only a peasant leader who did not possess sufficient intellectual capacities to be a correct communist leader. The fact that Mao put agriculture in stead of industry at the centre position in the People’s republic and the fact that he stated that the revolution should be led on the countryside to subsequently conquer the cities, only strengthened Stalin’s suspicions.

In fact, the quarrels between Mao and Stalin were part of a power struggle between China and the Soviet Union about the political leadership within the communist block. Russia was the first country ever where a communist revolution took place and because of this historical ground, the later Soviet Union profiled itself as the supreme leader of the communist block. Meanwhile, it was Mao’s view that China earned a leading position within the communist block as well, because the population of China (at that time around 600 million) was the largest within the block. Mao also accused Stalin of ‘great power chauvinism’. Eventually, Mao was forced to accept the Soviet Union’s leading position, because his country was too dependent of the Soviet Union’s support, so he could not risk losing this support over a power struggle. Although Mao did not let himself be spoon-fed by Stalin after this or as H. McAleavy puts it, Mao had “no intention of entering into servitude”, the fact that China had to

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33 This theory is also called the Domino Theory. Silverman, 1975, p. 916.
34 Flores, 2003, p. 106.
38 Flores, 2003, p. 84.
40 Flores, 2003, p. 106.
accept the Soviet Union’s superiority shows that China did not find itself in a core position within the 
communist block 44.

Under Mao, China recovered from most of the war damage, but internationally China remained very 
isolated. China’s United Nations Security Council seat remained in possession of Taiwan. Only few 
countries recognised the People’s Republic of China. Despite the economic growth achieved under the 
first Five Year Plan (1953 - 1957), which according to F.H.H. King amounted a 6% growth of the net 
domestic product per annum, China remained one of the poorest countries in the world 45.

Several more disputes with the Soviet Union occurred under Mao, where after Stalin’s death in 1953, 
Khrushchev had come to power. Mao especially disagreed with the fact that Khrushchev openly 
denounced Stalinism in 1956 46. It is McAleavy’s opinion that Mao was particularly mad about the fact 
that he had not been notified by the Soviets in advance about the change of course 47. The Soviet 
Union in turn did not agree with the Great Leap Forward (大跃进 Da Yue Jin, 1958 - 1961), which 
was launched by Mao to transform China from an agrarian nation into a more industrialised and 
prosperous nation. McAleavy states that the Soviet Union in reality feared that China would surpass 
the Soviet Union on the level of industrial production 48.

At the end of 1956 Mao started the Hundred Flowers Campaign (百花运动 Baihua Yundong). In this 
campaign, the population was encouraged to criticise the CCP’s policy on rebuilding the country. But 
Mao and other CCP top members were astonished by the enormous amount of criticism the Hundred 
Flowers Campaign resulted in 49. Not knowing how to deal with this criticism, Mao ended the 
campaign and in mid 1957, the CCP initiated the prosecution of those who had stuck out their necks 
during the campaign. According to M. Flores, over 300,000 people, many of whom intellectuals and 
artists, ended up in prison camps because of their criticisms during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (反右 
派运动 Fan Youpai Yundong) 50.

The conclusion that Mao and other top CCP politicians drew from the criticism received during the 
Hundred Flowers Campaign was that China had too much followed the example of the Soviet Union. 
A model which had been successful in the Soviet Union would not necessarily be successful in China 
as well. According to Mao, China needed a more Chinese model to rebuild the country. The emphasis 
on heavy industry in the Soviet Union did not match with China’s society, since the Chinese society

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44 McAleavy, 1976, p. 331.
45 King, 1968, p. 172.
50 Flores, 2005, p. 115.
had always been essentially agrarian in nature. Besides this, the Soviet model had led to de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union, which according to Mao, was a revision of communism\textsuperscript{51}.

A more Chinese style model for rebuilding the country was implemented in 1958, namely the Great Leap Forward (GLF). The major focal points of the GLF were the collectivisation of the agricultural sector and the re-education of the population. Instead of the previous economic emphasis on heavy industry during the first Five Year Plan, there was more emphasis on ‘walking on two legs’ during the GLF. This meant both the industrial sector and the agricultural sector were valued equally and both needed further development through massive labour-intensive projects\textsuperscript{52}. One of the main objectives of the GLF was that China was supposed to surpass Great Britain on the level of steel production, which in practice meant that there still was more emphasis on heavy industry during the GLF. In the agricultural sector, the \textit{people’s communes} (人民公社 Renmin Gongshe) were implemented\textsuperscript{53}. The people’s communes were intended to achieve an increase of scale in the agricultural sector and to promote a more efficient division of labour\textsuperscript{54}. This was necessary to be able to overcome the scarcity of capital in the sector. Private ownership of land plots and capital goods was eliminated. The Great Leap Forward completely failed in achieving its targets. Out of dissatisfaction with the GLF, the Soviet Union retreated all its experts in 1960, while China desperately needed these experts to rebuild the country. The economic growth under the first Five Year Plan was completely reversed by the GLF. Due to mismanagement, too much emphasis on heavy industry and neglect of the agricultural sector, China was faced with severe famine. According to official Chinese records, 20 million died during the Great Chinese Famine (1959 - 1961)\textsuperscript{55}. These years are also called the ‘three bitter years’. The first person to criticise Mao for the mismanagement of the GLF was Peng Dehuai (彭德怀), later Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) and Liu Shaoqi (刘少奇) also criticised Mao. Due to this, Mao was forced to resign as chairman of the People’s Republic in 1959\textsuperscript{56}.

After the bitter disappointment of the Great Leap Forward and the crisis within the party leadership, an internal power struggle between hardliners like Mao and Lin Biao (林彪) on the one hand and more progressive party leaders like Deng Xiaoping, Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai (周恩来) on the other hand, started. The power of the progressive branch within the CCP increased since Mao’s resignation and Liu Shaoqi succeeded him. But during the \textit{Cultural Revolution} (CR, 1966 – 1976, 文化革命 Wenhua

\textsuperscript{51} Doom, 2004, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{52} King, 1968, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{53} Flores, 2005, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{54} Flores, 2005, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{55} The Third World Institute, 2001, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{56} Berndt, 2005, p. 619.
Geming), the power struggle between hardliners and progressives reached a new climax. By means of Lin Biao, Mao was able to mobilise the army and later, parts of the population, in the shape of Red Guards (红卫兵 Hong Wei Bing) against the so-called ‘rightists elements’ in the Chinese society.

During the Cultural Revolution, China remained very isolated. After the Red Guards had almost become beyond the control of the CCP, Mao announced the CR to be over in 1969. Despite this, the CR lasted until Mao’s death in 1976, but the worst excesses of the CR ended in 1971 with the disappearance of Lin Biao after an alleged coup attempt. This was also the year in which more rapprochement between China and the west occurred. Due to Lin Biao’s disappearance and the fact that Mao was severely ill at that time, more room was left for the more moderate CCP top members. This meant rapprochement was made possible. The outcome of the rapprochement was China obtained its UN security council seat and most countries recognised the People’s Republic to be the only China, at the cost of Taiwan. The 1972 visit by Nixon to China is the most important symbol of rapprochement between China and the west.

It seems to me that China found itself partly in a peripheral, partly in a semi-peripheral position in the period 1949 – 1976. In this era, China was not dominated and oppressed by foreign powers like before. But China was very dependent of the assistance of the Soviet Union and other communist countries. Due to the disputes with the Soviet Union, China found itself in an isolated position within the communist block. But, due to the rapprochement since 1971, China became less dependent of the Soviet Union and the communist block. China became also much less isolated after 1971. Due to all the changes in 1971, 1971 was a pivotal year for China, in which the transition of China from a country in the periphery to a country in the semi-periphery started.

1.4 China’s Transition to a Core Country

To return to the ideas of I. Wallerstein about core, semi-periphery and periphery: it cannot be denied today that China is part of the core, although this was not the case in the past, as has been described in the above two sections. On the one hand, China is still a country in development today, especially in comparison with the west. It is Lu Duanfang’s view that China still is a country in development, because China is not a culturally western country, China was humiliated and exploited by foreign

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59 The official Chinese version about the disappearance of Lin Biao is that his plane crashed in Mongolia due to a fuel shortage (Qiu Jin, 1999, p. 195). Others, e.g. Ruddy Doom (2004, p. 87) draw this into question, since credible evidence has never been found.
60 Berndl, 2005, p. 620.
61 The Third World Institute, 2001, p. 167.
powers and China’s GDP is much lower. China’s GDP of 3769 US$ per capita a year (2009), is about ten times lower than most traditional core countries. On the other hand, China is the second largest economy in the world. Also the fact that several typical core countries like the US asked China for financial help during the current financial crisis (2008 - present) and the fact that as of may 2011, China holds over 1,1 trillion of the 14 trillion dollar US public debt, shows China is no longer part of the periphery or semi-periphery. The country meets Wallerstein’s criteria on core countries: today China has economic power.

The transition of China as a country in a peripheral position to a country in a core position was continued after Mao’s death in 1976. Although Mao was succeeded by Hua Guofeng as chairman of the People’s Republic, in reality it was Deng Xiaoping who was the most powerful person. In his Four Modernisations (四个现代化 Si Ge Xian daihua), which Deng Xiaoping had actually derived of Zhou Enlai, Deng proposed the modernisation of China’s agriculture, industry, science and national defence. Particularly the reforms that were made on an economic level were crucial for the emergence of China as an economic superpower. The new economic course was called Gaige Kaifang (改革开放), which means reform and opening up. Although this policy was a break with Mao’s policies in the past, the reforms made by Deng had not been possible without the transformations Mao made, according to R. Doom. It was Mao who reversed the scheme of evolution of Marx, which meant that socialism could be succeeded by capitalism, in stead of the other way round.

