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**'Living it Up' in Chaoyang's Bar Street:
A Representation of Smart Slackers in Beijing**

Lynn Ashworth

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Sociology and Anthropology**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Abstract

'Living it up' in Chaoyang's Bar Street: A Representation of 'Smart Slackers' in Beijing

Lynn Ashworth

This thesis is an ethnographic description of a group of foreign workers in Beijing, referred to as 'smart slackers' and who reflect a developing category in cotemporary migration. This thesis seeks to describe the daily lives of these young foreign professionals in Beijing, referred to as 'smart slackers'. Focus is placed on the professional jobs held by 'smart slackers' and the leisure activities that they pursue in an area of Beijing named Bar Street. The ethnographic description derives from the ten months I spent conducting fieldwork in Beijing. During that time, I became employed as an English teacher in order to gain a better perspective of those who I was studying. Furthermore, I spent my leisure time in one contained area of the Chaoyang District, called Bar Street. It was in Bar Street that I encountered my informants and collected formal and informal interviews.

Some of the issues addressed in this thesis are how young Western professionals seek out jobs in foreign locations, the emergence of a young, distinct, Western, affluent class of professional workers and China's reaction to the presence of these foreign migrant workers. This thesis explores the interludes, which are being taken by young Western professionals who are combining adventure, escape, work, and tourism in these travels. This particular form of travel I saw in Beijing is an instance of a progressively common form of travel that is increasingly blurring the lines of movement.

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I would like to thank my parents whose support in the last four years made it possible for me to complete my education. I would also like to thank my sister, Audrey, whose quick wit and attention to detail proved invaluable in writing this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I am seeking to show a new category of young, free-lance expatriates who trade in privileges of education, Western identity without the obligation and involvement of corporate employment. This thesis aims to provide an ethnographic portrayal of an emerging middle-class migration by providing an ethnographic description of a group of foreign workers in Beijing, referred to as 'smart slackers' who reflect a developing category in contemporary migration. Key broader issues such as globalization, transnational ties of goods, services, and people, expatriates and their travel experiences by way of their professional duties and the growing middle-class migration partly define the movement of foreign workers whom I researched.

In the past five years, Beijing has agreed to development programs, which have seen the rapid reconstruction of China's capital. No longer is the emphasis on the city serving as the administrative and cultural capital of the mainland. Beijing is situating itself as the primary capitalist rival to Shanghai, the port city which has historically been seen as holding those honours. As China formally entered the World Trade Organization in 2002, the same year the international Olympic Committee awarded Beijing with the honours to host the 2008 Olympic Games; a large yet unknown number of young, foreign workers came to Beijing seeking temporary employment.

China is modernizing on its own terms, shifting part of its focus to the economic prosperity, which many of its provinces are experiencing. The rapid development of Beijing has partly encouraged a migration pattern that appears to be increasing. This reverse flow of migration from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere is one of the key issues discussed in this thesis.

In 2002, I was living in the southeast part of Beijing called Chaoyang District, also referred to as the financial district since the largest concentration of multi-national corporation office buildings, the World Trade Centre, foreign embassies and the largest number of Western style apartment buildings situated in the district. Moreover, the high concentration of foreign workers who live, work and socialize in this area, influenced my decision to remain in Chaoyang. It was in Chaoyang that I came into contact with a large group of young, professional foreign workers whom I refer to as ‘smart slackers’; a group who are contributing to a form of expatriatism which differs from other contemporary migrant workers discussed in anthropology.

Titles

I got the name ‘smart slacker’ from *Louise, a manager who grew up in Vancouver and for business reasons, commutes between Beijing and Shanghai. Louise felt that ‘smart slackers’ represented the young professionals between the ages of twenty and thirty. Her definition included young foreign workers who come to Beijing to have fun and to look for work. Louise felt that ‘smart slackers’ were drawn to Beijing to avoid having to ‘grow up’ and ‘settle down’ after they reach the age of thirty. In Louise’s opinion, ‘smart slackers’ were attempting to ‘live it up’ before turning thirty, the age which she decreed as ‘old’. In her opinion, Beijing was responding to the desires of foreigners as proof in the foreign gourmet shops, Bar Street and the DVD vendors, so that Beijing was no longer as exotic and foreigners felt less out of place.

However, the term ‘smart slacker’ is not a shared label. I chose to use it in my ethnography because I felt the term partly revealed many of motivations of the group of ‘smart slackers’ I met except for the issue of age in which I felt that ‘smart slackers’ were

*** In order to protect their identity, I have provided pseudonyms to all my informants throughout the thesis**

not concerned with 'living it up before 30' in so much that they did not want to choose a career and settle down in their homelands at their current age, which range between 20 and 35. More over, I agreed with Louise that Beijing is responding to the presence of foreigners in the development of Beijing especially with Bar Street, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

Foreign workers used descriptive labels identifying themselves as 'non-packaged', 'local hire' or the title of their profession, such as English teacher. Non-packaged is counter to packaged, the latter term referring to corporate expatriates who are sent to Beijing to fulfill contractual obligations and who earn a high salary and have their living expenses charged to the company they work for. In contrast, non-packaged workers are individuals who come to Beijing without a prior job offer and seek out work, often in the teaching or media sector, or in the lower level positions in embassies. Due to the lack of contract and paid expenses, these types of workers refer to themselves and others as *non-packaged*. *Local hire* means a foreign worker is hired in place (Beijing) versus in their country of origin.

Among 'smart slackers' their gap years in Beijing are rationalized as importing valuable work experience and attaining an affluent lifestyle which many admitted was not as possible in their homelands. 'Smart slackers' are recognized by other foreigners in Beijing by the style of housing they can afford, their professions and the where and how of their leisure activities. Much of the socializing which 'smart slackers' participate in is centred around the Bar Street area, searching for entertainment amongst the concentration of bars, clubs and Western themed restaurants, divided into two streets, separated by a six-lane road.

'Smart slackers' are mobile professionals, with degrees in a wide range fields, and are predominantly Euro-American. There are numerous commonalities amongst the members of the 'smart slacker' group. 'Smart slackers' are largely middle-class, university educated, single (at least on arrival), and expressed to me the desire to escape from their lives in their homelands for a time. Key themes determining the category of 'smart slacker' are: independent travel abroad, the ability to become employed without the support of a multi-national corporation and without the benefits received from corporate employees, the desire to leave Beijing yet the indecision on the date of departure, and their participation in leisure activities centered in Bar Street.

Bar Street is the area where I collected much of my information on 'smart slackers' and practiced the method of participant observation. However, it was also in Bar Street, where I created a personal network for myself and spent my own leisure time when I was not conducting fieldwork or working as a language instructor.

Chapter Setup

The organization of this thesis is as follows: in Chapter 2, I will discuss the reasons behind my decision to study the lives of 'smart slackers'. I will outline the criteria defining the category of 'smart slackers'. I will provide an outline of the methods and practice used in gathering information. Lastly, I will review the contributions anthropologists have made in fieldwork technique and show how their findings shaped my own methodology.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the Chaoyang District, offering a description of the rapid development of parts of Beijing and the effects of this development on this group of 'smart slackers'. The chapter includes a descriptive background of the choice of

housing available to foreign workers such as where ‘smart slackers’ choose to live in the city. Furthermore, an outline of the factors shaping the daily lives of these young adults including such factors as the employment positions available, recreation activities and social networking in Bar Street.

In Chapter 4, I will analyze the findings from my research by focusing on the narratives I collected during the formal interviews. I will review recurring themes of escape through travel, ideas, and perceptions of what living Beijing means to ‘smart slackers’, and why they chose to embark on this interlude. Also in this chapter, I will review the types of relationships, which ‘smart slackers’ seek to create in Beijing and their ideas about eventually leaving Beijing and returning to their homelands. I will also show how the systems of regulations governing foreigners in China shape the lifestyles of ‘smart slackers’.

Chapter 5 is a review of contemporary migration literature. I will explore ideas of mobility and the categorization of travellers. I will review relevant areas such as the impetuses for international migration including middle-class migration, cosmopolitan attitudes, and shifts in patterns of contemporary tourism. More over, I will review varying approaches to transnationalism and elitism. I will attempt to show how this literature relates to my own ethnographic findings.

The final remarks are included in chapter six. In this chapter, I will attempt to show how my ethnography contributes to anthropology of global movement and migration.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUE IN THE FIELD

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce to the reader, the group of people on whom my research focused, whom I refer to as ‘smart slackers’ and how I came about to study their lives in Beijing. I will present a brief overview of Beijing and some of the challenges, which I faced, while there. Furthermore, I will present my methodology practices and I will discuss the practices of collecting information relating it to my research and experiences in the field through methods of participant observation.

The Chinese capital Beijing covers a distance of 16,800 km although the city is continually expanding outside the city limits in response to the demands of its thirteen million people as well as foreign industries. The city divides into nine districts. I focused my research in the Chaoyang District, which lies to the east of the city. Although I did not get an official number, several of my informants guessed that the number of foreigners in Beijing (excluding those on a tourist visa) lies somewhere between one hundred thousand and three hundred thousand people although there is a constant flow of foreigners entering and departing the city.

Chaoyang District is referred to as the financial district of Beijing. Chaoyang houses the World Trade Centre along with hundreds of multi-national offices and buildings. Chaoyang District has prime real estate and the largest number of Western style apartments and villas. The majority of expatriate workers lives and works in Chaoyang District, which is the principal reason why I chose to focus my research in that one area.

Prior to arriving in Beijing, I had planned to focus on the lives of Western corporate employees, commonly referred to in international business literature as expatriates, and their lives in Beijing. Initially, I focused my attention on studying the benefits of expatriates who were assigned to Beijing by their corporation. These expatriates are mostly executive managers or professionals who have been sent by their company or institution to Beijing to fulfill their contractual obligations. They are supplied with accommodations in compound villas or high-rise apartments. Many are allocated a car or are assigned a driver. Medical insurance, children's school fees, and holidays back home are expenses paid by their company. International business literature often quotes salaries for expatriates as being often thirty to fifty percent higher for an overseas position, which calculates to about 150,000 USD per year, often for three to five years. Expatriates are often given private language tutorials upon arrival (sometimes prior to original departure), usually have added responsibilities in managing a foreign staff, and often arrive with their family, adding on to their responsibilities. Furthermore, these expatriates often fall into the forties to early fifties age group and are usually at the mid-point of their careers. I will refer to these expatriates as "packaged." The term "packaged" implies that the expatriate worker receives benefits such as housing, medical insurance and commands a high salary.

While I was familiarizing myself with the Chaoyang District, I came across a large, accessible group of young, Euro-American professionals in a contained area. I soon found many similarities between these young professionals and myself. I was roughly the same age as most 'smart slackers', who fall into the early twenties to early thirties, age group. I had previous experience living abroad and understood some of the

emotions and problems ‘smart slackers’ were encountering (many for the first time). Furthermore, most responded positively to the interest I expressed in their lives. I had nearly the same level of education as most ‘smart slackers’ who usually hold at least a Bachelor’s degree and had roughly the same work experience. More over, I soon realized that not only did we share similarities but also that I had easy access to a large, visible group who were willing to introduce me to other ‘smart slackers’.

‘Smart slackers’ do not meet the requirements of “packaged” expatriates; thus, I argue that ‘smart slackers’ are creating a variation of expatriate worker. This interpretation and criteria of what it means to be an expatriate will be discussed in another chapter. What is important to note is that ‘smart slackers’ do meet some requirements of what it means to be an expatriate, and this was one of the reasons why I chose to study them. This criterion is they are “Western” foreigners, they are highly mobile, they live and work in Beijing, and they all express a desire to return home.

Defining ‘Smart Slackers’

‘Smart slackers’ are young Euro-American professionals, predominantly from Western countries who seek employment opportunities in Beijing. In this category are Eurasian and Asian-American workers who have come to Beijing but do not necessarily have any familial ties to the province or country. The ‘smart slackers’ with whom I met and interacted with had planned to stay in Beijing for a certain period of time before either returning home or moving on to another country thus making their stay in Beijing temporary.

‘Smart slackers’ are nearly all single (or at least were on arrival to Beijing); do not have the same professional experience, earning power or the same standard of living

in Beijing as “packaged” expatriates. They hold lower level jobs, their salaries are not as high and they must pay for their own medical insurance, rent and trips back home. Moreover, ‘smart slackers’ are often searching for work experience and often have yet to begin a “career.” ‘Smart slackers’ often refer to one another as “non-packaged.” The term “non-packaged” infers that the employee does not receive the benefits of housing, medical insurance and high salary.