China was communist in the past and up until today this remains unchanged. But Deng’s reforms, such as re-allowing of private ownership of land and allowing the privatisation of state-owned companies (during the 1980s and 1990s), ensured that China could be integrated in the global capitalist market economy. But despite this, the Chinese government kept a strong regulating influence on the Chinese economy. That is why the Chinese economic system is also called a ‘state-guided free market economy’, although this may seem an oxymoron. Despite the fact that Deng Xiaoping has never been chairman of the People’s Republic, he and his allies remained the dominant figures in Chinese

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63 Lu Duanfang, 2006, p. 5.
66 Zheng & Tong, 2010, p. 276
72 This title can be compared to the title of head of state, R.D.
politics. Under Deng, the economy underwent a period of growth which lasts up till now. Due to Deng’s policies, millions of Chinese were pulled out of absolute poverty in the 1980’s.  

When the economic growth declined, as was the case at the end of the 1980’s, this, among other factors, led to protests and dissatisfaction with the population. One of the outcomes of this dissatisfaction among the Chinese people during the 1980’s, was the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement, in which a group of students, but later supported by all kinds of groups, demanded more freedom and more democracy while occupying the Tiananmen square in Beijing. The Chinese government first tried to negotiate with the protestors, but later decided to remove them from the square by the use of military force. It is not exactly known how many people have died during these events, which later became known as the 1989 Tiananmen Incident (天安门事故 Tiananmen Shigu).

Deng’s policy of allowing moderate reform had been successful economically and had led to stability for most of the time, especially in comparison to Mao’s policies, like the Great Leap Forward, which had led to grave instability. This is why Deng’s successors, Jiang Zemin (江泽民, 1993 - 2003) and Hu Jintao (胡锦涛, 2003 - present), mainly pursued Deng’s more moderate line of politics after his resignation in 1990. Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” (三个代表 San Ge Daibiao) and especially Hu Jintao’s “Harmonious Society” (和谐社会 Hexie Shehui) are largely continuations of Deng’s policy.

N. Lardy suggests China was among the first communist countries to reorient its trade patterns away from planned trade with communist countries toward trade with free market economies, after the Sino-Soviet Split in 1960. The economic reforms made by Deng caused a further change in the direction of trade. In 1978, only a few percent of the production was exported to the United States. In 1992 the export to the US already amounted 30% of total Chinese export. The countries to which China exported its goods actually became more diversified. This meant that China became more independent and therefore possessed more economic power.

It seems impossible to point out one specific moment or year in which China became a country in a core position. Rather there have been developments in the last ten years, of which one can deduce the international acknowledgement of China as a prominent economic world player. The most important one of these developments was the fact that China was allowed to join the World Trade Organisation

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75 Sanders & Yang, 2007, p. 20.  
76 Shambaugh, 2008, p. 112 and p. 147.  
77 Lardy, 1994, p. 33.  
78 Lardy, 1994, p. 34.
in 2001 after a 15-year negotiation process. The WTO’s main objective is to internationally discourage quantitative trade barriers and protectionist measures and policies. This means the fact that China was allowed to join the WTO shows China was no longer a country in the semi-periphery, as Wallerstein states that the policies of countries in the semi-periphery are characterised by strong protectionist measures.

With regard to the question when China became part of the global core, it is Currier’s opinion that Beijing joined the growing number of cities compelled to privatise, deregulate, liberalise (economically) and globalise, after thirty years of national-level reforms. If one considers Currier’s reasoning, it can be concluded that China joined the global core at the end of the 2000s, since the reforms Currier refers to, started in 1978. In Currier’s view, globalisation in China resulted in the commoditisation of art and culture, since the reforms were confined to the economic sphere only. This trend, as will be described in chapter two, four and five, was crucial for the emergence of 798 Art Zone.

Another reform that facilitated the emergence of art districts in China, was the fact that the national government started outsourcing decision-making to city and province levels. The national government retained only supervisory and policy functions. A consequence of this territorialisation is increased competition between regions and cities. Through an augmenting number of airports, technology hubs and central business districts, Chinese cities have increasingly promoted themselves as ‘global cities’. This competition among Chinese cities and also with other global cities shows that the Chinese cities are part of the global economic network of metropolis, as seen in Paragraph 1.1.

The above shows that since the early 2000s China after two centuries of transformation and change met all the prerequisites for art districts to emerge. But in this chapter, only the global and national economic and political prerequisites for the emergence of art districts in China were treated. That is why in Chapter 2, light will be shed on the rise of contemporary art in China and the relations between artists and the government. In Chapter 3, the prerequisites for the rise of art zones in terms of urban form will be addressed. In the fourth chapter, it will be explained how factory 798 eventually transformed into an art district. The fifth chapter will explore the current status of 798 Art Zone.

79 Sanders & Yang, 2007, p. 120.
80 Reuvid, 2006, p. 15.
82 Currier, 2008, p. 239.
2. CONTEMPORARY ART IN CHINA

Art in China is different from art in the west, not only in appearance. Both today and in the past, techniques are different, subjects of art are different, the function of art is different and the status of both art and artist is different. But one thing, according to Van Elzen, remains the same in both the past and present: politics and culture (and therefore also art) are always intertwined in China. This is actually an essential issue to this master dissertation, as will be demonstrated below. Chinese art, like other kinds of art, has been shaped by its history. Although an interesting topic, it would take us too far to review the entire history of art in China. Therefore, focus in this chapter will be on Chinese contemporary art, which came into existence after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. But a short flashback to art during the Maoist era is necessary, since this is essential for understanding contemporary Chinese art.

Under Maoist rule, art was obliged to serve politics, art for the sake of art was viewed to be bourgeois and therefore dangerous. Art was an important means to promote policies with the people, especially since many Chinese were still illiterate in 1949. The art form that was allowed in this era, was a mix of Soviet socialist realism with Chinese folk art traditions. This was typical for Maoism: on the one hand, Mao wanted to destroy everything that was typically Chinese. For instance, Mao wanted to destroy the “Four Olds” (四旧 Si Jiu, which included old culture, old thinking, old customs and old habits) during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, as has been mentioned before, it was Mao who tried to adopt Chinese elements into communism.

In the 1949 – 1976 period, the profession of artist was recognised, but an artist had to complete an official training program and had to join an artists union. Many artists worked for the Chinese government and designed propaganda posters or taught art. Others who were not willing to submit themselves to the regulations of the government with regard to art, placed themselves outside the system. Non-official artists produced art clandestinely. Artists who had been caught deviating from the official line concerning art were punished severely. Many artists also became victims of the earlier mentioned Anti-rightists campaign (1957).

With Mao’s death in 1976 and the rise of Deng Xiaoping, more general freedom was allowed. It was at that time Chinese contemporary art came into being. Deng also rejected personality cults surrounding former political leaders and the use of propaganda posters as a means of promoting

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84 Van Elzen, 2009, p. 82.
86 Jiang & Ashley, 2000, p. 4.
87 Van Elzen, 2009, p. 79.
policies declined. This meant many artists lost their job as an artist working for the government. This was in fact completely in line with the entire Gaige Kaifang policy of Deng Xiaoping: just like certain state enterprises, art became privatised as well. Artists now had to sell artworks to private individuals to make a living. This gave rise to a new market for art.

This is why 1976 was the year 0 for contemporary Chinese art. Maoist art can be of high quality, but is not really art for the sake of art. In the Maoist era, artists were not free in their choice of subjects. Therefore there was almost no room for the artist’s own interpretation or creativity. Artworks were not only appreciated for their aesthetic value, but were a tool of the regime to spread and consolidate the communist ideology as well. Most propaganda posters, even though the subject and the style can differ, more or less all do have the same lay out. Under Mao, the only allowed art style was a combination of Soviet socialist realism with Chinese folk art traditions. It is Van Elzen’s opinion that under Mao, Chinese art not only lost its connection with world modern art developments, but also lost the original characteristics of traditional Chinese art, which emphasised self-expression and freedom of spirit.\(^{89}\)

After 1976, art had to be reinvented from scratch by Chinese artists in a society which during the post 1976 period underwent great changes. Because they never had experienced this much artistic freedom before, many artists had no orientation and nothing to hold onto. Art in this period partly functioned to heal the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. This art is called “Scar Art” (伤痕文化 Shanghen Wenhua).\(^{89}\)

After 1976, although the art academies continued to teach socialist realism, Chinese art was again influenced by other (foreign) art styles. The reason for this was that certain Chinese artists got the opportunity to travel around the world to study art. Also, foreign visitors were allowed again to visit China in greater numbers. This had a great influence on Chinese contemporary art as well.

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\(^{89}\) Van Elzen, 2009, p. 77.
The era after 1976 was the first time that it became possible again for people to talk about art and literature in a serious way. This is why new art movements emerged, such as the Stars Movement (星星画会 Xingxing Huahui), which was founded in 1979. Thirteen young artists, e.g. Ai Weiwei (艾未未), Li Shuang (李爽), Ma Desheng (马德升), Huang Rui (黄锐), Qu Leilei (曲磊磊), and Wang Keping (王克平), were the founders of this movement. The Stars group was one of the first avant-garde art groups in China. Their first exhibition was organised by Huang Rui in 1979. The exhibition was held by hanging art works on a fence near the official state museum for art, the National Art Museum of China (中国美术馆 Zhongguo Meishu Guan). This exhibition was banned by the government. Because of this, several members of the group started promoting artistic freedom. Under Deng, artistic freedom was not infinite either.

According to Sus Van Elzen, the first Chinese contemporary art movement saw the light in 1985, namely the ’85 New Wave movement (85美术运动 Bashiwu Meishu Yundong). The members of this movement were inspired by the reforms and renewal of Deng Xiaoping’s Gaige Kaifang policies. The ’85 New Wave and other contemporary art movements continued to develop in a more and more provocative and conceptual direction, peaking with the 1989 China Avant-Garde Exhibition (前卫艺术展 Qianwei Yishuzhan), held in the National Art Museum Beijing. This exhibition was the first and only time that avant-garde artists appeared as a large group at this museum.

The avant-garde movements such as ’85 New Wave ended with the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, during which some ’85 New Wave members were victims, although many non-artists were also involved in the protests. Even though the Chinese government had become more liberal since the death of chairman Mao, freedom was and up until today is not equal to the level of freedom known by artists in the west. The Tiananmen Incident showed that post 1976 China still is a repressive state. But according to R. Doom, the Tiananmen Incident also shows that China is no longer a typical police state, since a police state would never have tolerated protestors occupying the most important square of the county for weeks. On the other hand, it shows clearly that there is a certain fluctuation in the

91 Art Speak China Website http://www.artspeakchina.org/mediawiki/index.php/The_Stars_Group_%E6%98%9F%E6%98%9F%E7%94%BB%E4%BC%9A Consulted on 07-26-2011.
92 Van Elzen, 2009, p. 76.
93 Art Speak China Website http://www.artspeakchina.org/mediawiki/index.php/1989_Avant-Garde_exhibition_1989_%E5%89%8D%E5%8D%AB%E8%89%BA%E6%9C%AF%E5%B1%95 Consulted on 08-01-2011.
amount of freedom that is allowed by the state, which applies to the freedom of both civilians and artists. For instance, this year a new crackdown by the government on artists, such as Ai Weiwei, occurred, after a period of a quite lenient attitude by the government toward artists. Artists were monitored closely by the government in the 1980’s and this still is the case today.

The monitoring of artists by the government has caused a trend in artists and art students to quit their official jobs and move to little villages in the outskirts of Chinese large cities, in order to escape the watchful eye of the government. It was in these more remote locations, that artist enclaves/villages came into existence. The first group of artists to do so, was a group of artists and art students in Beijing who gave up their official jobs to become freelance artists in the mid 1980’s. They decided to move to Fuyuanmen village, near the old Summer Palace (圆明园, Yuan Ming Yuan), because of its remote location on the city fringes. Chinese artists isolated themselves to be able to produce art without so much government interference. The art village near the Summer Palace is described by Liu Mingliang as inhabited by artists living a vagrant and clandestine life. This is why contemporary art had and still has an “underground” image in China. The artist enclaves, such as Fuyuanmen, were the actual forerunners of the later art districts, such as 798, as will be further explained in 4.3.

Today, Chinese contemporary art is very popular around the world. Recently a work by Zhang Xiaogang (张晓刚) called ‘Forever Lasting Love’, was sold for £6,300,000, a new record price for a Chinese contemporary art work. Though this is changing, in China itself, Chinese contemporary art is less well-known and less popular. One could say Chinese contemporary art maybe is even more popular outside China than within the country itself, since a great deal of the Chinese art sold on auctions, ends up in possession of non-Chinese collectors. This is why it is imperative for Chinese artists to have access to the international art market. Without this access, many artists would not be able to make a living just by producing art.

According to Doom, an important reason why contemporary art is not very popular with the average Chinese, is that the traditional bond between folk art and contemporary art does no longer exist. During the pre-revolutionary era, the art that was appreciated by the average people adhered to the aesthetics of the elite and had an educational value as well. The Maoist art was also made in a way that everyone could understand by including folk art elements. But with the death of Mao and the rise of Deng and the coinciding increase of freedom, contemporary art movements emerged. But these art

movements were led by a small elite of artists and art students in the larger cities of China. These movements had to operate in an underground scene, due to their controversial character and their critical attitude toward the government. Because of the elitist and underground aspects of contemporary art and the fact that contemporary art circles were concentrated mainly in the cities, the bond between folk art and elite art ceased to exist after 1976. Also, based on my own observations, the “contemporary” art exhibited in the official museums I visited is very different from the kind of art which was produced in 798 Art Zone in the 1990s, when it was still an underground scene. This is why contemporary Chinese art is not appreciated by everyone in China, since many people can not identify with Chinese contemporary art. It is Liu Mingliang’s opinion that, although China has entered the 21st century, Chinese society still has not accepted contemporary Chinese art and the artists that produce it.\(^{100}\)

The relative unpopularity of contemporary Chinese art in China has had great influence on the development process of 798 Art Zone. This will be further discussed in Chapter four and five.

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\(^{100}\) Liu, 2011, p. 19.
3. CITIES & URBAN PLANNING IN CHINA

Cities and urban planning in China underwent great changes in the 19th and 20th century. One of the reasons for this, is that the Chinese urban population increased dramatically in this period. In 2006, 577 million people lived in Chinese cities. Between 1980 and 2002, the percentage of people living in cities of China’s total population increased from 20% to 40%. But at the end of the 19th century, China was still largely a rural country, with only 6 - 7.5% percent of the population lived in cities.

In the first years of the 19th century, before the First Opium War, the traditional forms of architecture and urban planning were persistent, because there was very little foreign influence on Chinese architecture and urban planning at that time. China has a very long history of city planning, since the oldest texts on this topic date back to the Zhou dynasty (周, 1150 – 256 BCE). In these classical models, cities have city walls, around the city itself, but also within the city. The neighbourhood was the basic spatial unit to organise cities. The street plan of these cities was a north-south east-west grid of streets. Residential and commercial units were separated of each other in the classical city. This is more or less what Chinese cities looked like before 1839.

The urban landscape of Beijing was even more influenced by the classical Confucian and imperial values in terms of architecture and urban form in comparison to other Chinese cities, since it has already been the capital and centre of the Chinese empire for long. The city’s layout was constructed in a very hierarchical way, with the forbidden city in the middle and concentric city walls demarcating social hierarchy within the city.

After the First Opium War (1839 - 1842) and the signing of the Unequal Treaties (1842), foreign powers began dominating China. These foreign powers had great influence on Chinese urban form, by building railroads, ports and the first western-style buildings, such as the buildings that were built on the Shanghai Bund (中山路 Zhongshan Lu) in this period.

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102 Zhao Gang, 1994, p. 173.
103 Shaugnessy, 2006, p. 28.
104 Lu Duanfang, 2006, p. 11.
In the republican era (1912 - 1937), first attempts were made to reorganise the cities in a more modern way, although the city walls were preserved. Old cities were considered unhealthy and 乱 Luàn, disorganised and chaotic, as opposed to harmonious ( 和 He), which modern cities were considered to be 106. However, the traditional dense and compact patterns persisted in most Chinese cities.

After 1949, the People’s Republic of China began emphasising itself as a socialist country, part of the socialist block. This had a great influence on Chinese urban form. The work units or Danwei (单位) became an essential feature of Chinese urban planning. The entire Chinese society was divided into Danwei by the new communist government to achieve the most effective labour division to rebuild the country as quickly as possible. The Danwei system still exists today, although in a less strict way. The Danwei are not only a work place, they are social institutions also. Traditionally, all the members of one work unit lived together on the same walled compound, since it was the Danwei that provided residential space to its members. But the quality of the residential units depended on the Danwei’s own financial situation 107. This made possible an increase in inequalities of housing.

In some cases, the Danwei units still exist in a strict way, with all Danwei members living in the same compound. In the walled compound, Danwei members have access to all kinds of facilities such as shops, cafetaria’s, healthcare and educational centres etc. So in contrast to the classical city, commercial units are present in the Danwei compounds. There is no need for the Danwei members to leave the compound, since the work units are largely self-sufficient. According to Lu Duanfang, although the Danwei work unit was the dominant urban form under Chinese socialism, an entirely socialist city does not exist in reality 108. The Chinese Danwei-based urban form was an alternative to both capitalist and socialist urban form. Chinese urbanism was more or less a compromise between the need for capital accumulation and labour reproduction that existed in the Chinese society during the Maoist period. The fact that the Danwei compounds were walled but comprised both residence-, commercial- and work units, shows influences of both the classical Chinese city and the socialist city.

The Hukou system (户口) is another division mechanism used by the Chinese regime, which is closely related to the Danwei system. Developed in the 1950’s, the Hukou system was designed to register the residence of households 109. By using the Hukou system, the population was divided into city dwellers and rural dwellers. This system was also developed to put an end to massive rural migration to the cities in the coastal areas of China, since people could only make use of social services, such as health care and education, in the town registered as their residence. Migration was allowed, but a person

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107 Fleischer, 2010, p. 29.
needed the government’s permission for this. The state also issued quota’s concerning the number of people allowed to migrate every year.