There are varying reasons why ‘smart slackers’ are drawn to Beijing, yet most say that they are in Beijing primarily to work. Even though ‘smart slackers’ state that they are in Beijing for employment reasons, many also add that they came to Beijing seeking adventure, new opportunities for work, or to escape their lives at home and their past. Their reasons and justification for their lives and behaviour in Beijing will be discussed further in another chapter.

Although ‘smart slackers’ hold a range of degrees most end up teaching English as a second language. Regardless of ‘smart slackers’ qualifications, Beijing has limited job opportunities, especially to those who are not executive managers or speak fluently in Mandarin. The most readily available jobs are those, which rely mostly on language skills and communication. Due to the high cost of living in Beijing, many ‘smart slackers’ have several jobs such as free lance work. Short-term work opportunities are available such as doing voice recordings for language training cassettes and videos. Stable employment can be found in tutoring private students, or committing oneself to several teaching institutions on a contractual basis.

‘Smart slackers’ are very careful concerning titles and introduce themselves in very specific terms that have a shared understanding amongst foreign workers in Beijing.

Therefore, a teacher is understood to be an English teacher, a “consultant” is understood either as an English teacher or in terms of low-level language positions in small foreign companies. “Foreign expert” is reserved for those who work in media such as editors, copy editors, and writers. If a smart slacker were to say, “I work in an embassy” this translates to “My position in the Embassy is as a junior clerk.” Senior positions in embassies are often introduced with their official title to distinguish them clearly from the junior positions. Titles are another way in which ‘smart slackers’ distance themselves from other youthful foreigners in Beijing. A title would signify that the person has *membership* to the ‘smart slackers’ group and thus be treated in a certain way. Tourists who wander into the social spaces in which ‘smart slackers’ occupy are treated differently. Although such tourists are not typically shunned or excluded, investment in getting to know someone well or spending much free time with them is not something that a ‘smart slacker’ would tend to do. This tendency is associated with many of the feelings and ideas that ‘smart slackers’ have about Beijing and which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Are non-Euro-American expatriates included in the ‘smart slacker’ group? Japanese professionals were not considered members of the ‘smart slackers’ group, as they were sent by their corporation and were considered “packaged”. I was informed by two of my Japanese students at the language institute where I taught, that Japanese employees sent by their corporations were supplied with Japanese themed apartments, along with Japanese satellite television stations and Mandarin language training. Apart from their hectic work schedules, both my students informed me that their leisure time

was spent either practicing English or Mandarin or attending corporate sponsored functions thus limiting their free time to socialize with other foreign workers.

Furthermore, young African men and women who worked as traders in the local markets were not considered 'smart slackers' even though African diplomatic staff was. It is not clear to me why this membership includes some and excludes others although I do theorize that language and economics play key roles. The ten young African diplomatic staffers whom I met all spoke near fluent English and all held a post-secondary degree. Two of which had affluent backgrounds. Although their economic positions differed from other 'smart slackers' as some earned a higher salary and some earned a lower salary, their presence in popular bars was constant and engulfed with other foreign 'smart slackers'. In regards to the young African traders, the five traders whom I met managed to speak to a few words of English and were continuously traveling back and forth from Beijing to Ethiopia. However, it was common for some African traders to go to nightclubs I never came across an integration of traders with the larger foreign groups.

Sanlitun

After the first few days in the field, I learned that most 'smart slackers' congregate in one main area of Chaoyang, called Bar Street, an area popular for those seeking entertainment and housing. Therefore, I chose to follow the smart slacker example and rented an apartment in the local housing that was affordable and close to this area, often referred to by its Chinese name Sanlitun (pronounced *San Lee Tuun*).

Bar Street, or Sanlitun, is made up of two streets, divided by a six-lane road. North Bar Street is a tree-lined street, with Western style restaurants and bars. The area

is also known for its embassies, foreign private schools, and diplomatic housing. The area has a popular nightlife and is busy every night of the week with foreign and local patrons eating and drinking.

South Bar Street lies across the six-lane road. Isolated from the pomp and glory of its sister street, South Bar Street is a maze of dark alleyways, with pubs and bars scattered about. Referred to as the cheaper sections of Bar Street, there are fewer restaurants and only local housing apartment buildings. Both streets are popular with foreigners and affluent locals. It is a landmark in Chaoyang.

Initially, I observed the leisure activities in the bars and clubs, slowly making contacts and gathering information about ‘smart slackers’, employment, housing and other valuable tips to living in Beijing both from the ‘smart slackers’ themselves as well as available literature, specifically the English weeklies distributed in the bars and foreign restaurants in Chaoyang. Furthermore, as the local Chinese population is constantly relocating to the newly created suburbs due to the rapid development of new areas, I felt that Bar Street would be the ideal place to study as its future was safe from destruction and that ‘smart slackers’ always return to the area. This meant that I was able to track people easily in an open, public space.

Choosing Bar Street as one of the main locations for carrying out my fieldwork proved to be beneficial to me. I found it easier to choose one major location as a “home base.” Although I branched out to observe ‘smart slackers’ in their homes, over the phone and in public spaces, I did not divide my time equally. For the most part, instead of following my subjects around, I sat and waited for them. By situating myself in a public place such as the Bar Street area, I had several advantages in observing my

subjects and was able to encounter the same people and slowly develop a relationship with them. Although I did not view this as a strategic way of *penetrating* the group, similar to Joanne Passaro, I simply did not know where else to start. Passaro states that the preparation of fieldwork largely overlooks how to *start* researching. Preparation often involves theory, finance, and transportation, whether it is taking planes, trains or, in her case, the subway, to the field (Passaro, 2000:152). Passaro chose several sites that allowed for participant observation of New York City's homeless people. Her decision to determine sites once she arrived in the field proved to be beneficial, as she was able to explore areas of her thesis that might not have come about if she had specified her sites prior to her arrival.

On my arrival in the field, I was overwhelmed, as I did not know where to start. Before coming across Bar Street, I spent my first few days searching for foreign faces. Armed with a map, I would follow foreigners, marking on my map where I saw them. It was in the hostel that I was staying at that I met two people who would have a great impact on my stay in Beijing. In that respect, I agree with Passaro, perhaps too many insights and opportunities are missed if the ethnographers try to over plan their site and their mission.

Why did I switch my focus to researching 'smart slackers' instead of packaged expatriates? There were many factors in my choice to research 'smart slackers'. One of these factors is the cost of living in Beijing is high, thus accommodation is expensive. In order to prolong my stay in Beijing, I took up a job teaching English and consequently was in constant contact with several young foreign professionals. I quickly realized that

a job meant that I could get a fuller understanding of ‘smart slackers’ professional lives in Beijing.

Through my employment, I had constant and regular access to ‘smart slackers’ in the workplace, giving me the opportunity to understand their lives as I could not observe them in their workplace. Initially, I was limited to observing them in public spaces and their social activities. My own work experience would allow me to understand some of the aspects of working as an expatriate in Beijing.

My position as an English teacher also gave me access to and membership in the ‘smart slacker’ groups. I gained entry into a diverse crowd of young professionals. Prior to working, I was seen as an outsider, and although many ‘smart slackers’ professed to being interested in sitting for an interview, I was not treated as a smart slacker. The manner in which ‘smart slackers’ introduced me to people always included that I was in Beijing studying *expatriates*. Many ‘smart slackers’ assumed that I did not want to speak to them about their lives because they were not “packaged.” Nevertheless, by working and socializing with ‘smart slackers’ I was able to convince them that I was interested in their lives and not solely in their packaged counterparts. Before I became employed, my introduction to the group gave the impression that I was not going to be in Beijing for more than a couple of months which meant that ‘smart slackers’ were not very interested in getting to know me very well. To be accepted and treated equally, and more importantly, trusted with their secrets, I needed to join their group in order to become a participant rather than just an observer.

Membership aside, what occurs when the researcher is less powerful than the informant is. Traditionally, the anthropologist retained much of the power in choosing

what to observe, what to write, what to discuss in the academic forum. However, in the study of elites and not themes, does the power shift from the researcher to the informant? Shore says the shift does occur and is important in understanding how elites use their power while at the same time, eliminating much of the researcher's options (Shore, 2002:11). At the same time, should anthropologists allow themselves to be vetoed by those whom they are researching in order to gain limited access? Who benefits the most from ethnographies of elites? Elites are seen not as a group in society, but a category and in this category, there are friendships, kinships, networks and ritual or symbolic behaviours that can be studied. An ethnography of the category and space may explain elites that may serve more effectively and perhaps ethically than studying the individual. There have been attempts to study multinational corporations and "hidden hierarchies of power" there are still a lack of research done in "studying up" (Shore, 2002:3).

Ultimately, I did not research packaged expatriates, however, towards the end of my stay in Beijing, I had a better understanding of which some of them were, and how they lived their lives in Beijing. Certainly Shore makes a point when he says that there is a lack of 'studying up', however, in my research I attempted to explain how a group of middle-class Westerners managed to create an affluent lifestyle for themselves and in that respect, I was 'studying up'.

By studying the social networks made by these young professionals as well as observing the social and ritual behaviours displayed by "smart slackers", I formed a better understanding of the privileged lifestyles which many of them lead in Beijing. This will be discussed further throughout the following chapters.

The image or idea of elite is sometimes linked to those who are responsible for change in society channelled through organizations with the non-elites following suite and participating in the changes. In the social sciences, individuals are not referred to as elites, rather their organizations that they are members of, is referred to as elite. Furthermore, much research involves the institution in which elites are embedded, creating a vagueness of who is part of the elite (Marcus, 1983:9). Elites shadow themselves in corporations and other organizations, with a chameleon-like ability to be apparent in the organization but transparent about the influence they may wield. The exclusivity invokes images of secret societies and power held by an unknown group, who view their positions as elite, within society. In relation to researching them in the form of ethnography, difficulties arise. Gathering empirical research on the nature of the elite organizations instead of attempting to focus on the individuals for bibliography can prove to be difficult. The researcher must display knowledge of the organization and fill in the rest with well-placed guesses and assumptions. It is a challenge to describe the role of elite in the organization they belong to without having to distinguish their roles inside and outside of said organization (Marcus, 1983:11).

In Beijing, I lacked the intricate knowledge of the multi-national corporations and the hierarchy found within. Furthermore, even though I learnt the addresses of many corporate offices, I had no means of gaining entry. That is to say, I did not know who worked there, as there were no detailed business directories available to me at the time. I was not able to recognize who belonged to the packaged expatriate group nor could I distinguish their roles inside their corporations. The challenges of attempting to research packaged expatriates became overwhelming. The limitations in getting access to

packaged expatriates proved to be daunting. The contact with packaged expatriates was much more limited beginning with difficulties in locating them individually. While packaged expatriates work predominantly in one area, they may live all over the city.

Sarah Strauss explains that membership in some cases is a necessity not for acceptance of the ethnographer on the part of the group but as a method of understanding the group. In her example, Strauss explains that her participation in the teachings of yoga was necessary to not only understand the transformation and effects on her mind and body her credibility with yoga practitioners. For Strauss, her participation, what she calls, “doing and being” in some ways was more important than “knowing” (Strauss, 2000:172).

Increased mobility has shifted the roles of ethnographer and subject. Now the ethnographer has to contend with their own comings and goings in the field as well as of those they are studying. During my research, I learnt that all expatriate workers had to deal with the almost constant arrival and departure of friends and partners as much as I did. This lent me a better understanding of our shared experiences as many ‘smart slackers’ understood the problems I was facing in keeping track of my informants.

The mobility of informants causes a new set of challenges for the ethnographer. Traditionally, ethnographers were privileged in being the one who could enter and leave the field whilst their informants stayed. As Nigel Rapport explains, the concept of ethnographic research was based on the assumption that the anthropologist entered the field, and was validated in the writing. Few had to contend with their informants entering and leaving the field yet today, anthropology now contends with wireless communication, high mobility rates and the discourse of “*where is there*”? Similar to

Rapport's experience in a village in England, it was my experience that I, as the ethnographer, was sedentary, while my informants were entering and leaving. This role reversal proved challenging, as I was forced try and keep track of informants entering and leaving Beijing. I devised a system of tracking informants, I paid close attention to 'smart slackers' discuss who came and went (Rapport, 2000:72).

Rapport argues that narratives are stories told about someone's life, words that describe their perceptions of their world. Narratives often reveal how the informant's beliefs and perceptions are formed across time and space.

Smart slackers' use of narratives was similar but was channelled through gossip. Gossip was a tool which allowed me to follow networks of 'smart slackers' and better understand how people are linked as well as who was still in Beijing and who left. The cohort-ness of people, the togetherness is made clear through networks made through conversations. In order to understand the cohort-ness of people, especially when dealing with a large group of people, who are spread across a metropolis, I relied on gossip and personal stories to shape ideas and themes together.

'Smart slackers' were not hesitant to discuss their lives or perceptions through formal interviews conversation. Gossip's function was to pass on vital information about Beijing, information such as crimes against foreigners, job opportunities, or international news. Through gossip, I understood their perceptions about Beijing and about their current lifestyles. The sharing of information is very intricate in how 'smart slackers' relate to one another and deal with one another. More so, offers up the logic, understanding and *raison d'être* of their lives in Beijing. I found that when 'smart slackers' were gossiping, it had less to do with actual, documented content and more to

do with their stream of consciousness. ‘Smart slackers’ gossiped about the latest world political developments or which bar may be closing revealed how they prioritized their lives. World events were always secondary to which bar was opening or closing or which international DJ was coming to Beijing. ‘Smart slackers’ often revealed that the here and now took priority over the future or the world outside of Beijing.

Criteria of Informants

For the purposes of conducting interviews and gathering narratives, I set about finding ‘smart slackers’ that met certain requirements. Such as, all of my informants were living in the Chaoyang District and had been in Beijing for a minimum of six months to three years. Informants was employed at the time that I interviewed them. Each informant had definitive plans for returning to their homeland, although some were vaguer about the date than others were. This is common amongst ‘smart slackers’ who all wish to return home eventually, but are often unsure when they will go. Many wait for things to change in their lives, or find excuses to go home and face their “real lives.” The idea that their lives in Beijing are unreal is not quite accurate. Rather, their lives in Beijing make up a period of time where they are *escaping* from their lives back home and living a life with no consequences. I will elaborate these points in the following chapter.

I conducted formal interviews with twelve people, ten of which were ‘smart slackers’; the remaining two were older professionals. I was introduced to many of my informants through ‘smart slackers’ I had befriended. Five of the twelve informants were men. Four of the men were in the mid-twenties to early thirties. The exception was one informant who was in his late fifties. Of the seven women, nearly all were in their mid

twenties to early thirties apart from two who were both in their early forties. All of the informants except for one had a post-secondary education or degree.

Three of the informants were English teachers, two worked for embassies; three occupied lower-level management positions in multi-nationals, while one was a foreign adviser. The others worked in highly specialized fields. Although only twelve people were formally interviewed, I managed to speak to dozens of other people in similar situations about their lives in Beijing. The informal discussions were held with 'smart slackers' who frequented the Bar Street area. I also spoke to others who did not frequent the Bar Street area in order to get a more balanced perspective.

During the formal interviews, I would ask the informant to describe their lives in Beijing, why they chose to come to this city, and their general thoughts and feelings about other 'smart slackers'. My interest lay in what 'smart slackers' had to say about their own lives in Beijing, how they formulated their ideas about the city and about their peers. Through their narratives, I understood more about Beijing, how things worked, how people behaved and the outcomes of their behaviour.

While participating in many outings with 'smart slackers', I came to understand that although they said their lives in Beijing were centred on their employment, much of their time was spent socializing and binge drinking. For months I observed, and often participated, in the "celebrations" of Bar Street. I began to understand that 'smart slackers' were not always cautious about their health and took many risks such as eating potentially unsafe food from street vendors, consuming large quantities of alcohol and illegal narcotics. Furthermore, 'smart slackers' encouraged each other to participate in these activities. My subjects also often delighted in promiscuous and risky sexual

behaviour. This behaviour will be discussed in another section. The further I ventured into these lifestyles, the more I questioned whether my participation was a “rite of passage” or merely a result of my own addictive personality. Mid-way through my research, I had to re-examine my motives and participation levels in smart slacker activities. Was I participating for the sake of research? How “native” must I become to understand ‘smart slackers’? Taking into account my failing health in Beijing due to the climate and the numerous evenings out, I had to limit myself to what I could and could not participate. I relied on my position as an English teacher, both a safe and practical activity, as a point of access to my subjects’ lives.

Passaro asks if pushing personal safety is “better knowledge.” She questioned how far she would go to collect information and whether she would risk her personal safety in the field. Although unlike having to sleep in the rough New York streets, my subjects’ lifestyles proved to be no safer. Yet, this pressure to participate was tied to belonging to the group. Smart slackers often admitted that they pushed the limits of their health and well-being because of peer pressure and boredom. The latter, they explained, was due to the fact that apart from drinking in bars or at home, there was very little else to choose from in regards to foreign interest entertainment. Therefore, ‘smart slackers’ and I alike, would venture out several nights a week, binge drinking as it was the only way to meet up with friends and acquaintances.

Membership contains two sides of participation: the ethnographer who chooses to become a member and the participants who accept the ethnographer as one of them. What this translates into is the selection of social activities and the level of participation that the subjects desire to participate with the ethnographer. As Vered Amit states, the

ethnographer must have the ability to adapt to new social environments, relationships, and demands. This criterion of fieldwork can often be a challenge and is often taken for granted in the pre-departure stage (Amit, 2000: 1).

My participation in the ‘smart slackers’ group was enthusiastic in the beginning. Like all new arrivals, the cheap alcohol, late nights, and excitement of being in a foreign land often last for three months. It is what ‘smart slackers’ refer to as the “honeymoon phase.” The romanticized idea of membership and belonging, seduced me into prolonging my stay in Beijing as most ‘smart slackers’ do. Many admitted to me that they had originally planned to stay in Beijing for no longer than a year, two years ago only to extend their stay.

Helena Wulff argues that the ethnographer today can also remain partly in the field, without having to be physically there. Through technology, prolonged stay or numerous return visits, it may be harder to leave the field. Many, she argues, may not want to as the seduction to “go native” occurs. This seduction may prolong the stay in the field, yet most eventually return home. Keeping contact with the field through communication technology can allow the anthropologist to preserve ties to the field. Exiting the field is often not an easy thing for many anthropologists. The desire to stay or the overwhelming sadness of saying goodbye does not rest solely on the side of the anthropologist. The informants’ desire for the anthropologist to stay can also be heartfelt and emotional (Wulff, 2000: 155).

My departure from the field was particularly difficult, as I had developed strong ties with some of my informants. Unlike Wulff, I was certain that I would not return to the field, knowing that I would most likely never see my informants again. The finality

of it all was particularly difficult for me, and although I knew it was unrealistic, I secretly wanted to give up my thesis work and stay in Beijing as a ‘smart slacker’.

Many ‘smart slackers’ admitted that they often felt that leaving would be too hard, that they wanted to stay in Beijing with their group. The farewell parties, which took place on a monthly and often weekly basis, were emotional and difficult times for all involved. Again, I saw the parallel lives of the ethnographer and the ‘smart slacker’, many of whom are enticed to stay and remain in Beijing. The “virtual field” exists for the ethnographer as much as it does the ‘smart slacker’. Email and international calling cards are the choice methods of keeping in touch for ‘smart slackers’. For many, they took comfort in knowing that they would not lose complete contact with the friends they made in Beijing.

At every farewell party, the departing expatriate would promise to return to Beijing. I did not. I knew that I would not return to Beijing and I made no secret of this. It was my experience that many ‘smart slackers’ felt a great desire to return yet few did. During my ten-month stay in Beijing, three ‘smart slackers’ returned. These cases were unusual, as it had been made it clear during the going away parties that each would not be returning to Beijing. The desire to remain in Beijing for as long as possible is a key issue with many ‘smart slackers’ and I will discuss this further in another chapter.

Conclusion

Although I had initially planned to research packaged expatriates, I managed to gain membership into a large, easily accessible group of foreign workers. Unlike packaged expatriates, ‘smart slackers’ were easy to locate and were willing to be part of my study. Therefore, I chose to focus my attention on researching the ‘smart slackers’

who lived, worked, and socialized in the Chaoyang District situated in the eastern part of Beijing. By being employed as an English teacher, I was capable to create a point of access into the 'smart slackers' groups while situating myself in Bar Street as a means of observing them in their leisure activities. The key points in my research were membership and participation in 'smart slackers' recreational activities although it is not always clear who is permitted membership into the 'smart slacker' groups when it comes to ethnicity. The 'smart slackers' whom I met and studied were Euro-American, Eurasian and Asian-Americans, all who spoke native or fluent English.

In the following chapter, I will present an in-depth background description of Chaoyang District in Beijing along with the context of 'smart slackers' lives.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXUALIZING BEIJING, BAR STREET AND THE 'SMART SLACKERS' LIFESTYLES

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the context of 'smart slackers'' lives. I will begin with a description of Chaoyang District and discuss the importance of Bar Street and 'smart slackers'' leisure activities. Also presented is the idea of networking, including how networks are made, and how information is exchanged through name cards.

Out of the nine districts, Chaoyang is the most prosperous. The district is considered the financial district of Beijing, as it houses the World Trade Centre and dozens of multi-national offices. In response to China's admission into the World Trade Organization in 2002 and winning the bid to host the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese government is gentrifying Chaoyang, clearing the path for larger, financial institutions. In order to be financially equipped to respond to global market demands, the government has allowed the district to pull down its old buildings and re-situate its residents in newly created suburbs south of the city. Continued efforts are apparent with the construction of two newly created Ring Roads (*highways*) that has eased the access to these new suburbs.

In order to understand the massive changes the government made in 2002, one must examine the Open Door Policy of 1977. In the late 1970's, under Deng Xiaoping, China accepted foreign industry, along with a small number of expatriates. The few foreign staff and journalists in Beijing were confined to living in hotels where they were closely watched by the Chinese government. Diplomats and embassy staff were housed in embassy compounds. To this day, the compounds remain with guards at the gates and

cameras in the lifts. Even Chinese staff was cautioned to be wary of foreigners. Private cars and drivers were assigned to the foreign workers, limiting their freedom of movement. However, by the end of the 1980's, development of luxurious hotels and Western style apartments began as more foreign workers descended upon the city.

Even though great changes have been made to make foreigner workers feel more welcome in Beijing, like most governments, the Chinese government has not completely let go of the idea of regulating their lives. Visa requirements to work, live, or visit the country are controlled by the Public Security Bureau (PSB). In order to enter or leave the country, there must be an official visa glued in the passport, which is scanned at immigration stations in the airports and at the borders. I was informed by a diplomat that in order to obtain a Chinese driver's license, the driver must pass a Chinese road test and surrender their foreign driver's license.

Locating and Creating a "Home"

The rate of development is rapid, so that once a building that has been pulled down and cleared, the reconstruction is often finished in months. Apartment high-rises are replacing traditional housing, called *hutongs*. Rent in these new apartment buildings has gone up considerably, making it more expensive to live in this district. As most "smart slackers" work in Chaoyang, it is only natural that they would want to live in the district. Furthermore, if one were to compare salaries, 'smart slackers' usually earn more than Chinese staff who work in foreign companies. Chinese employees in state owned companies make considerably less, but have two of their daily meals, transportation to work, health care, and housing provided. What this means is 'smart slackers' are in a better position to pay high rent than the local Chinese. Although 'smart slackers'

typically earn a higher wage (compared to what they would earn in their home countries), the cost of living in Beijing is high, especially when it comes to housing. Few ‘smart slackers’ can afford to live in the luxury housing compounds on their salaries which is why they turn to local housing. I will explain the difference in local housing further on in this chapter.

Perhaps one of the most notable aspects of Chaoyang is the high cost of housing. A one-bedroom apartment in a Western style high rise eight kilometres away from the Bar Street area starts at 1000 USD a month. On the other hand, a one-bedroom apartment in local housing, in the Bar Street area, costs 900 USD a month. However, a one-bedroom apartment in local housing eight kilometres from Bar Street starts at 315 USD a month. Most ‘smart slackers’ admitted that they ideally wanted to live as close to Bar Street as possible. An apartment ten kilometres away was viewed as ideal or as close as possible.

What draws ‘smart slackers’ to Chaoyang? Most noted that the appeal to live in Chaoyang District stems from the numerous resources that were available to them in this district. The district houses most of the Western clinics, restaurants, boutiques, and schools. Furthermore, all embassies are located in Chaoyang, along with the diplomatic housing. Western styled apartment high-rises, villas, gourmet food stores and bars that are concentrated in Chaoyang contribute to the desire to live “where the action is.” What is appealing to ‘smart slackers’ is that the district can be easily navigated on foot, by taxi, by subway or the more popular form of bicycle. Furthermore, as the city has a high cost of living, they invest more in their rent and their recreation and less on transportation.