After 1949, urban planning in general became a national issue instead of a municipal issue. In the first Five Year Plans, there was a strong emphasis on industrialisation of the country and urban planning was supposed to serve this goal. Residence and work place at the same location was favoured. The typical Maoist city consists of the old city centre surrounded by walled Danwei work / residence units. This is completely contrary to capitalist cities, in which residence, commercial and work units are separated. New construction mainly took place outside of the traditional city centre, due to the increasing number of Danwei in those areas. The city centre remained a commercial and residential centre, as had been the case before 1949.

According to Lu Duanfang, it is very important to take the element of scarcity, that characterised post 1949 China, into account in research on Chinese urban form. It is Lu’s opinion that in the research on Chinese urban form, too much emphasis is put on socialist aspects, at the expense of third world aspects such as scarcity. The difference between developed countries and countries in development, is that the funds needed for industrialisation should be acquired from within the country by countries in development, while developed countries extracted the funds for industrialisation from other countries than their own (often from their colonies). Scarcity and political factors were the main forces in shaping Chinese urban form and it is these factors that need to be included in this research, in order to get a better understanding of the urban transformations in China and therefore of the emergence of 798 Art District itself.

There were four different causes for scarcity in post 1949 China, according to Lu. The first reason was that scarcity was an inheritance from the earlier era. Secondly, China faced international trade embargos and blockades after 1949. Scarcity was also created by the new political and economic system. And lastly, social scarcity was created by the changes in human needs that were a consequence of modernisation. A gap existed between people’s expectations and reality.

The old construction style was considered wasteful, so a new kind of architecture was needed to overcome scarcity. Supporters of the old style were dismissed from their positions. This also happened to Liang Sicheng (梁思成), Chairman of the Beijing Urban Planning Committee, who was fired in 1955 for being an advocate of the old construction style. The new Chinese building structures were

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110 Lu Duanfang, 2006, p. 3.
built according to an ultra economic standard. This was also an important criterion in the construction of 798 factory complex, as will be explained in Chapter 4.

In the Maoist era, scarcity was actually considered to be a positive issue. It meant a blank sheet of paper, from which society could start all over again. Lu included a quotation of Harvey in his work: “Mao was a real life Faust who aspired to build a brave new world out of the ashes of the old, by eliminating anything that stood in the way of modernisation”. This quote expresses exactly the essence of Maoist urban form: the elimination of all wasteful types of urban form combined with the adaptation of some traditional types of urban form, such as the walled compound.

In this chapter, it is also important to consider Henri Lefebvre’s theory on the production of space. It is his view that space is not neutral, but that it is a fundamental component of the capitalist mode of production and social domination. Space is not neutral and is a product of social domination, since it is a social product. Space serves as a tool of thought and action. This means that space in addition to being a means of production; it is also a means and product of control, domination and power. With regard to this theory, it is Lu Duanfang’s opinion that the realisation of the production of space was not only achieved by the socialist mode of production but also by the historical scarcity and mismanagement caused by the Maoist regime.

Since the end of the 1970’s and the 1980’s, as described in Chapter 1, more room became available for opening up to the west, reform and modernisation. China became a more capitalist state as well: China started participating in the capitalist world market. On the other hand, China kept emphasising itself as a developing country as well. This trend caused the emergence of the central business district as a new form of urban planning. The emergence of central business districts in Chinese cities was accompanied by a strong uneven growth of territorial units and the rise of new forms of urban spaces such as shopping malls, technology hubs, flagship architecture buildings and luxury residential enclaves. This trend was essential for the development process of 798 art district, since a capitalist market process in the housing market is an important prerequisite for art districts to emerge. It is exactly the production of space that facilitated the emergence of 798 Art Zone, since increased territorial inequality and inequality among city dwellers is the main drive behind gentrification processes in large cities (as has been explained in Paragraph 1.1).

113 Lu Duanfang, 2006, p. 11.
116 Lu Duanfang, 2006, p. 11.
In the 1990s, there was a policy shift by the regime toward commoditisation of residential real estate \(^{119}\). The Second National Housing Conference in 1991 decided that the rents were to be raised to a level covering maintenance costs, sitting tenants were to be encouraged to buy their apartments and an increasing share of new housing was to be offered in the housing market. Because the people’s wages had increased over a certain number of years, many had accumulated substantial savings. This and the fact that inflation was high and the Chinese financial institutions were still immature made it very attractive for Beijing residents to buy real estate as a kind of money box.

Another decision that had an influence on urban planning in Beijing, was the reintroduction of land prices in 1987 \(^{120}\). This made it so that today, spatial structure and location decisions in Beijing are more and more based on land value. During the Maoist era, there was a more clear segregation between urban and rural sections on the fringes of Beijing. Today, this has changed due to the reintroduction of land prices. Rural and urban parts are more varied in terms of location.

Today, the real estate industry has become one of the most important engines behind Chinese economic growth. The focus of development of property complexes has increasingly shifted to the suburbs, since the housing prices in the city centre have risen. In Beijing, the areas outside of the 3rd Ring Road, have experienced increasing popularity for residential construction projects. Fleischer even mentions that the area of Jiuxianqiaolu (酒仙桥路) and Wangjing (望京), the neighbourhood in which 798 is also located, have become the latest centre of residential construction projects \(^{121}\). It is Fleischer’s conclusion that the urban experience of residents underwent great change \(^{122}\). In the Maoist era, the quality of one’s housing depended on one’s revolutionary background, relations to superiors and the political importance of a person’s Danwei. Today, it depends on a person’s economic situation and the economic performance of the Danwei.

Since China became part of the global economic network, several large Chinese cities also became part of the global economic network of metropolis (Section 1.1). This has sparked a competition between these cities. In the competition among Chinese cities in profiling themselves as global cities, the construction of a unique identity is very important. This is why the construction of flagship architecture buildings, airports, central business districts and technology hubs became very popular with city planners. This is also the case in Beijing, since over the last ten years, these types of buildings have been constructed in large numbers \(^{123}\). In order to build these projects, older buildings or residential units had to be expropriated and demolished first. For instance, Beijing was in the news

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\(^{120}\) Fleischer, 2010, p. 30.  
\(^{121}\) Fleischer, 2010, p. 31.  
\(^{122}\) Fleischer, 2010, p. 31.  
\(^{123}\) Kloet, 2010, p. 34.
internationally several times in the period leading up to the 2008 Olympic Games, because residents had been forcefully evicted from their homes to make room for the construction of the Olympic Stadium. 798 has been on the list to demolish as well, but it turned out that 798 Art Zone contributes to Beijing’s image of a global city. Although it is not a newly constructed complex, it is an example of flagship architecture. It helps Beijing in constructing a unique identity, since the architecture of 798 is unique within Asia. 798 also portrays an important phase in the Chinese modern history. Besides this 798 is offering a contemporary cultural space previously lacking in Beijing. All these issues will be further elucidated in the next chapter.

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4. HISTORY OF 798

4.1 Factory № 798

798 started as a factory complex that was part of the bigger industrial project called ‘718 Joint Project’. 718 Joint Project was part of the first Five Year Plan (1953 - 1957) of China. In those days, China was still in the “建国 Jianguo” period of rebuilding the country after decades of war. The main objectives of the first Five Year Plan were to collectivise the agricultural sector and a quick industrialisation of the country to make possible the restoration of the war damage. In Mao Zedong’s view, the best way to achieve this goal was the development of heavy industry. He also believed that heavy industry could help China in achieving more wealth. It was Mao’s dream vision for Beijing and other Chinese cities that the skylines would be filled with factory chimneys. It was in this context that the idea to build 718 joint factory, and in fact for many other industrial complexes, originated.

In 1951, Zhou Enlai granted permission to build a factory complex in the Dashanzi (大山子) area. At that time, Dashanzi was still located in the outskirts of Beijing, in an area were already some other factories had been build, such as factory 774.

As has been described in Chapter 1, China was very dependent of the support of the Soviet Union in the period after the proclamation of the People’s Republic. Hence China did not have sufficient liquidities to finance the 718 project itself. But the Soviet Union declined China’s request to finance 718. A reason for this could be the bad relationship between China and the Soviet Union in the 1950’s. On the other hand the Soviet Union was already involved in financing and assisting in 156 other industrial projects in China.

Because the People’s Liberation Army was in need of electronic military components, the plan was that 718 would produce these components in the future. The Soviet Union did not produce its own electronic components. Instead it imported these components from East-Germany. This meant the Soviet Union did not have experience in producing electronic components and China had to rely on the DDR for this. In 1953, the Chinese government agreed with the DDR that the DDR government would finance the building of the factory complex, and with this, 718 Joint Project became the 157th project in China financed by the DDR. The arrangement was that the DDR Ministry of Post and Telecommunications would provide a design for the industrial complex. They would also provide

130 Huang, 2008, p. 58.
technical assistance for the building process. The German influence is reflected in the architecture of
the 798 factory complex: for the design of the buildings, the Germans used the originally German
Bauhaus style. The Bauhaus style was very appealing to Chinese urban planners, who were faced with
scarcity in the post-1949 era, since the Bauhaus style is very economic. The Bauhaus style was not
appreciated by the Soviets, who preferred more palatial architecture styles. This is why the 718 project
embodied a provocation toward the Soviet Union and why there were several disputes between the
East-German experts working in 718 and the Soviet experts working in the near-by 774 factory. The
content of these disputes usually concerned the quality of the buildings. For instance, the Chinese
and Soviet experts found it sufficient if the buildings could withstand a 7.0 Richter’s scale earthquake,
but the East-German experts, in a typical case of German gründlichkeit (thoroughness), wanted the
building to be capable of withstanding 8.0 Richter’s scale earthquakes.