Due to the high rent in luxury apartments, 'smart slackers' live in various local apartment buildings. The information regarding housing laws is ambiguous and often incomplete. I was told that there are specific buildings throughout Chaoyang, which are not permitted to rent to foreigners. I could not get any information in regards to specific buildings or areas, but was advised to search for apartment buildings that foreigners have been living for more than six months as it was assumed that their length of stay meant that the proprietor was permitted to rent to them. The information I received came from 'smart slackers' and the Chinese staff whom I worked alongside in the language institute.

Even though many were often caught and evicted at a great financial loss to them, 'smart slackers' continued to live in local housing. Most landlords asked for three months rent upfront and many 'smart slackers' found themselves being evicted as soon as two weeks after moving in. Yet in other cases, the proprietor took their name, passport number, and Chinese visa number and registered them at the Public Security Bureau or the PSB. The PSB is a government agency that ensures the regulations of housing and resident permits are adhered to in the Chinese capital. After speaking with many 'smart slackers', my understanding is that if a proprietor registers the 'smart slacker' as a tenant, it is interpreted that the 'smart slacker' has permission to live in that building. Unfortunately, this type of information is largely unavailable to foreigners. Even embassies cannot always determine the laws governing housing. Most 'smart slackers' revealed to me that they had moved into their apartment and were hoping not to get stopped by the PSB.

In 2002, the housing law was amended, allowing foreigners to choose from a wider range of housing, especially local housing. The shift from isolating foreigners in

compounds and hotel rooms to regulating a larger choice of housing is clearly influenced by the WTO agreement. The government made changes to the residential zoning to allow foreign workers to rent an apartment so long as the proprietor registered the tenant at the PSB. It should be noted that twice a year, PSB officials routinely visit apartments and ask to see if the tenants, Chinese or otherwise have the proper residence permits. Under Chinese law, only citizens born in Beijing have permission to work and live in the capital. This measure was taken to ward off an influx of migrant labourers from other provinces. The extent to which these measures have worked is questionable. Yet, PSB officials routinely make their rounds, handing out fines of 625 USD to unregistered foreign workers caught living in local housing. I knew of eight 'smart slackers' who were caught unregistered and were told to make their way down to the police station with their landlord in order to pay the fine though no one was evicted.

Since most 'smart slackers' cannot afford to live in luxury apartments, their only option is to live in regulated local housing. Prior to the amendments made to housing regulations, many 'smart slackers' revealed to me that they often felt very nervous about going back to their apartments out of fear that the PSB would stop them and demand to see their papers. These "papers" were the responsibility of the proprietor, who would take the 'smart slackers' personal details and then submit them to the PSB. The process of having to contact the proprietor (who often did not speak English) and go down to the police station to register caused much anxiety in 'smart slackers'. There was also the bigger issue of who was to pay the fine. Although most 'smart slackers' who were caught had their landlord pay the fine, there were cases in which the landlord threatened to evict the tenant if they did not pay the 625 USD fine. The stress of being caught meant

that many 'smart slackers' did not spend much time at home. This was even more apparent in October and May when the PSB conducted their extensive investigations. I noticed an increase in the number of 'smart slackers' in Bar Street at this time.

In winter, local housing is subjected to strict heating control. Beijing is the only city in China that has central heating, provided by the government in all buildings. In order to remain cost efficient, the government turns on the heat from mid-November and turns it off in mid-March, in Western apartments, the heat often comes on a couple of weeks earlier. As many buildings have old wiring, during the summer months, the fuse boxes tend to overheat due to the large number of air conditioners running at once, creating blackouts. During the summer of 2002, the apartment buildings on my street, along with Bar Street lost power on four separate nights, when the temperatures outside had reached 33 degrees Celsius.

I wanted to understand the link between housing and Bar Street as nearly all of my informants lived in local housing. This corresponded closely to the number of 'smart slackers' who sought entertainment in Bar Street. I will discuss the numerous reasons, beginning with a description of local housing.

There are many differences between living in a Western style compound and local Chinese housing. A primary difference is the lack of privacy. Most local housing has thin walls so noise levels tend to be high. Most foreign workers view their apartments as a sanctuary, a place to escape from the stresses of their lives in Beijing but many feel that local housing does not offer them that escape. Most 'smart slackers' admitted that they missed the creature comforts of "home" such as a satellite television, an oven in the kitchen or a bathtub in the washroom which are all lacking in local housing. Instead,

local apartments are equipped with access to only local television stations, two ring burners for cooking and a showerhead without dividers in the bathroom. This means that when you take a shower on the wall in the bathroom, everything in your bathroom gets wet. Although this may not translate as being a hardship, it is a key issue for many 'smart slackers', it is an added reminder that they cannot do the things the same way that they would do "at home."

I questioned why they did not consider their apartments in local housing to be "home." Most view local housing as a temporary lodging, a place where they must live until they go home. Most 'smart slackers' explained that if they were to stay in Beijing for more than a year, they would try to move into a Western style apartment because while local housing was fine if it was temporary most felt that they could not live there indefinitely. The appeal of "moving up" in housing is closely linked to the 'smart slackers' success, as their success is often measured in how much they can achieve while living in Beijing. Regardless of the fact that nearly all 'smart slackers' eventually return to their home countries, it is important for many to live the lifestyles associated with the packaged expatriates and so the move up from local housing to Western style housing becomes a change in status for them. Many 'smart slackers' admitted to me that they were often envious of packaged expatriates who had their housing provided for them. Many longed to be able to move into a nice apartment but doubted they would ever be able to afford one.

These 'smart slackers' who had lived in Beijing for several years or those who planned on living there for a few years often did not make an effort to invest in refurbishing their housing. As a side note, those who did attempt to spend money on furniture, art and

other forms of decorating were living with their partners and had set up a “home” for themselves in Beijing. The dual income allowed for ‘smart slackers’ to spend more money on their home than the single ‘smart slackers’ because many couples spend more time at home than their single counterparts. A distinct and recurring feature of the lifestyle of single ‘smart slackers’ is their near bare apartments and the amount of leisure time they spend in Bar Street. Their salaries are often spent on their social lives and on items that can be easily transported such as clothing and souvenirs.

Nearly all of the ‘smart slackers’ I encountered admitted that they tried to avoid buying too much fake designer clothing and shoes instead of facing the bureaucratic postal system for sending items such as presents and souvenirs home. Although the prices for slow boat shipping are reasonable, the filling of forms, and inspection of all your goods is stressful and time consuming. I myself sent home a record ten boxes of personal affects, much to the amazement of my informants.

Leisure and Recreation

One of the important findings of my research was the continuous complaints about the lack of affordable leisure activities. Most ‘smart slackers’ seek entertainment in Bar Street. Furthermore, their choice in leisure reflects their choice in housing as most ‘smart slackers’ admit that they chose to live as close to the area as possible, choosing whatever they could afford in or near the district.

In 2002, Bar Street was facing a dismal future. Rumours spread amongst foreign workers that the Chinese government had agreed to let a contractor tear down the Bar Street area and replace it with a large financial plaza. English weekly magazines informed readers that the destruction was imminent. ‘Smart slackers’ who paid high rent

in the area began to look for new apartments. Billboards began to appear, showing the artist's sketches of what the financial plaza would look like. Many foreign workers wondered loudly where they would go for entertainment should Bar Street close. The destruction of the street that was not a great concern; rather, it was what foreign workers would do with their spare time and where they would congregate if the streets had been destroyed.

The choices of leisure activities are limited to foreign workers, especially 'smart slackers'. Unlike packaged expatriates who often have their families living with them in Beijing in compounds with satellite television, private gyms and mandatory work functions to attend, 'smart slackers' have to look outside the home for entertainment. Most foreign workers were relieved to hear that the area was saved from the wrecking ball when it was rumoured that the embassies situated on North Bar Street petitioned the Chinese government when they joined and informed the Chinese government that they would not relocate. In the end, the government complied with their request to build elsewhere.

In the course of my research, I learned that Bar Street means much more to 'smart slackers' than a mere place to drink. Bar Street reflects their lifestyle. Due to the fact that most 'smart slackers' do not live close to one another or work together, Bar Street serves as a convenient place to meet up with one another. Bar Street is convenient as it is easy to find, it is close to the embassies, and it is always filled with patrons. Regardless of the night of the week, there are always people wondering around. The layout of the street allows people to wander from one establishment to the next. During the warm

weather, most patrons converge in the middle of the road on South Bar Street and on the sidewalks on North Bar Street.

Most patrons choose not to stay in one bar for the entire night. People often wander from one bar to the next, often carrying their drinks with them or they stand outside the bar and drink, going in for refills. Many 'smart slackers' told me that it was this freedom of mobility that particularly appealed to them. Without the confinements of staying in one bar, 'smart slackers' were able to wander about freely, looking for other places to go, decreasing their chances of boredom.

The most popular forms of spending are on alcohol and pirated DVD's and music CDs, eating out and house parties. During my research, I observed and was told, that the consumption of alcohol is the favoured form of entertainment by most 'smart slackers'. Most admitted that they drank too much but pointed out that there were few other options available to them in terms of entertainment. Therefore, even those who did not want to venture out to Bar Street did so out of lack of options. Many 'smart slackers' told me that they were envious of the packaged expatriates who could afford to go to the embassy balls, galas and concerts which are patronized by the affluent expatriates and wealthy Chinese. An evening out to these events cost the same amount that a 'smart slacker' would spend in the course of a week on entertainment. Most 'smart slackers' admitted to me that they often preferred to eat and drink in several cheaper establishments than save for one expensive event.

As I have already explained, for these 'smart slackers', the time period to stay in Beijing is much more fluid and decisive than the packaged expatriates who are there on contract. Their salaries do not allow for hoarding luxury items, expensive clothing, and

furniture or *objets d'art*. 'Smart slackers' choose instead to invest in goods that they can consume immediately or that they can travel home easily.

It is important to understand with whom the 'smart slackers' are expecting to spend their leisure time. Nearly all of my informants expressed that they preferred the company of foreigners but had made at least one close Chinese friend. Few 'smart slackers' said that they spent an equal amount of time with foreigners and their Chinese friends.

The Dynamics of Bar Street

Bar Street represents a boundary in which 'smart slackers' and other types of foreign workers meet up and converge on the street or in the establishments that line the streets. It appeared that 'smart slackers' often ignored the Chinese patrons unless they were introduced to them by a common third party. However, I attempted to ask several informants, the reasons were not explained to me. Although I could deduce that the segregation could be partly due to the language barriers and the fact that most 'smart slackers' teach English for a living and do not want to give free lessons to a local who wants to practice their language skills. My understanding of 'smart slackers' showed that they go to Bar Street to seek out other foreigners, not local Chinese. This idea that Bar Street is a boundary, closed off to local Chinese is reflected in 'smart slackers'' actions and the history of how Bar Street grew from being an embassy area to housing the most bars in Beijing.

Why are the streets segregated? Those who congregate on Bar Street on a nightly or weekly basis are predominantly Euro-American as the Streets reflect the Euro-American culture in the heart of Chaoyang. Bars usually opt for a Western style or

influence, playing Western pop and R&B music, with varying degrees of bilingual staff and Western influenced décor, toilets, and draw customers who recognize the cultural signs. Economics plays an important role in the segregation. Prices of food and beverages sold in many of the establishments are at par with Euro-American price schemes, thus limiting the types of patrons who can afford the goods. This translates into the affluent Chinese, foreign workers and tourists being the targeted consumer group. The Bar Streets do not turn away Chinese patrons, nor are all the establishments in the area strictly Western although there has been an increase in the number of bars that are beginning to cater to the young, affluent Chinese patrons.

Membership in Bar Street is based on the criteria: English is the predominant language spoken even by Europeans who are not native English speakers. Eurasian, Euro-Asian, and Euro-American patrons fall into the above category, although there is diversity in nationality and ethnicity, the commonality is the English language. There are various nationalities in Bar Street, such as Europeans, Australians, New Zealanders, and several African nationalities, they all share the same ability to speak English and are “foreign” to China. Bar Street hosts an anglophile community and its establishments carry the four major English-speaking weekly magazines and predominantly play English pop music. The patrons of Bar Street try to exclude local Chinese. Bar Street is a barrier marking the boundary for relationships between the above-mentioned members. The streets are perceived as the one place in Beijing where foreigners are less conspicuous, a place where they form the majority compared to the minority they join when they step out of Bar Street.

Although membership into foreign groups in Bar Street is clear, I never encountered one expatriate worker who explicitly admitted that they resented the local Chinese that they were slowly infiltrating Bar Street although the inflexion was of disapproval. On the contrary, my informants would make the effort to say that it was “just one of the things” that occurs in China. This vagueness of their resentment was much clearer in their actions towards local Chinese patrons. I argue that the ‘smart slackers’ who frequent Bar Street use methods of isolating local Chinese, although the extent of the method behaviour varies between people and evenings out. One type of behaviour is the way that ‘smart slackers’ stay out late into the night. It was rare that I ever saw Chinese patrons in bars past 2 AM, especially on a work night, perhaps due to different work hours. During the weekends however, it was likely to see more Chinese patrons staying late, yet the number of foreign patrons always greatly out-numbered them. Secondly, foreign patrons drink more alcohol in shorter periods than their Chinese counterparts do. I often noted that ‘smart slackers’ would constantly order rounds of drinks and play complicated or unfamiliar drinking games with their foreign companions, thus isolating their Chinese companions from joining in or following each game. Furthermore, bar hopping, a favourite with most ‘smart slackers’ would ultimately break off groups of people, often leaving the Chinese companion to stay with one or two people, while the majority of the party ventures off to another establishment.

Another method, which appears to isolate their Chinese companions, is through dominating the conversation between foreigners at the table. Conversations were often about work, or people they knew, or news events from their home countries. Whenever I observed, or was part of a group of people in Bar Street with one local Chinese guest,

everyone at the table would play, what I call, *ten-minute musical chairs*. Each 'smart slacker' would eventually move down the table and find themselves beside the local Chinese guests and would talk for roughly, ten minutes until someone else got up from the table and the rotating would begin again. Finally, even though 'smart slackers' start off the night drinking in cheaper establishments, often they move on to more expensive bars or clubs, thus limiting those who can afford to go along.

The history of Bar Street lends greatly to the understanding of how 'smart slackers' react towards local Chinese patrons. The first bars in Beijing were located in hotels, which were exclusive to foreigners only, meaning tourists, journalists, and other expatriate workers. The only Chinese allowed were the trained staff. The first few establishments to open were strategically located in and around the embassy areas, which were cordoned off by embassy guards. The owners of these establishments were foreign and so they advertised in English-speaking communities. More importantly, in the mid-1990's, the Chinese government still encouraged a great mistrust of the foreign residents and fraternizing with them was discouraged. By 2000 however, with economic prosperity and relaxing attitude towards capitalism, local Chinese businesspersons began to copy the success of the foreign establishments, bringing the bar concept and more traditional Chinese concepts together to create an entertainment hybrid, such as karaoke bars.

Even though foreign workers were accustomed to bars, serving them and not locals, over time there has been such a high turnover in expatriate workers yet the attitude towards Bar Street does not seem to be disappearing. I argue that this behaviour is partly due to the older 'smart slackers' and other expatriates who pass along this attitude

towards to the new arrivals. Perhaps it is a link to the idea that Bar Street is a representation of Euro-American culture, therefore, it is only natural in their eyes, that it is understood and enjoyed by those from that culture. Whatever their reasons may be, the boundaries around Bar Street appear to be breaking down regardless of how 'smart slackers' may feel about it. The 'smart slackers' I knew in Bar Street would not want to come off as being racist by admitting that they resented the influx of Chinese patrons. However, their actions often reflected their attitudes.

I was in the position to ask an informant who chose to have an informal conversation about 'smart slackers' attitudes towards Bar Street and local Chinese patrons. Richard is single and is a nightly patron of Bar Street. Having spent six years in Beijing, he has seen the metamorphosis of Bar Street. Richard is a British national, who is in his mid-thirties and who works as a consultant in a foreign firm. What makes Richard unique is the fact that he is out every night of the week on Bar Street, going to the North and South Street establishments, meeting up with people and constantly expanding his social network of friends and contacts. Furthermore, Richard can speak Mandarin and has befriended the staff in several establishments. The staffs know him by name and rush to make sure he gets a table and receives immediate service. Richard provided an historical overview of Bar Street to me along with a contemporary opinion of why the segregation exists.

In 1999, Bar Street was more family orientated and family friendly. European and North American couples would dine out with their children, and have brunch on the weekends. The nightlife was directed towards an older crowd of expatriates, with many embassy workers who would walk down the street and have a drink after work. It was

less of an all-night party atmosphere. Few bars remained open late into the night as most patrons left at midnight. Back then, few local Chinese patrons went to bars. Those who did usually went out with their foreign managers with whom they worked in multinational corporations.

More importantly, Richard explained that the Streets were “exotic” to the local Chinese, a place in which most faces were not Chinese, indulging in “rituals” that were foreign to them. Moreover, the establishments were expensive and few could afford to go in. On the weekends, the Sanlitun Market was crowded with foreign shoppers and tourists. By 2002, the market had largely disappeared and replaced with more bars. In 2002, more establishments catering to Chinese patrons began to appear. Karaoke bars, clubs that play Chinese pop music, Chinese bands, and unilingual staff were catering to a predominantly Chinese clientele.

The divide in the types of bars, and the types of patrons the establishments attract have create a segregation between Chinese patrons seeking bars that they can relate to and the ‘smart slackers’ who are looking for bars that they are familiar with. Richard felt that Bar Street was beginning to fall into the hands of the Chinese. Expatriates, he said, was looking for other places to go, and was spending less time in Bar Street. Places such as Chaoyang Park, with its expanding apartment complexes and gourmet shops, were attracting foreigners away from Bar Street. Hou Hai, a picturesque neighbourhood with a river running along it, was becoming a favourite hangout for many foreigners. Richard felt that it was not just the Chinese however, but the disappearance of many older expatriates and families from the area that was causing the exodus from Bar Street. For

him, the presence of a younger, more rowdy group of foreigners was equally unappealing to older foreigners.

I was interested in understanding how the shift from foreign patrons to Chinese patrons occurred in such a short time. Richard assessed that the rising levels of standard of living, along with the increasingly relaxed attitudes of the younger Chinese generations was creating a new class of patrons. Along with the fact that there were younger, single expatriates in Beijing than previous years, the nightlife will continue to change to meet new demand. His forecast is that Bar Street will be left for the foreign tourists and Chinese patrons, while “we” look for somewhere new and exciting to drink.

I sought out another perspective from another ‘smart slacker’. Jonathan is in his early twenties and is employed as an English teacher. He came to Beijing in 1999 and hangs out in Bar Street three to four nights a week. Jonathan is Eurasian and is bilingual (English and Mandarin) although he is always searching to improve his Mandarin. Jonathan is often accompanied to Bar Street by a local Chinese friend who has a good command of English and who is usually receives a friendly welcome by foreigners who know him. Jonathan was candid about ‘smart slackers’ attitudes towards Bar Street. In his opinion, ‘smart slackers’ treated Bar Street as if it were their own. In his opinion, some Chinese patrons fit in better than others did. The criteria of “fitting in” were that the patrons were men, who were bilingual or at least had a good command of English and who were not looking for English lessons. Locals with a disposable income and understanding of foreigners were more likely to fit into foreign groups than those who chose to go to Chinese bars and talk only with their Chinese friends. Yet even those who did meet the “criteria” were not always fully accepted into the foreign groups. Jonathan

pointed out that 'smart slackers' were not going to ever admit that they did not want Chinese patrons joining them in the bars because no one, in his opinion, wanted to appear racist in front of others. Yet, few would readily ask a group of unknown Chinese patrons to join them at their table, unlike their usual behaviour with fellow foreigners.

It is important to note that not all 'smart slackers' shy away from making local Chinese friends. On the contrary, nearly all said that they have a close Chinese friend with whom they spend varying degrees of time. However, they rarely venture out to Bar Street together. Jonathan explained that local Chinese often came to Bar Street early and left early. Furthermore, Chinese patrons take their time drinking and do not necessarily plan to get inebriated unlike so many 'smart slackers'. Moreover, the Chinese friends who accompany the 'smart slacker' often notice that their companion is busy talking with other 'smart slackers' thus excluding their Chinese friend from the conversation. I have observed this numerous times and even did this to some of my Chinese students who accompanied me to Bar Street because of the language barrier.

However, when 'smart slackers' do go out with their Chinese friends they often enjoy three hour dinners, spending time eating and talking. Another favourite pastime with Chinese friends was to visit the local cultural sights or stay at home and watch movies together. These activities are reflective of the intimacy of the time spent together unlike Bar Street, which is very open and lacks privacy.

A recent yet, important distinction between 'smart slackers' is the few who are in intimate relationships with another 'smart slacker'. It was my experience that most 'smart slackers' who ventured into Bar Street were single whereas those with a partner often remained at home and entertained small groups of friends. Dinner and house

parties or watching DVDs appeared to be the most favourite leisure activities for couples and some singles.

Why does Bar Street draw to its establishments, those who claimed that they do not enjoy the “scene”? While many ‘smart slackers’ admit that they do not enjoy venturing out to Bar Street often, many seek out alternative forms of entertainment in bars. Bars located off the main Bar Street area offer a variety of live music shows, reading rooms, bowling, and karaoke. Regardless of personal tastes, ‘smart slackers’ often venture outside of their apartments, in search of entertainment. Several informants admitted to me that they thought Beijing was a lonely place to live so they sought contact in Bar Street because it has the largest foreign crowds at any time, anywhere in Beijing.

Apart from work and Bar Street establishments, there was not much available in terms of entertainment. There are few foreign films shown in movie theatres except for international blockbusters, which are shown with Chinese subtitles. Although the Italian Embassy often shows Italian films, few other Embassies offer much entertainment except on national holidays. As I discussed above, local housing is not conducive for socializing at home. An important underlining issue however, is the fact that ‘smart slackers’ rely heavily on human contact with each other because most cannot converse fluently in Mandarin, thus limiting their socializing with locals. Furthermore, ‘smart slackers’ rely on making as many friends as possible as so many keep leaving; there is a great need to constantly replace them.

The ritual for drinking in Bar Street remains much the same as ‘smart slackers’ and other foreigners approach Bar Street as they would approach a bar or nightclub scene back home. They arrive later on in the evening, they drink mass quantities of alcohol in

the cheaper bars, they look for a date for the evening, and then they move on to a nightclub where they drink less because the alcohol is more expensive. At the end of the night, they and their date search for food from street vendors on the side of the road and then they take a taxi home.

Alternative Entertainment

When 'smart slackers' are not going to bars, they can often be found purchasing DVDs. The consumption of pirated DVD's and music CD's is rampant amongst expatriates and middle-upper class Chinese. Although pirated DVDs are popular with expatriates, the 'smart slackers'' desire for illegal movie copies is significant. Local Chinese housing does not provide satellite television, the only form of television available apart from the national network. China Central Television broadcasts news and programs created by the Chinese government. One CCTV channel airs English news but is censored by the government, leaving most 'smart slackers' to avoid watching the station altogether. This leaves copied movies as being the primary source of television entertainment. Furthermore, DVDs are a cheap source of entertainment for 'smart slackers', with a DVD costing .90 USD and .45 US for a music CD.

Many foreign workers enjoy the ritual around purchasing DVDs, often spending a couple of hours during a weekend afternoon, browsing through large bundles of DVDs while eating brunch with friends. The restaurants along North Bar Street accommodate individual DVD sellers. So long as the patron purchases a drink, the DVD seller is permitted to approach their table, this way both the vendor and restaurateur benefit from the transaction. More important perhaps, is the fact that the selling of pirated movies is illegal.

Buying DVDs is not considered a risk by foreigners even though it is illegal. The Chinese government has for years, ignored the copyright laws of software and media property. Chinese industries continued to manufacture illegal copies of CDs and DVDs, even after they joined the World Trade Organization. Upon signing the agreement, China is expected to abide by the international copyright laws. Therefore, the police have started to seize illegal DVDs from the vendors.

This has not deterred vendors from selling them or foreigners from purchasing them. Most vendors seek shelter inside bars and restaurants where they can hide their large bags conspicuously under the tables. It is unclear where the vendors get the copied movies but it appears likely there may be few distributors as there is a definite lack of variety of DVDs amongst vendors. The mass production of the same titles is usually blockbuster films and newly released films in the United States. In October, many vendors on North Bar Street began to tell patrons that there were no new DVDs coming into Beijing, which caused distress in foreign circles. A close friend of mine who has a good command of the language asked his vendor what caused the shortage of DVDs. The vendor confided to him that two trucks entering the city were stopped by officials and that the cargo had been confiscated. The vendor mentioned that along with the DVDs, bundles of drugs were also found (possibly cocaine as the vendor tapped his nose and sniffed). Foreign workers had to wait a month before the new DVDs arrived.