Between 1954 and 1964, over 300 East-German experts cooperated with Chinese construction workers
to build the 718 industrial complex. Only in 1964 was the entire building process of 718 completed,
the building of factory 798 had been finalised in 1957. The entire 718 complex measured 500,000
square metres and consisted of several separately operating factories: factories 706, 707, 718, 751, 797,
798 and research institute no. 11. The fact that the names of all factories started with a seven,
indicates that they were all producing some kind of military products. The 718 Joint Project was
opened on October 5, 1957, although it was not yet finished. It was also in 1957 when factory no. 798
opened its doors. Just like the entire 718 complex, 798 was a state-owned factory complex. In 798
electronic components designed for military use were produced. There are even rumours that the
electronic components used in China’s first nuclear bomb were produced in the 798 factory buildings.
The components that were produced were not only intended for China’s own market, some components
were also exported to other socialist countries, such as North Korea. Since the communist block
countries were excluded from the global market, they were forced to trade among each other.

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133 Huang, 2008, p. 64.
135 Huang, 2008, p. 58.
In 1964, the 718 industrial complex was separated into several separate factory complexes, of which 798 was one. The 718 complex had become to big to manage efficiently 137.

718 is the biggest industrial complex ever built in the Bauhaus style 138. It is also unique within Asia, since it is the only factory complex built in Bauhaus style on the continent 139.

4.1.1. Factory 798: a role model and propaganda showpiece

When the 798 factory complex opened its doors in 1957, it was known as one of the best places to work in Beijing, because of the excellent facilities for the workers and their families. S. Van Elzen views 718 as an almost completely self-sufficient industrial city, since 718 had its own theatre, shops, stadium, swimming pools and libraries 140. It also provided housing, healthcare and education for the workers and their families. This also meant that 718 and 798 complex were flagships for the Chinese government. The 718 project perfectly conformed to the CCP policy of collectivisation of agriculture and industry. It was also a (rare) example of successful cooperation between two socialist states. Ironically it was already in the 1950’s and 1960’s that the factories embodied a mix of heavy industry and (propaganda) art, since the factory walls and ceilings were decorated with propaganda slogans à la ‘Chairman Mao is the Red Sun in our Hearts’ (毛主席是我们心中的红太阳 Mao Zhuxi Shi Women Xin Zhong de Hong Taiyang). Other slogans encouraged workers to work diligently for the sake of the motherland.

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137 Van Elzen, 2009, p. 129.
139 Cui Xuan, 2010, p. 198
140 Van Elzen, 2009, p. 128.
4.2 The End of the 798 Factory, The End of an Era

In the 1980s and 1990s, 798 factory complex faced many hardships. Due to Deng Xiaoping’s Gaige Kaifang policies, more competition between companies was allowed in China. It also became possible to privatise state-owned companies. According to R. Doom, the main reason for the Chinese government to allow more competition and the privatisation of state companies, was that the management structure above the state companies had also proven to be inefficient.141 State companies, like the 798 industrial complex, found it hard to beat with this new competition. Many state companies employed more workers than necessary for production and therefore contributed to hidden employment.142 Because of the surplus of employees and with it the high wage costs, many state companies were economically unhealthy and unable to compete with non-state companies.

The development of Special Economic Zones (SEZ 经济特区 Jingji Te Qu) also had a negative influence on state enterprises outside the SEZ. These Special Economic Zones had been established under Deng’s Gaige Kaifang-policy at the end of the 1970’s as an experiment to reduce the social, economic and political costs associated with drastic policy shift, which Gaige Kaifang was.143 The

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143 Wei, 1999, p. 6.
Special Economic Zones served as a laboratory to test new, more open measures, which later might be implemented outside the SEZ as well. In these zones, a higher degree of economic freedom exists, which attracted many foreign companies and foreign investment. State-owned companies were not used to compete with foreign companies and because of their inefficient management and high wage costs due to overstaffing were unable to do so. State-owned companies outside the SEZ were subjected to more stringent economic laws and therefore did not have the same competitive position as state enterprises in the SEZ. The latter were able to benefit from the presence of foreign companies and investment in the SEZ, the state-owned companies outside the SEZ were not 144. Since 798 was not located in a SEZ, the existence of Special Economic Zones influenced 798’s competition position negatively.

Another factor that contributed to the difficulties of state companies, was that during the 1980’s the economy of many other socialist countries was in a very bad shape, mainly due to mismanagement. This also affected the Chinese economy and state factories. The quality of goods made in state factories was not of a level sufficient to export to western countries, although these countries in the 1980’s were already China’s main trading partners 145. Most of the goods produced by state enterprises were intended for the Chinese market, or were exported to other socialist countries. This bilateral trade had ceased almost completely at the end of the 1980’s 146. With perestroika and later the end of the Cold War and the degeneration of the Soviet Union, the need for electronic components for military use in the Soviet Union collapsed. This influenced 798 negatively: production ceased at the end of the 1980’s, over 10,000 factory workers lost their jobs and ultimately, the factory complex was abandoned147.

The ceasing of production and later abandonment of state factories like 798, occurred a lot during the 1980s and 1990s. This marked the definitive end of a period in which a collective mode of producing was the norm. Only factory 751, which was also part of the 718 Joint Project, is still in operation today.

144 Wei, 1999, p. 86.
146 Calvo, 1993, p. 53.
4.3 The First Artists Arrive

With the almost complete ceasing of production and abandonment of the 798 factory complex at the start of the 1990s, a big group of industrial buildings in Bauhaus architecture style became vacant in the Dashanzi suburb of Beijing. Cui Xuan describes the architecture of the 798 buildings to be spacious in terms of design, symmetry, but also playfully asymmetrical, plain, lofty and neat. Some of the factory spaces were built with a saw tooth-shaped ceiling with windows in it facing south. This means that there is always a lot of natural light in the factory spaces, which is preferred by artists. The Bauhaus architecture turned out not only to be functional for industrial production but for artistic production as well. Besides the favourable factors of the 798 site, the reason one of the first art districts in China came into existence exactly in Beijing, is that this city has always been a magnet for

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149 Cui, 2010, p. 198.
intellectuals, artists and talents of all kind, since it was appointed by Kublai Khan as the new capital in 1271.\(^{150}\)

According to Kong Jianhua (孔建华), the development of 798 Art District was caused by the free market process on the Beijing Housing market. In the development process of 798 Art Zone, one can discern three distinct stages\(^ {151}\). The first stage is what he calls the stage of cultivation and incubation (培育孵化 Peiyu Fuhua). In this period, which started in 1995 and ended in 2003, the first artists rented factory spaces to use these as art studios. At that time, rent prices were very low: around 0.3 Yuan per square metre per day.

The first group of artists who moved into the 798 factory buildings was the clique around Sui Jianguo (隋建国), Lin Jing (林菁) and Liu Suola (刘索拉)\(^ {152}\). In 1995, the Central Academy of Fine Arts moved from their original location in Wangfujing (王府井), in the city centre, to an old electronic component factory in Wangjing (望京), which is near 798. In the same year, Professor Sui Jianguo, Dean of the sculpture department of CAFA, was looking for cheap housing to set up a work space\(^ {153}\). He rented a 3,000 square metres abandoned storage room of factory 706 and was the first artist to settle there – and with this, the art district was born. Soon others would follow Sui Jianguo. The first foreigner to become a tenant in the art district was Robert Bernell, an American national. In 2002 he rented the Hui Muslim cafeteria of 798 factory, which measures 120 square meters. Bernell transformed this space into the first bookshop in the art district, the Timezone 8 Bookshop.

Although 798 art district was a new phenomenon in China, the trend of artists living in kind of “artist enclaves” was not new, as has been explained in Chapter 2. The entire “artist enclave trend”, but especially the artist enclave that came into existence in the 1980’s near the Beijing Summer Palace, has contributed to the emergence of 798 Art Zone. The artists living in the art village near the Summer Palace, were evicted in 1993\(^ {154}\). So during the mid-1990s, many artists were looking for a new location to live and work. 798 met all their needs at the right moment: large working spaces, location outside the city centre and cheap rents.

\(^{150}\) Wang & Li, 2009, p. 877.
\(^{151}\) Kong, 2009, p. 28.
\(^{152}\) Zhang, 2010, p. 19.
\(^{153}\) Wang & Li, 2009, p. 876
\(^{154}\) Art Speak China Website, http://www.artspeakchina.org/mediawiki/index.php?798_Art_District_%E8%89%BA%E6%9C%AF%E7%A9%BA%E9%97%B4 . Consulted on 08-01-2011.
In the “period of cultivation and incubation”, the relations between the artists and their landlord, the Seven Star Group (七星集团 Qi Xing Jituan), were still friendly. The Seven Star Group is a state-owned enterprise which was established at the end of the year 2000 and which received the property rights of the entire 718 factory complex from the Chinese government, including the property rights of factory 798. The relations between both the artists and Seven Star Group were friendly because there was mutual benefit for both parties: the artists obtained working space at a reasonable price, the Seven Star Group received a reasonable rent revenue for the otherwise vacant factory spaces. With these rent revenues, the Seven Stars Group paid reparations and pensions to the former employees of 798 factory. 