What does this all mean to 'smart slackers'? DVDs serve a dual purpose for 'smart slackers' as they are a cheap form of entertainment and they are lightweight so they are brought home as souvenirs. As I already explained, 'smart slackers' often have a limited spending power and cannot afford to send things home. Yet DVDs are portable

and are often used as keepsakes. The DVD culture of expatriates is very significant in Beijing. A movie that lasts two hours is often enough for the viewer to feel a connection to their homeland, by the sheer fact that they are watching something produced in their language and can identify with the meanings on the screen. The isolation of watching a DVD transports the person away from their life in Beijing, which is often all that one needs to reenergize.

Networking

China is a country of vastness, contrast and has the largest population in the world, concentrated on land that appears to barely contain them. There are hundreds of dialects spoken in China, yet, beneath it all, there is one commonality, and that is the existence of networks. Robert W. Hefner explains that guanxi networks are characteristic of Chinese everywhere in the world and build guanxi into every aspect of their lives. Hefner points out that guanxi does not stop at economic networks, but rather, it is a web of connections and information. People within the guanxi network may rely on the network for jobs, market information, overseas contacts, buying a house, price schemes, or even choosing a school for their children. Hefner explains that guanxi is an equal partnership, based on reciprocity and trust. The trust is the basis of the guanxi, one that is cemented in the practice of network building. How it is formed may differ, as some networks are filial, while others take place early on in school and develop throughout a lifetime. Although family networks take on a much more patriarchal and filial nature, guanxi is built throughout gift giving, favour exchanges and dinners (Hefner, 1998: 12).

Gary G. Hamilton explains that guanxi is only part of a wider creation of networks. Although guanxi is tied closer to economics, it is but one aspect of a larger

network of social relationships. Networks reflect, Hamilton argues, the Chinese society, and is not merely a cultural practice (Hamilton, 1998: 58). Guanxi does not encompass all types of relationships, but rather it is based on reciprocity, and is created between friends, colleagues, and business partners. Family relationships are seen as separate, as they are not concerned with reciprocity as much as loyalty and obedience (Hamilton, 1998:57). Guanxi connotes closeness between people; it is built on trust and intimacy, and is not created between strangers.

Wong Siu-Lin goes even further to describe the class-conscious creation of guanxi. Speaking in terms of emigration of overseas Chinese, Wong describes the types of networks working class migrants used in order to emigrate from Hong Kong. Wong compares the affluent class networks may include diverse friendships to working class migrants who rely heavily on family. The middle (or lower middle) class depend on their careers and wages and so have the lowest emigration proclivity. In these terms, Wong argues that guanxi is understood as a network of economic relations and “social trust” (Wong, 1999: 142)

The requirement or use of a network does not rest solely with Chinese people. Networks are just as essential for foreign workers living in Beijing. For ‘smart slackers’ their networks are often created through their leisure activities, predominantly in Bar Street. I found the most common way of creating a network was to meet one person, who then in turn introduces you to another and so on. This simple method is common knowledge to ‘smart slackers’ who often exchanged phone numbers with people who accompanied me to Bar Street. This method creates many opportunities to find work, an apartment, and new contacts. Some ‘smart slackers’ explained to me that they often

sought out contacts who worked in certain industries or who were rumoured to be well-connected.

The more I ventured out into Bar Street, the more I began to recognize that ‘smart slackers’ rely heavily on Bar Street to meet up with people from their own social/economic/language group. Going out most nights for drinks reinforces a network as the chances of meeting up with the same people are greatly increased. This emphasis on meeting up with the same people is critical to sustain a personal network. Because the average ‘smart slacker’ will meet dozens of their peers a week and hundreds in a year, regular contact is crucial in remembering people. It takes a lot of time and money to keep up a personal network of this sort. Personal networks rely heavily on face-to-face interaction.

It should come as no surprise that Beijing is entwined with bureaucratic red tape. Getting an apartment, renewing visas, traveling within China, and communicating with locals can be very difficult for many foreigners. The presence of a Chinese friend can help ease matters. The Chinese friend can help the Chinese speaker and foreigner communicate and make each feel at ease. It is often just as stressful for a Chinese speaker to deal with a foreigner who has little command of the language or knowledge of how things work. A Chinese representative lends credence to the foreigner, a sign that he has been accepted by a local and therefore, can be trusted. A big advantage of having a Chinese friend is also the help they can provide in getting things done in Beijing. It is instrumental to have a “Chinese face” to represent a foreigner is often the only way to get things done in Beijing.

Name Cards

How is a network made? How are names passed on and remembered? Who knows whom and how do they know them? These were my questions when I was advised to build my own network. I was not sure how to develop one or how the person who told me developed his. It was at that point that I was handed a name card. It is similar to a business card, except that people hand them out for social purposes. A typical name card has the person's name, mobile number, email address, "home" address, and a title with one side of the card written in English and the other side in Chinese characters. The title often reflects the cardholder's occupation. The latter is important in differentiating who's who in Beijing. As I mentioned in the methodology chapter, there are several types of foreigners in Beijing, including expatriate workers (packaged and 'smart slackers'), university students, and tourists. A name card categorizes its owner into one of these categories by displaying their profession or self-title.

Name cards are not limited to expatriates; foreign university students also understand the importance of name cards. Name cards are the most efficient way to provide someone with their "vital statistics." I learned that there is an etiquette surrounding name cards when I accidentally made a faux pas. I passed on a name card given to me by someone I knew to someone else in my network. The two people in question did not know each other yet one of them had the other's name card. When the owner of the name card learned of this, she became irate with me. Unbeknownst to me, the card itself should never be passed on to a third party; rather, this information should be given on a separate piece of paper. Should the third party contact the name on the card, they must mention who handed out their number. In this case, it was I. Name cards are expensive to print, especially for 'smart slackers' who usually live on a budget.

Furthermore, the “ceremony” around exchanging name cards binds two people together. Giving out a name card and receiving one ensures that two people now consider each other contacts in their personal network. It is bad form to offer the information of someone outside of this bond without the consent of the person in question.

‘Smart slackers’ rely heavily on their networks. As I have already discussed, due to the mobility of ‘smart slackers’, those remaining in Beijing often scramble to replace their friends and contacts. In order to keep track of whom they know, they only hand out name cards to people whom they meet face to face. I was advised to do this by many of my contacts. Some went further in explaining that it was wise to choose whom you wanted in your network. Some ‘smart slackers’ warned me about making the wrong contacts as gossip is rampant and reputations are largely known in Bar Street.

Conclusion

Aside from the development in the area, there seems to be a constant flux of foreigners entering and leaving Beijing. After tourists, ‘smart slackers’ appear to make up the second largest group of transient foreigners in Beijing as they have the least amount of commitments to their jobs and their personal life. Many ‘smart slackers’ feel that the Chinese government has tried to contain most of the foreign workers in Chaoyang. Up until this year, the government had strict rules governing where foreigners were permitted to live. Specific areas in Beijing, types of housing, hotels, and hostels were under varying degrees of government control. It was unclear whether or not foreigners were allowed to live in local housing. Some ‘smart slackers’ were under the impression that certain areas of Chaoyang were illegal while others were legal.

The importance of a network reflects how ‘smart slackers’ live in Beijing. They rely on one another, more so than they would rely on people in their home countries. A network is a system in which they have friends, they have parties to go to and people to take holidays with. A network assures that the ‘smart slacker’ is never *alone* in Beijing. This point is especially important. Bar Street contains one of many networks, but it also contains ‘smart slackers’ who may be feeling lonely, or who seek out enjoyment. ‘Smart slackers’ created such personal ties because although diverse in national background they have the commonality of being Euro-American in Beijing. ‘Smart slackers’ appeal to one another because of the common cultural understandings, language, and favoured leisure activities such as bar hopping and clubbing. While many ‘smart slackers’ seek out Chinese friends and attempt to “master” the language, they can be found revisiting Bar Street to replenish their need for commonality or familiarity.

In the following chapter, I will focus on the ‘smart slackers’ causes and motivations for moving to Beijing along with their ideas of travel by examining their narratives.

**CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF ‘SMART SLACKERS’ NARRATIVES,
THEIR MOTIVATIONS, AND THE GOVERNMENTS’ RESPONSE TO
FOREIGN WORKERS**

Introduction

My research took place from March 2002 to December 2002. During this period, there were a large number of foreign workers in Beijing. Furthermore, this coincided with major events such as China’s acceptance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Beijing’ winning bid to host the 2008 Olympics. The signing of the WTO agreement drew temporary, migrant workers, whom I refer to as ‘smart slackers’.

This chapter will explore the reasons behind the move of ‘smart slackers’ to Beijing, as well as their own ideas of travel. Furthermore, I will discuss the immigration laws and the economic initiatives taken by the Chinese government, which in turn affect foreign workers. Lastly, I will discuss the types of relationships made by ‘smart slackers’ and the motivations behind them.

‘Smart slackers’ knowledge of Beijing is largely limited to one area as they predominantly tour one district named Chaoyang, also referred to as the financial centre. Few ‘smart slackers’ opt to live far from the financial centre, and the few who do usually do so for work purposes. Even then, the majority of time they spend outside of work is in Chaoyang. Essentially, they are building their lives around Bar Street, their jobs, and the foreign attractions. In order to simplify their lives, they keep their social activities and housing as close to one area as possible as I have already detailed in the previous chapter.

Most ‘smart slackers’ can recite the main sites of interest in Beijing, for example the cultural heritage sights that most foreigners visit. They may also be able to recite the

landmarks in Chaoyang like medical clinics and offices. This limitation of knowledge stems from situating themselves in one area, and surrounding themselves with other expatriates. Chaoyang houses the main sites of interest for 'smart slackers'. This, along with the transportation problems, creates a bubble of activity in a small, condensed area. Their attraction to the area encourages its further development.

What does all this mean? Essentially, 'smart slackers' are only experiencing one very specific part of Beijing thus creating a limited understanding of Beijing. Moreover, they exclude themselves from Chinese activities opting instead to immerse themselves in the foreign activities of Beijing as so many predominantly socialize with fellow foreigners. Their recreation is spent in foreign-styled bars and watching foreign films. My research revealed that very few of my informants experienced many Chinese customs or a cultural exchange as most spent their time pursuing foreign tastes and interests. Therefore, the many statements made by my informants in which, they claimed that they were knowledgeable about Chinese custom and culture and therefore, could transfer those skills to a job "back home" confused me. I will discuss these statements further on in the chapter.

The seclusion that many foreign workers allow for themselves creates a distorted perception of Beijing. Many of the 'smart slackers' I met use the confines of the financial district as a safety net. In Chaoyang, always a place to escape to is familiar. There are always foreigners walking about, tourist groups wandering the streets and more opportunities to meet locals who can speak English (and in many cases Russian and French). Moreover, the appearance of Chaoyang is very different to the rest of Beijing. There is an atmosphere similar to that of Hong Kong or Singapore in Chaoyang as there

are more modern buildings and apartments, hotels and foreign shops,. The flow of foreign faces in contrast to the Chinese faces, gives it an international feel. In other areas in Beijing, a foreigner is more noticeable and looks more out of place. Although there is development also taking place in the centre of the city, where the Forbidden Palace is situated, there is still a distinctive feel to Chaoyang. The sight of numerous McDonalds and KFC restaurants is usually the first indication of this distinctiveness.

The familiarity of these kinds of outlets can often help foreign workers in dealing with their daily lives. Many of my informants admitted to me that they found the exposure to a new culture and language stressful. Certainly, with the overcrowding of most areas in Beijing, it is rare to find a secluded area where one can relax in private. Staying at home is not often a tempting option and therefore, ‘smart slackers’ head to places that they can relate to, and that make them feel more at ease. As an example, at any time of the day, the ten Starbucks cafes in the financial district are brimming with ‘smart slackers’ who seek shelter with a coffee and a foreign book or newspaper.

Many of these ‘smart slackers’ admitted to me that they are intimidated by their lack of proficiency in Chinese and often find it difficult to communicate. After meeting dozens of ‘smart slackers’, I came to learn that even those who had a relatively good command of the language often struggled with communicating in Chinese due to the expansive vocabulary and different Chinese dialects spoken in Beijing by Chinese migrant workers. For many who either teach or work with a Chinese staff, the desire to surround themselves during their leisure time with people with whom they shared a common language or culture.

Perceptions of Travel

I was interested in learning about my informant's thoughts and feelings about travel. During my interviews, I asked them each questions about why people choose to travel and why they thought so many of their peers chose Beijing. I also asked them about their own reasons for traveling, and what the factors were in leaving their homelands to come and work in Beijing as none of the 'smart slackers' I encountered ever expressed the desire to stay in Beijing permanently. Moreover, I was curious as to how a developing country could offer a better lifestyle than their Western homelands.

Ronald was a twenty-four year old American aspiring entrepreneur who had been in Beijing for six months when we sat down for a formal interview. At the time of the interview, I had been in Beijing for four months.

Ronald and I met up in my local pub in South Bar Street for supper. At the time, Ronald was not a regular on Bar Street; in fact, he avoided the whole area as much as possible. Yet after our interview, I began to see him out on Bar Street on a weekly basis.

This was his second trip to Beijing; the first time in 1999 was on a two-month student exchange program. Ronald had not completed community college although he had been in a business program. At the time, he said he had no plans to return to school. Instead, Ronald returned to Beijing in 2002 employed as an English teacher. I was interested in understanding why he chose to return to China three years later. Ronald explained that he felt "stuck" in the United States. His last relationship with a woman ended and he felt that he needed a change. Ronald was working in a low-paying job and felt that his chances of success may be better overseas.

“I was looking for something new and fresh but when I got to Beijing I felt lost and confused. I did not feel adventurous. I got scared and I got anxious. However, after time, I got over it. Now I want a girlfriend from here. I need to improve my Chinese and I do not have the time to take lessons. The thing is though; I will not stay in Beijing if I get bored, no matter who is here. If I do not think that I am going to make money or start my business, then I may go home (to the United States) or maybe I will look for work somewhere else. I dunno yet. One of the luxuries of travel is that I can pick up, move to a new place, and start over again. It’s so easy.” (Ronald, April 26, 2002, Bar Street)

Ronald told me that he felt that other ‘smart slackers’ had no real agenda in Beijing; instead they were searching for themselves by leaving their old lives (and identities) behind to find something new. Ronald felt that he had an agenda and spoke about his plans to open up his own nightclub. When I asked why he decided to come to Beijing to open up a business, he replied that he could not get the same opportunity back home in the United States because he could not raise the money. Yet, at the same time, he had neither the money and nor the *guanxi* needed for a business in China. This did not seem to concern him as he thought that Beijing would serve him well since there were more job opportunities so he could make money to start a business. Furthermore, he spoke of a vague opportunity of meeting the “right people,” such as local Chinese businesspersons who would willingly invest in a joint venture. He told me that he spends most of his free time trying to meet local businesspersons in the neighbourhood where he lives. He does not live in Chaoyang; rather he chose to save his money by renting a local apartment in the Haidian district. The journey to work by bus and subway is roughly an hour, therefore he spends less time in Chaoyang, compared to ‘smart slackers’ who choose to live in the popular district.

“I am interested in the Chinese culture, it’s so different. I have a sense of fulfillment here that I lack at home. Nevertheless, you know the Chinese way is no better than in the West, it is just different. I may get the chance to start my own business. Or, maybe it won’t work out and I will go somewhere else and be an expat there.” (Ronald, April 26, 2002, Bar Street)

Nancy was twenty-four years old and working in an international medical clinic as an insurance clerk. When I spoke to her, she had been living in Beijing for nearly two years. We sat down for a formal interview two months into my research. Her foreign roommate introduced me to Nancy over brunch in Bar Street. Nancy admitted she was eager to talk to me about her experiences. Nancy rarely ventures out to Bar Street. She explained to me that she preferred spending time alone or with a few friends in selective Chinese restaurants.

Nancy revealed to me that she made a good salary compared to other ‘smart slackers’, yet she chose to live in local housing with three other foreigners, for reasons that she did not want to go into. I wanted to understand why she chose to come to Beijing in the first place. Nancy explained that she did not have a job when she arrived in 2000 but found her present job posted in an English weekly magazine and applied for it. At the time we spoke, she revealed to me that had she applied for her job now, she would not have met the new requirements for her job set by the clinic. Nancy explained that many companies were no longer taking in any foreign worker, but were screening applicants more closely and requiring Chinese language skills, something that did not occur two years ago.

Nancy had been studying Mandarin and Chinese studies in Australia and had taken part in a school trip to China in 1995. After completing her studies, she worked in Australia and earned enough money to move to Beijing. Nancy felt that her first experience in China in 1995 had been a “nasty shock” for her. The experience was one that she says she would not want to relive, but felt that she needed to return to Beijing to understand what went wrong for her during her first visit. Nancy felt that in 1995, she

was not mature enough nor prepared to handle the exposure of a new language and culture and felt that she had treated the experience as if it were a punishment instead of a reward, by constantly complaining, crying, and longing to go home. She felt that her life in Beijing at the time was helping her to grow and to become “a better person.” Nancy explained to me that she felt that she understood why her peers would pick up and leave for Beijing, completely unprepared for life in China.

“I think that young people come here with idealistic attitude that they can handle any extreme and any hardship but soon realize that they can’t. I think that by traveling and going to new places it serves as a way of building yourself but at the same time, you are running away from your responsibilities back home. I think that sometimes people see it as a way to prove they can survive on their own, like they set out to prove to everyone that they could do something because no one believes in them. I think that a lot of expatriates like me, come to Beijing and when they learn how life is, they suffer from an identity crisis. I don’t think they really prepare themselves. You need to understand that Beijing attracts a certain kind of person, those who think that they can handle extremes and hardships but they are not realistic to the whole experience. All you have to do is look around and you see younger, single men come here because they want to fulfill their sexual needs with Chinese women without having to commit to a serious relationship. (Foreign) men really outnumber (foreign) women in Beijing because it’s becoming China sexy. Men come here to find women, not to find work. Work just happens in the course of them finding women. But even work is not so easy to get anymore. Companies expect a good education and Mandarin. If you can’t speak Mandarin, you’re going to end up teaching English. “(Nancy, April 28, 2002, Bar Street)

Gary was thirty-three years old and had just gone into business for himself when I sat down to interview him at his apartment. He had been working as a manager in an international school for almost two years when he decided to leave the post and open up his own language school. Unlike Ronald, Gary has connection with a wealthy Chinese investor who happens to be a very close friend of his. Furthermore, Gary hired a former employee as his personal assistant with good guanxi. Although he knows that the school will take at least a year to open, he says he is patient and is working part-time as an

English teacher to pay his bills. I sat down with Gary for a formal interview during the summer, which corresponded with the first stage of the company launch. After I left Beijing, I stayed in contact with him and asked him if he could update me on the developments of his business. In November of 2003, the company had been in business for one year and was still struggling to get off the ground. Although Gary had found a temporary office to conduct classes, he was finding it difficult to persuade larger companies to use his services as the market is very competitive especially with the presence of multi-national language centres such as *Berlitz* and *Wallstreet*.

As a self-proclaimed bachelor, Gary lives in Chaoyang in a two bedroom Chinese apartment. The most notable furnishings are a large television, DVD player and dozens of DVDs stacked on an end table. His mattress lies on the ground without a box spring, beside a sofa. This room, he explains is where he spends most of his time watching movies or entertaining local Chinese women whom he meets in bars, schools or through his foreign friends. Gary admits that he has two plates, two bowls, and two mugs. The reason he says is that he only ever has two people in his apartment at a time. What makes this interesting is that Gary had a prosperous career in Toronto as a corporate lawyer, but gave it up because he said he felt “trapped.” By traveling, he says, he can move into the future from the present without having to explain. Furthermore, he admits to striving for something quite opposite to the life that he had in Toronto by living in a “minimalist apartment.” Gary divides his time between Bar Street and Chinese restaurants where he likes to take his Chinese girlfriends. When Gary is on a date with a local woman, he maintains he avoids Bar Street to avoid being seen with anyone. Gary was adamant about trying to keep his personal life to himself. Although he does willingly share

information with close friends, I included, he felt that he did not want casual acquaintances knowing about his private life.

“At home, the past follows you around, yet in Beijing, the past does not matter to other people. Let’s not kid ourselves, there are a lot of directionless people in Beijing, who were trying to find answers, which are in themselves, maybe they just don’t know that. You know, your life in Beijing is uncertain, I don’t know if I am going to leave tomorrow because I decided to change jobs and now I have to relocate. I had so many problems in Toronto. My marriage fell apart; I gave up my career to teach English. My parents were stunned, my colleagues were stunned, and my wife and I divorced, so that just added to all the pressure. I like Toronto, but I couldn’t handle it anymore. My best friend was in Beijing when I spoke to him and him said, get over here now! What are you waiting for? You have to come to Beijing, trust me. And you know what? He was right. I came here and I got a good job in days, teaching English. Within three months, I was in charge of the company. I got an apartment and I have money to go out every night of the week. If I want to eat out every night, I do. If I want to meet women every night, I can do that too. In Toronto, you work so you can just survive. Here, I have it easy. People don’t realize that there is a lack of qualified people here so jobs are easy to get when you’re a foreigner. It’s wild here, it’s primitive.” (Gary, July 14, 2002, his apartment)

Gary informed me that he was going to stay in Beijing until the end of the 2008 Olympic Games. After that, he did not know where he would end up. With several university degrees and professional experience, he never felt concern about going back to his career. Gary often told me that being an English teacher always meant that you could pay your way around the world, stating that he was certain that he would not practice law again, as he preferred to teach even though it was not economically gainful. Furthermore, the number of opportunities in Beijing gave many ‘smart slackers’ the motivation to stay and seek out better employment opportunities.

“Here, there is a lack of qualified people to do the jobs so someone who has a degree and a brain can do really well for themselves. Well, I knew that there was a general lack of qualified staff in all facets and that includes the present Western staff. You see guys between 20 and 30 years old who are managers. They have more chances here. I think people have to realize that it’s such a big market here and an important market that you can afford to make a mistake and companies will still grow. How many people can do that at home? Here, your error will not

be as major as it would be back home because the demand for your skills and knowledge is so high.” (Gary, July 14, 2002, his apartment)

Myra was twenty-two years old, working in the Australian Embassy when she agreed to sit for a formal interview in late August. Myra met me for supper in a Russian restaurant in the Russian neighbourhood located in Chaoyang. She did not have permission to talk about her job or her department, other than to say that she was staff. Myra had originally gone to Shanghai in 1997 to study Mandarin in one of the local universities. She returned to Australia and then followed her boyfriend at the time to Beijing in 1999. Although the relationship ended badly, Myra felt determined to put the experience behind her and stayed.

Myra had no clear ideas about what she wanted from life, particularly her life in Beijing. For her, life in Beijing was “less real” than in Australia. The benefits of her freedom included not having to justify herself to anyone. Although she had been living in Beijing for five years, she was uncertain about returning home to Melbourne. What held her in Beijing was her transient lifestyle, for her there was “more to give up.” In Beijing, she was able to live better than in Melbourne. She commanded a higher salary and she could afford her own apartment even if it was in local housing in Chaoyang. Myra enjoyed going to Bar Street on the weekends for brunch with friends. Even though she was not a regular on Bar Street, she managed to visit the area at least once a week.

In Beijing, Myra felt that she never had to explain her actions or decisions to anyone, but in Australia, there were more people involved directly in her life, influencing her decisions. However, Myra had made it clear that she was not going to settle in Beijing. She did want to eventually return to Australia but felt distant to her family and friends back home. In particular, she felt the loss of the “common ground” that she had

had at home with others. Common ground, she explained, was the same beliefs and ideas, career, education and life experience like those she grew up with in Australia.

“Your life here can be very fun in a lot of ways. It’s seems less real here and very free. You don’t have to justify yourself here and yet it can be really challenging to do the everyday things like buy food. Things don’t get boring like they do back home. You don’t have a life routine like you do back home. In Beijing, things stay fresh because of the constant wave of expatriates coming and going. When you travel, you’re looking for a way to make a living, and to make a better life than what you can’t achieve back home. I think that because of the ease in which you can slip into your life here, a lot of people (expatriates) have a hard time leaving. I’m not saying that Beijing is easy. Beijing can be full of frustration, and it can be full of problems, but everyone here understands your problems because every expatriate has gone through them before and will help you get through them. You don’t have to be alone here, even if you came here alone. You come here with one identity and you leave with another. People change here Beijing makes you change. I think that once people spend a year here, they learn about themselves and they grow. You know what a big problem is. When you leave Beijing, you leave your life. Your life won’t be here to come back to. I think that is why so many of us have a hard time leaving. Things change too quickly here. It’s great while you’re here things are fresh. But leave, try, and come back and you won’t be able to reclaim your life. You only get one shot here. And sometimes, it’s too scary to go back to the real world and leave this.” (Myra, August 6, 2002 Russian Neighbourhood)

Myra’s admission that her interlude in Beijing might last years is common amongst many foreign workers. In Myra’s case, she is not yet prepared to leave behind the life that she has created for herself in Beijing and knows that it would be difficult to reclaim the life she had in Beijing should she leave due to the rapid changes in development and the constant flow of foreign workers entering and leaving the city.