In 2003, at the end of the first phase, a series of spectacular and experimental exhibitions occurred in 798 Art District, such as the ‘Transborder Language 2003’, by Shu Yang and Huang Rui, ‘Reconstruction 798’ and the first Beijing Biennale, which all attracted high numbers of visitors. It was in the year 2003 that 798 Art District became known by the general public. The number of artists and art foundations who rented parts of the former factory complex increased dramatically in the same year.

### 4.4 798 Art Zone’s Survival Crisis

The second stage in the development of 798 Art District is the stage Kong Jianhua calls the phase of the development of dispute (争议发展期 Zhengyi Fazhan Qi, 2004 - 2006). In this period, the discussion whether the factory site should be demolished or not started. In this discussion, it was the view of the Seven Star Group that the factory complex should be demolished to make room for an electronics manufacturing site. In the north-western Haidian district (海淀区 Haidian Qu) of Beijing, such a site already existed: Zhongguancun (中关村). Zhongguancun used to be a little village in the outskirts of larger Beijing, just like Dashanzi. As Beijing grew, the village was swallowed by the city. In the 1980’s, a plan was made to turn Zhongguancun into the Silicon valley of China. To achieve this goal, the enterprise Beijing Electronic City Company (北京电子城有限责任公司 Beijing...
Dianzicheng Youxian Zeren Gongsi) was established in 1995\(^\text{158}\). Today, most prominent technology companies in China have an office in Zhongguancun and what used to be a quiet suburb turned into an electronics hub. The Seven Star Group was established to create another Zhongguancun alike technology site at the location of the 718 factory complex. This was in accordance to the zoning plan of Chaoyang district, in which it was also planned to create an electronics hub at the 718 location\(^\text{159}\).

According to Kong Jianhua, another reason why the Seven Stars Group wanted to get rid of the artists in 798 was because the art they were making sometimes could be quite controversial\(^\text{160}\). The Seven Stars Group also did not like the fact that they could no longer control the popularity of 798 since the art district achieved a lot of brand awareness since the popular 2003 exhibitions. Besides this, it is Sus Van Elzen’s view that the people behind the Seven Stars Group are actually conservative government officials who do not appreciate contemporary Chinese art and only see the dangers for national stability of such art\(^\text{161}\).

The dispute grew bigger and bigger. From a local dispute between renters and a landlord, it turned into a dispute on district level of Chaoyang District (朝阳区 Chaoyang Qu), later it became a city level dispute and eventually it became a question of national interest. To raise awareness among local people and to make the case of the imminent demolition of the art district known to the international public, the “Dashanzi International Art Festival” was held in 2004 and in the two following years as well. The artists hoped to create an international forum on contemporary art in China\(^\text{162}\). This turned out positively, as a reaction to the festival, the 798 artists obtained the support of a group of several prominent personalities on the level of art and culture. Academics recognised the historic and cultural value of 798 and labelled it as part of China’s heritage. During this stage, 798 Art District was acknowledged by the Beijing Municipal Leaders Group for Cultural and Creative Industries as a city level cluster area. The government also adopted legislation, by which 798 became a municipal centre of gravity. This all contributed to the conservation of 798 and thwarted the plans of Seven Stars Group.

This is why, in the opinion of Kong Jianhua, this period was very beneficial to the art district. Although there were a lot of disputes revolving around the imminent demolition of the complex, it was in this period that the art district gained a kind of brand awareness. A negative aspect of this evolution is that the number of artists working in the art district has declined, as rents have risen because of the increasing number of galleries in the compound. Kong Jianhua seems to think that the most imminent threat to 798 is no longer the demolition of the complex, but the commercialisation of the art district.

\(^{158}\) Kong, 2009, p. 28.
\(^{159}\) Wang & Li, 2009, 876.
\(^{160}\) Kong, 2009, p. 28
\(^{161}\) Van Elzen, 2009, p. 130.
which drives away the artists. In his words: “every day, the number of galleries increases, but the number of artists decreases day by day” 163. But according to Kong, this is a problem which is hard to avoid.

4.5 798 Art Zone: No Longer “Underground”

The third stage is the period Kong Jianhua calls the era of “standard guidance”(规范引导期 Guifan Yindao Qi 2007 – present). It is in this period that the art district is monitored more closely by the Chinese government. The character of the art zone became more and more dominated by the influence of the authorities. An event that underscores this, was the eviction of Huang Rui in 2006, who was the first artist to be thrown out of 798, because the government refused to allow the necessary permits.

Although the article of Kong was written in 2009, it is my opinion that this period lasts until today. During my visit to 798 last April, a strikingly high number of policemen were present in the street scene of 798. Also, government signs informing visitors what objects are allowed to be photographed of and what objects are not, could be found on several places. The current crack down on artists, has been described in Chapter 2, is another indication that artists are closely monitored these days.

In 2008, on the eve of the Olympic games that were held in Beijing that summer, the government exploited 798 as a tourist attraction for the first time and promoted the art district as an important landmark in Beijing164. The city’s tourist information flyers even stated that one had not really been in Beijing, if one had not paid 798 a visit165. It is Wang & Li’s opinion that the Beijing city government deployed culture as a key to bolster economic growth and to deal with decayed industrial complexes166. The appearance of 798 underwent great changes in this stage to become even more attractive to visitors, as will be described below. In the words of Bérénice Angrémy, during the current period, 798 from an underground scene transformed into a public forum167.

163 Own translation of a quotation from the article of Kong Jianhua, 2009, p. 28.
164 Kong, 2009, p. 30
165 Kong, 2009, p. 29.
166 Wang & Li, 2006, p. 876.
In this period, 798 was no longer threatened by demolition, since the government had recognised 798 as the site of “Creative Cultural Enterprises” in 2008. The fact that 798 was also integrated in the official Beijing city marketing further supports this. At least for the time being, the recognition of 798 by the Chinese government has saved the 798 site of demolition, but this does not mean the art district is immortal. A future perspective on 798 art district will be given in the next chapter.


5. **798 ART DISTRICT**

5.1 **Location**

798 Art District is located in Chaoyang District (朝阳区 Chaoyang Qu) in north-western Beijing. It is located southeast of the Airport Expressway. The former factory complex is located in the city block that is bounded by the Jiuxian North Road (酒仙北路 Jiuxian Beilu) in the north, the Wanhong Road (万红路 Wan Hong Lu) in the south, the Beijing-Baotou railway (京包铁路 Jing Bao Tielu) in the east and the Jiuxian Bridge Lane (酒仙桥路 Jiuxian Qiao Lu) in the west. The area of the former 798 factories in total measures 138 hectares, of which 68 hectares are in the jurisdiction of the 798 Art District Supervision and Organisation Office. 23 hectares of the plot is built-up land, of which 12 hectares are rented to artists, shop owners, art foundations, restaurants etc. (In appendix 1, p. 58, two maps are included to indicate 798’s location)

In the 1950’s, when the 798 factory complex was built, Dashanzi was a small suburb-like sleepy village on the outskirts of Beijing. The village was that remote and rural that, to use Kong Jianhua’s words, “only bean curd and sausage vendors did business there” 169. Today, this has changed. The atmosphere in the Art District, but also in the streets around it, is much more urban, lively and international. Due to its location near Beijing Capital Airport and the Airport Expressway, 798 is a very favourable location for companies looking for accommodation near the Airport 170. This is also why the Seven Stars Group considered tearing down the 798 factory buildings and selling the land to a private companies. The land values at this location have dramatically increased in price over the past 15 years.

5.2 **798 Art Zone as a Tourist Attraction**

Today, 798 Art Zone is an important attraction for both foreign and domestic tourists. Especially at the weekends, 798 is crowded with visitors. Even a special bus stop was built to accommodate all the tourist busses that drop off tourists at 798. While in Beijing, I performed a little test: in Wangfujing Bookstore, one of the largest bookshops in Beijing, I reviewed all Beijing Travel Guides in the travel books section, both English and Chinese editions, to see whether 798 was mentioned in these books. It

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169 Kong, 2009, p. 29.
Because of the high number of visitors, the number of cafés has increased in 798. Own picture. R.D. (2011)

As has been mentioned in Chapter 4, the popularity of 798 increased after several exhibitions and festivals held in 798 in 2003. These were held by the local artists and art organisations to increase the brand awareness in an attempt to avert the imminent demolition of 798 by the Seven Stars Group. By attracting as many tourists as possible, it was demonstrated that 798 not only is the site where artists reside and artworks are produced, but that 798 is also of economic importance. By demolishing 798 this source of revenue would have also been lost.

This is the main reason the national and municipal government also started supporting 798. The government realised that 798 is a unique site, that could be economically beneficial to the city and declared the 798 site to be the site of a “Creative Culture Enterprise” (创业产业 Chuangyi Chanye), of which there are six in Beijing. Ever since, 798 has played major role in Beijing city marketing. 798, due to its image (this will be treated in the next section), contributes to the unique image of Beijing. This in turn contributes to the city’s competitive position in the inter-urban competition between both Chinese and global cities.

The people that visit 798 are both foreign and domestic tourist and Beijing residents. In my view, the foreign tourists that visit Beijing as part of an organised trip will probably not visit 798, since it is quite bit far away from the city centre and the other well-known tourist attractions such as the Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, etc. (See map II in Appendix I, p. 58). Also, most organised trips only stay in Beijing for a few days. Despite the fact that 798 is marketed as an important tourist highlight by the Beijing municipal government, it still is less well-known in comparison to the tourist highlights just mentioned. In my opinion, only those foreign tourists who stay in Beijing for longer than just a few days, and who are interested in art and who have done some reading before going to Beijing will maybe visit 798 Art Zone. The non-Chinese tourists I have seen in 798 were mainly travelling individually and most of the time were accompanied by a Chinese private tour leader. Zhou Tankan, who I interviewed while visiting Beijing for this master dissertation, is a tour leader herself. She told me that she regularly guides foreign tourists in 798.

173 Tan, 2005, p. 119.
Beijing draws an even larger number of domestic tourists each year. It is my view that Chinese travellers prefer to travel in groups, even within their own country. Van Elzen makes a similar remark about Chinese tourists visiting 798\textsuperscript{174}. Younger Chinese travellers tend to travel alone. The Chinese people I saw visiting 798 were mainly young people, sometimes accompanied by a tour leader. As has been mentioned in Chapter 2, Chinese contemporary art is not (yet) popular with all Chinese. Many Chinese often do not appreciate this kind of art and therefore the number of people visiting 798 is quite low. It was very striking that the young people that were visiting the art district at the time I was there, almost all seemed relatively wealthy Chinese. Many were wearing clothes unlike what average Chinese people would wear and had a fashionable appearance. This is also the remark that Cui Xuan makes in his article\textsuperscript{175}. The fact that 798 is also regularly the scene of BMW car shows, strengthens this assumption\textsuperscript{176}.

5.3 The 798 Brand

Due to its history of artists settling in 798 to be away from both the busy city centre and the government’s watch, the 798 site has an underground and experimental image\textsuperscript{177}. The fact that 798 was the scene of several very edgy art exhibitions, contributes to this image. The artistic circles in China also have an underground image (as has been described in Chapter 2).

Another important aspect of the 798 brand is also connected with its history: the fact that 798 in the past was a state-owned military-industrial enterprise. According to Zhuang Jiayun, there exists an obsession with iconography in the postmodernist era\textsuperscript{178}. This has lead to the commercialisation of certain profitable marketable signs of history. 798 is one of these signs, since it was a model factory promoted by the government as the best place to work in Beijing. The industrial Bauhaus architecture and Maoist slogans on the ceilings of the factory buildings are serving the postmodern need for nostalgia in the current age of rapid modernisation in China. It is Zhuang’s vision that 798 symbolizes an ideologised period of history, as it emphasises architectural, textual and visual signs of the past\textsuperscript{179}. With certain visitors, 798 might stir up memories about the “good old days of socialism”.

\textsuperscript{174}Van Elzen, 2009, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{175}Cui, 2010, p. 198.
\textsuperscript{176}Wang & Li, 2009, p. 884.
\textsuperscript{177}Van Elzen, 2009, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{179}Zhuang, 2009, p. 2.
In this context, it is useful to return to Henri Lefebvre’s theory about the production of space and the non-neutral status of space. 798, as a former factory built by the government in the 1950s, is very clearly not a neutral space. If one applies Lefebvre’s theory, 798 was a means of control, domination and power of the Chinese government of the 1950’s. Since the Chinese government is still dominated by the same party today, 798 is also a means of domination of the current Chinese government. The fact that the Chinese government is promoting 798 today, fits into this picture, as the former model factory 798 reflected a quite positive story about a period in China’s history.

Another reason why the Chinese government started supporting 798 (besides the obvious economic factor) is that people like Li Xiangqun, professor at the Academy of Arts and Design at Qinghua University, stated that 798 could develop into an international art centre. If 798 would develop into an international art centre, it could act as a showcase for the Chinese government to prove all people and countries that accuse China of restricting artistic freedom wrong (although the current crackdown on artists may prove China’s critics to be right).

Today, 798 represents both China’s socialist legacy and the so-called hippy-avant-garde lifestyle. Due to the image of the 798 brand, the site became a popular scene for both wedding pictures and commercial photo shoots. During my visit to 798, I have seen several married couples having their wedding photo’s taken with a factory landscape in the background. In 798, near factory 751, there is also a wall with pictures on it of several commercial adds in which the 798 site figured as a background. So 798 is clearly trendy and fashionable.

5.4 Consequences of 798 Art Zone’s popularity

According to J. Currier, the fact that an art district like 798 could emerge, demonstrates that art and culture became more powerful within Beijing. But due to this power, the art district became marketed, first to preserve the art district and later to help sell Beijing as a global city. This resulted in 798 becoming popular and this has had a great influence on the art district. The number of shops, bars and restaurants has increased in the last eight years. A consequence of this is that housing prices in 798 have risen drastically since 1995. In 2004, the price per square metre had already reached 0.726 Yuan a day, while in 1995 it was still 0.3 Yuan. In 2008, the rent had increased to 2 Yuan per square metre a day. On favourable locations in 798, rent has in reality even reached 4 Yuan per square meter.

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180 Lefebvre, 1974, p. 210
183 Currier, 208, p. 238.
184 Kong, 2009, p. 29.
a day or even higher. In the 15 years 798 exists as an art district, rental prices have increased sevenfold \textsuperscript{185}.

Higher rents are one of the reasons why some artists are leaving 798 Art District today. Due to these high rents, it is economically more viable for artists or other private persons to open a shop or a gallery in 798, than to have a workspace there. This made 798 less attractive for young artists who can not afford these high rents. During my visit to Beijing, I interviewed Zhou Tankan, a Beijing resident who lives near 798 Art District. She told me her cousin, a young artist, lives in Caochangdi (草场地), because at that location, housing prices are still affordable. Many other artists have left, because 798 simply got too popular and busy, which made 798 is no longer a favourable working environment to them. In the 1990s, 798 was very underground and therefore not yet a tourist attraction. Today, Busloads of tourists visit 798 every day and a lot of Beijing residents also visit 798, especially during the weekends. Many artists found business of the art district disturbing and left 798 for villages like Caochangdi and Songzhuang (宋庄), where the atmosphere is still more tranquil and quiet.

During my visits to 798, it also struck me that 798 has almost no residential units anymore. While in the past, most artists in 798 both worked and lived there. Earlier this year, I also visited Moganshan (莫干山) in Shanghai, also an art zone, though much smaller in comparison to 798. Here, many artists worked and lived in the art district. Most buildings in Moganshan have several floors. The ground floor, first and second floor are mainly galleries and art studios. The higher floors are residential units, where both artists and other residents live. But in 798, all buildings seem to be occupied by shops, galleries, bars and restaurants. Huang Rui in his book also states that there are almost no residents left in 798 \textsuperscript{186}. During my visit, I asked several artists and Beijing residents whether there still lived artists in 798, but they all more or less answered that if there are still artists living in 798, there numbers are very small.

\textsuperscript{185} Kong, 2009, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{186} Huang, 2008, p. 146.
The success of 798 Art District did not go unnoticed by other Chinese cities. This is why 798 was copied by several cities, such as Shanghai, Shenyang, Chengdu and Kunming.

Another consequence of 798’s popularity is that the works made/sold in the art zone have changed. In the literary research I did in order to write this master dissertation, I discovered that all articles/books that were written before or in the year 2006, described 798 as a place were very edgy, regime-critical and experimental art is produced. For instance Laura Tan refers to an art work in which the Chinese flag is torn to pieces.

But the authors that wrote about 798 after 2006, such as Liu Mingliang and Kong Jianhua, more or less all stated that the art in 798 is not that daring anymore. This corresponds to what I experienced myself during my visits to 798 Art Zone. Only in the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA), some experimental art could be found, but this art was mainly made by western artists. Most of the art sold or exhibited in the other galleries, was not daring at all. It surprised me that some galleries even exhibited art works that were strikingly similar to the old style calligraphy paintings.

So my view is it is obvious most art in 798 conforms to the taste of the general public. And this is actually quite logical, since the rent prices are high in 798, so money needs to be made by the gallery owners. This has caused 798 is no longer the site of “cultural revolution”, in a sense that daring and renewing art is no longer made there. But, it is my personal opinion 798 can still be the site of “cultural revolution”, because the art in 798 may be able to reconnect the bond between contemporary art and folk art, which ceased to exist after 1976, since the art in 798 is being conformed to the taste of the general public.

5.6 798 – A Future Perspective

It is impossible to predict the future. But based on the processes that shaped 798 Art Zone, it is possible to make predictions about what the future will bring. As has been described in chapter one, art zones emerge as a consequence of the impact of globalisation on urban landscape. This impact of globalisation on urban landscape can only occur in countries part of the global core. Art districts only emerge in the cities that are part of the global economic network of metropolis. A free market process on the housing market is also a prerequisite for art districts to emerge. Since China and Beijing met all these prerequisites during the 1990s, it was possible for 798 Art Zone to emerge. It is these processes

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that shaped 798 Art Zone in the past and it is very likely that they will continue to shape it in the future as well.

An author that supports this view of globalization is K. Lynch, as it is her view globalization is an irreversible process, as the economic interdependence of countries worldwide continues to grow\(^\text{190}\). It is likely that land values in Beijing will continue to grow. This means it is important for 798 to remain economically viable as an art district. It is my view, that as long as the art district remains profitable for the artists and merchants, it will continue to exist. But Kong Jianhua also stated that the number of artists in 798 grows smaller and smaller every day and that this may also be a danger for the art district. If all the artists would leave 798 in the future, the art district may lose its image of being trendy, avant-garde and underground. But it is precisely this image that is a very important factor in contribution to the popularity of 798. So if that image would be lost in the future, visitors might not find it attractive anymore to visit and therefore, 798 would become less profitable. If 798 Art Zone would become unprofitable in the future, it would very likely disappear as an art district and maybe even the entire factory complex would even be demolished, as the high land values in this part of Beijing are too high to leave the area just unutilised.

But it is also possible that, although most artists will probably leave 798, it remains popular with visitors in the future as well. This would just mean that 798 is more like an art market than an art district, since artists are no longer living here. This might already be the case today, since Van Elzen states 798 is popular among international curators and art dealers, who visit to the art district to “shop” for artworks\(^\text{191}\).

\(^{190}\) Lynch, 2003, p. 40.
\(^{191}\) Van Elzen, 2009, p. 130.
CONCLUSION

In this master dissertation about 798 Art District Beijing, the aim was to investigate whether 798 Art District still is the site of “Cultural Revolution” or whether it is only a showpiece of city marketing.

In the first chapter, it is explained that art districts can only emerge in large cities that are included in the global network of metropolises, since the emergence of art districts is a consequence of the impact of globalisation on city landscapes. By using Wallerstein’s theory concerning countries in a global peripheral, semi-peripheral and core position and by reviewing China’s history since the First Opium War (1839 - 1842), it is elucidated that China from a country in a peripheral position, ascended to a country part of the global core, since China is in possession of economic power today.

China experienced several transformations since the First Opium War in the 19th century. China was confronted with foreign domination and exploitation in that century. The early 20th century saw the end of imperial China and the foundation of the Republic of China. Also (new) ideologies became popular in China at that time. And an era of civil war started between warring factions in the 1920’s. At the end of the 1930’s, China was again confronted with foreign domination, this time by Japan. In 1945, the Sino-Soviet war had ended, but the civil war between communists and nationalists resurged. This civil war ended in 1949, with the victory of the communists and the declaration of the People’s Republic of China. After 1949, important transformations were made, such as the industrialisation of the economy, that enabled China’s later ascend to a semi-peripheral position and even later, core position.

The ascend of China to a semi-peripheral position started in 1971, with the rapprochement to the west. China no longer found itself in an isolated position and became less dependent of the Soviet Union. With the death of Chairman Mao in 1976, there was a greater scope for more moderate CCP leaders, such as Deng Xiaoping. Under his rule, China’s economic- and many other policies were reformed and became more liberal. China also underwent a period of economic growth, which lasts more or less up till today and which pulled millions of Chinese out of absolute poverty. Deng’s successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, kept pursuing Deng’s course of stimulating economic growth by inert reform, since it had led to economic growth and relative stability.

It is impossible to indicate one year or event after which China became a country in a core position. This rather seems the outcome of years of reform, economic growth and stability. But in 2001, China was allowed to join the WTO. This constituted the international acknowledgement of China as a
prominent economic world player. Another fact that shows that China possesses economic power, is the fact that during the current economic crisis, several countries asked China for financial help.

Since it is clear that China has economic power today and therefore is part of the core of the global economic world system, it was possible for art districts to emerge in China as well, since China met all the economic and political prerequisites.

With regard to the emergence of 798 Art Zone, the Chinese contemporary art and the Chinese artistic circle play a crucial role. China’s contemporary art scene came into existence after Mao Zedong’s death. During the Maoist period, art was strictly regulated and was only supposed to convey the political message of the regime. Artistic freedom was virtually inexistent. The allowed art form of the propaganda posters was a mix of socialist realism with Chinese folk art traditions. With Mao’s death in 1976 and the rise of more moderate politicians, more artistic freedom was allowed. Also the personality cult surrounding Chinese leaders was abolished and the use of propaganda posters diminished. This gave rise to the emergence of the first (contemporary) art movements, the Stars Group and ’85 New Wave. The Tiananmen Incident made an end to these movements. Tiananmen also caused more artists to move to remote artist villages on the fringes Beijing, which had emerged since the mid 1980s, to escape the government’s watchful eye. These art villages were the forerunners of 798 Art Zone.

Contemporary Chinese art is not popular with every Chinese, many find it hard to identify themselves with this art. One reason for this is the bond between folk art and contemporary art had ceased to exist since 1976. The art movements that have risen since that time, were sometimes quite anti-establishment and there have also been fluctuations in the amount of (artistic) freedom allowed by the government. Therefore many artists worked in an underground scene, often in art villages, separated of other city dwellers. Due to this Chinese contemporary also obtained an underground image. The Chinese art villages constituted the forerunner of the later art districts.

Chinese urban form underwent great changes since the First Opium War. Before this war, Chinese urban form was still mainly a classical Confucian type of urban form, with many hierarchical elements in it. After the First Opium War, Chinese urban form was influenced by foreign urban form, which translated itself in the construction of ports, railroads and western-style buildings. In the republican period, the first attempts were made to reform the Chinese cities in a fundamental way, although the attempt was not very successful, due to war and civil war. In the Maoist era, urban form was a mix of classical and socialist urban form. The society was divided into Danwei (work units) and these Danwei

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constituted both the work and residence unit in the same location. The city centre remained unchanged in its composition: a combination of commercial and residential units.

With the reforms of the 1980’s and 1990’s, land prices were reintroduced and the real estate sector as commoditised. The real estate sector became an important drive behind Chinese economic growth and this coincided with a strong territorial uneven growth. These are ideal circumstances for art districts to emerge. Chinese cities also increasingly emphasised themselves as global cities. To support this status, the cities were in need of a unique identity. The urban planners tried to achieve this mainly by constructing flagship buildings, Central Business Districts and technology hubs. Although not newly constructed, the 798 site is an example of flagship architecture as well and therefore contributes to the unique identity of Beijing. 798 also is also a cultural platform previously lacking in the city.

Factory 798 was built in the 1950’s, as part of the 718 Joint Project, a large industrial complex. Because China at that time did not have enough funds to pay for the project itself, it requested the Soviet Union’s assistance. The Soviet Union declined this request, but the DDR was willing to help China. Between 1953 and 1964, 300 East-German experts cooperated with Chinese constructionists to build the complex. For the structure of the buildings, the typical German Bauhaus style was used. Factory 798 was finished in 1957 and ever since it was opened, it was a flagship factory to the Chinese government, since factory 798 provided its workers with many social services. 798 was also an example of successful cooperation between two communist countries.

But in the 1980s, the economic performance of factory 798 declined and eventually, production was ceased and the factory became abandoned. Around the same time, many artists in Beijing were looking for new accommodation to both work and live. The deserted 798 factory complex met all their needs: large working spaces, cheap rent and a location beyond the city centre. With the first artists moving in, the transition of the factory complex into an art district had begun. In the first stage, the relations between the artists and their landlord, Seven Stars Group, was still friendly. This changed as Seven Stars Group made plans to evict all the artists and to demolish 798, to replace it with an electronics hub. The artists protested this and held several high profile exhibitions and festival to raise brand awareness and to gather support to stop the imminent demolition of 798 Art Zone. This worked, as the government of Beijing city struck off the plans to build an electronic hub. The government even starting supporting 798 as a tourist attraction. Due to this development, rents have risen and government control in the art district has increased. This has caused some artists to leave 798 to move elsewhere. Government influence in the art zone has increased as well.

798 is located between the fourth and fifth Ring Road of Beijing, between Beijing Capital Airport and the city centre. In the past, this was at the borders of rural and urban Beijing, but today, due to
urbanisation, 798 is no longer located on the fringes of the city. 798’s location is popular with companies and real estate construction companies. This is why there were plans for the demolition of 798 and to build an electronic hub on the site.

798 became a popular tourist attraction after the art zone got promoted by first artists and art organisations and later by the government as well. But 798 Art District is still relatively unknown with tourist in comparison to other tourist highlights in Beijing. Due to increased popularity, 798 became a brand with the image of being underground and trendy. The factory complex also has a retro image, as it reflects elements of China in the 1960s.

The consequence of 798’s popularity is that the rent prices and land values have increased in 798. Because of this, young artists can not afford to live in the art zone anymore. The art district also became busier due to many more visitors. Therefore, for some artists, 798 is no longer a favourable working environment and they also decided to move. The popularity of 798 has also influenced the art made there. Because of the high rents, the artists and merchants in 798 have to make profits as high as possible. This is why the artworks in 798 have changed and became less daring and edgy. In the 1990s, the art made in the art district was made the way the artist wanted. Today, artworks have been adjusted to the taste of the potential buyers. This is why in this sense, 798 is no longer the site of “Cultural Revolution” and is a showpiece of city marketing. But because the art in 798 is conformed to the taste of the general public, it may be able to restore the bond between folk art and contemporary art. In this sense, 798 still has an important, maybe even “revolutionary” role to play.

In the future, it is likely the processes of globalisation will continue to shape Beijing’s urban landscape. Therefore it is important for 798 to stay attractive to visitors, since land values very high on this location. But due to these high land values, many artists have left 798 and it is possible the art district might lose its image of being underground in the future. This would probably cause the number of visitors to decrease, as the image of 798 is an important contributor to 798’s success. If this is the case, the 798 site might be demolished in the future. But it is also possible 798 becomes an international art market, instead of an art district. This already seems to be the case as 798 is very popular among foreign art traders.
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APPENDIX I

Map I: 798 Art District

Map II: Location of 798 Art District within Greater Beijing