Louise was twenty-four years old who grew up in Vancouver. Louise’s heritage is Hong Kong Chinese and she learned Cantonese as a child. However, Louise also learned to perfect her Mandarin after moving to Beijing for a year and then to Shanghai in 2000. Although Louise comes to Beijing once a month for business, she uses the time to meet up with her friends who live in the capitol Louise has been a manager in a

Shanghai-based company for two years. Once she completed her university education in business, she decided to move to Beijing to seek work. Within a month, she found the managerial job for which she relocated to Shanghai. As I mentioned in chapter one, I credit Louise with allowing me to use the term ‘smart slacker’ in this thesis. She first introduced me to the word and permitted me to adopt it for my ethnography. When Louise agreed to sit for a formal interview in a Chinese restaurant in the flower district of Chaoyang, in October, she referred to other expatriates such as herself as “‘smart slackers’”.

“You can live (in Beijing) very well on very little. You may not like Beijing but you like the lifestyle. It’s a great place to start your career. There are opportunities here that are not available in North America. People love it for being high-end but it’s tougher to be an expat here because jobs are harder to get. The minimum requirement now is conversation Chinese. The locals are learning English and foreign education is no longer needed. The expat’s best asset is that they are foreign looking and in the end there will always be a need for foreign faces because companies here think it sells more and is more impressive to have foreign staff, even if your job is to stand around and be foreign.” (Louise, October 23, 2002, Lady Street)

I was curious to know more about the type of expatriates that she referred to as ‘smart slackers’.

“Beijing allows for ‘smart slackers’. ‘Smart slackers’ are young, between twenty and thirty who come to Beijing to look for work and have fun before they get too old. Most want to enjoy the free life before they turn thirty and then they settle down. We justify it by saying that when we reach thirty, we will grow up. And where is it more free than in Communist China? (Laughter) The expat influence on Beijing is so obvious in its development. Chaoyang Park bars are the latest influence. The city responds to what they think expats want. We want gourmet shops, we want more bars, we want nice apartments, and we want it all in one area. The more expats consume these things, the more the city will give it to them, because let’s face it, most Chinese people will never be able to afford it so who would they build it for? Beijing is not a hardship posting. Ok, there are challenges, especially with green expats, but once you get your footing, you’re ok. You learn to manage and you learn that Beijing isn’t as foreign as you think. There are enough foreigners here to make it less overwhelming and less exotic.” (Louise, October 23, 2002, Lady Street)

Interludes in Beijing are common amongst 'smart slackers'. As Louise says, Beijing allows many young foreign workers to "take time off" from their lives and explore new opportunities. At the same time, these 'smart slackers' are making use of their interlude by being employed in a range of white collar jobs that may help serve them in the future.

Tara grew up in Montreal and had made two journeys to Beijing in four years. Tara first arrived in Beijing for a two-week holiday to visit her boyfriend after failing the New York Bar exam and ended up staying for a year. It was when she suddenly became ill that she decided to return to Montreal. Yet, in Montreal, she found it increasingly difficult to find work. Furthermore, she admitted to missing Beijing and the friends that she had made whilst there, so she decided to return. Although Tara never took the Bar Exam again, she was successful in finding freelance teaching jobs in Beijing. Although Tara says that there are numerous employment opportunities, there is little guarantee of saving any money.

Tara was thirty-two years old and had held down a range of jobs including acting, teaching, administration, and consultation. Tara was very clear about her goals in Beijing. Originally, she said that she wanted to earn enough money so she could put a down payment on a condominium in Toronto. With this in mind, Tara was nomadic, staying with friends for extended periods of time and living in inexpensive hostels whenever she ran out of options. Although Tara went out to Bar Street on a weekly basis, she did not drink alcohol and chose only to go to nightclubs that did not charge a cover entry. Money was always a concern for Tara.

When we sat down for a formal interview, her Chinese visa was for a tourist visa, which meant that she had permission to stay in the country for thirty days. However, Tara had already begun working which is illegal to do with that visa and had planned to renew her holiday visa one more time before applying for a work visa. The reason for this is that holiday visas are less expensive and is renewable twice before applying for a different visa. Although Tara agreed to be included in my research, she would not permit me to tape record our discussion, nor would she agree to sign the permission form. She asked instead if I could take notes by hand and not use her real name to which I agreed. I took down her words verbatim and she acknowledged the notes I took.

Tara and I arrived in Beijing one day apart and she was the second person I interviewed. We went to a Starbucks in Chaoyang where she insisted in sitting in a back area in case she saw anyone she knew yet at the same time, Tara was very candid during the interview, which she pointed out; she might not have been had I recorded the conversation or if she had signed the permission form.

“Non-packaged people hustle a lot more because they can come to financial ruin if they are not careful. Your money can run out so people get giddy about money because it comes and goes They live hand to mouth because they not only have to pay for their own rent, they have to keep up appearances. You have to wear good clothes. Not high-end clothes but good clothes. You have to look the part. Young, hip, successful with a good address and a name card. It’s hard to keep up with the Joneses. I have seen people go to ruins trying to keep up. My time in Toronto has taught me every trick of the trade. I know how to make people believe that I got it all together, but you know just how much my life is a mess right now. Do I ever come across that way? I can’t. People can never know your real situation in Beijing or they will dismiss you or they will try and use you.”
(Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks)

Tara views traveling as the opportunity to make money, depending on which countries one chooses to work in. Countries such as Japan and the United Kingdom have high standards of living thus making it far more difficult not only to earn money, but also

to save any. Yet, foreign workers who had the determination to succeed could exploit other countries in Asia with lower standards of living. Tara is a seasoned traveler, who has lived in Europe, Asia, North America and the Caribbean and in her opinion, travel is always more pleasurable if one was determined to work hard and make money.

“In Canada, you do not strongly identify with a lot of things but abroad you feel it more. As an expat, I see myself as a Canadian living in Beijing but I traveled a lot like in the UK, the US, Canada, and the Caribbean. For now, I’m just living in Beijing. Your identity is a big deal here because you get jobs based on your passport. The market value is based on ethnicity. It’s more marketable to be Canadian because it has a monetary value. China likes Canadians. If you teach English, then it is better to be Canadian or British because we speak Standard English. If you’re Canadian, then you probably don’t have a strong accent, which is good. In Beijing, the passport has a value due to the lack of expats for hire. You really feel your worth here.” (Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks)

Tara’s opinion about ethnicity and passport value does have some truth in terms of teaching English. Many of the advertisements in the English weeklies often asked for “Canadian,” “Australian” or “English” accents. However, these do not exclude other English speakers such as Americans, nor does it guarantee a higher salary.

“I made money for myself by promoting myself as an English Consultant. There is a big market for voice-overs for English educational tapes and TV appearances on Modern English (*local English TV show which teaches its viewers English*). There are modeling jobs here, as long as you have a foreign face. You know, there are so many jobs here that you would never dream of getting back home. You can find these jobs through networking and referral, that’s why you have to go out so much and meet people. Spread your name around and the jobs will come. The only problem is if it’s through a referral, a lot of expats walk into the job knowing nothing about it and not knowing what to expect. But it’s still the best time to be here, Beijing is more modern now than it was a year ago and there are more jobs. I think it’s called the peak, jobs now but later on, there will be nothing.” (Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks)

What is interesting about the walk in jobs is that foreigners are not always best prepared or suited for the type of work they are doing. Tara describes a thriving economy, yet at the same time, she is aware of the limitations and lifespan of that

economy. Tara eventually left Beijing in August and returned to Canada even though she had planned to stay longer. Her sudden departure, inspired by a relationship with a foreign market trader, which was coming to a close and the exhaustion she felt from “hustling.” At the time of Tara’s departure from Beijing, the number of classified advertisements in the English weeklies had dropped considerably. Even the number of English teaching jobs was fewer, and those that were there were asking for a TESL (Teach English as a Second Language) certificate and a minimum number of years teaching experience.

There were episodes when my informants used the interview as a method of venting their anger and frustration about their lives in Beijing. Mary was one such informant who went on to describe her smart slacker peers as “self-centred”, “self-absorbed” and “hedonists.” Although there were other ‘smart slackers’ who made the same comments to me, Mary was vehement in explaining why she made those remarks. For her, as for many others, she was looking for an opportunity to build her resume, and decide what she wanted to accomplish in Beijing. In her opinion, she had set goals and was completing many of them while other ‘smart slackers’ did not. Bilingual in English and Mandarin, she held a consultant job in a software development firm. I met Mary through a mutual friend who had mentioned that I was researching expatriates and it was she who asked for an interview. Mary was in the middle of planning her departure when I met with her in April in a bar in North Bar Street. Mary immediately told me that she wanted to participate in this interview, as she not only thought that she had many worthwhile things to say, but as an excuse to vent to someone about her life in Beijing. I was more than willing to listen to her although I was concerned about the public space in

which she had chosen to meet. In fact, the bar turned out to be a convenient place, as she would point out examples of what she was discussing, for example, the large crowds of foreigners who descend on Bar Street on a weeknight.

Mary was twenty-four and she had planned to return home to Vancouver and prepare to go to graduate school in the United States. She had been living in Beijing for four years when I interviewed her and had determined that she would leave Beijing in no less than three months after our interview. Mary asked me to meet her in Bar Street, as she no longer visited the area as often as she had in the previous two years. Mary explained that she had grown tired of the scene and chose instead to invite friends over or to go out to supper instead of drinking in the bar area.

“I started off as an intern and I worked for a year on contract. This was during the internet boom (1998). There were loads of dot com jobs available. I worked for a year and a half but the boom went bust and I ended up working as a consultant.” (Mary, April 1, 2002, Bar Street)

Mary described the shift from career-orientated goals to leisure goals that in her opinion, occurs regularly with foreign workers.

“Expats get caught up in making themselves happy here. They are self-centered, self-absorbed and hedonists. It’s all about them, people use each other here, and it’s very phoney and superficial. You begin to question who your friends here are really. I have one friend here, one real friend. It creates this ugliness, that you can’t trust people because people just want to get whatever they can out of you. It’s so selfish here. People don’t care about anyone but themselves, and they don’t even try to hide it.” (Mary, April 1, 2002, Bar Street)

“But professionally, you cannot exclude yourself whether or not you are willing. You need guanxi, it’s always important to keep that up or there goes your employment options. If you don’t make the effort to keep up your network, who will hire you? Who will remember you?” (Mary, April 1, 2002, Bar Street)

Mary emphasizes the protocol around working in Beijing. For her, it is important to separate those who are serious about their work and those who are not. At the same

time, Mary shows that there is a paradox between keeping up one's personal network and trying to build a trusting friendship with a fellow foreigner. In Mary's opinion, there is a challenge in keeping up one's network or expanding one's options without abusing friendship ties.

Why Choose China?

As 'smart slackers' are in a position to quit their jobs back home and move abroad, Beijing becomes instrumental in my informant's interludes from their lives back home. As I explained in the previous chapter, most 'smart slackers' are middle class, detached, unmarried and often recent graduates. Their work experience highlights part time jobs or summer jobs, but few had had a career or at most had just begun their career when they left for Beijing.

The underlying reasons motivating many of these 'smart slackers' to come to Beijing had little to do with the city itself. Rather, the choice of location measures the terms of what the country can offer by comparison to other locations in East Asia. They wanted to travel somewhere in Asia and China, perceived by many as exotic and mysterious. Although there are other Asian countries whose economies can provide them with jobs, these 'smart slackers' follow a process of elimination. Hong Kong and Singapore are too expensive to live in, along with the fact that they pose too many restrictions to getting a work visa. Japan's main employment for independent foreign workers is teaching English and the cost of living is much too high for most, especially those who are seeking an urban setting. Coupled with the saturation of Taiwan's labour market, China is becoming a more fashionable place "to be."

"In China, the economic and social change allows for expats to act the way they want and the expats know that things are up for the taking. Money, women, and a

better lifestyle: expats can have it all here. Expats do not have a past; they can be who they want to be.” (Mary, April 1, 2002, Bar Street)

“China is hip,” statement often repeated to me by ‘smart slackers’. Beijing is developing an image of itself as the new Shanghai, while trying hard to persuade international corporations to set up offices in the capital rather than Hong Kong, Shanghai or Guangzhou. With this allure come many foreign workers who are eager to get in while it is still “fresh.” What many new arrivals do not realize however, is that the job market in Beijing is saturated with foreign workers and bilingual Chinese staff, and there are few jobs (aside from teaching) to accommodate them. Another reason why so many choose Beijing is that it offers a higher standard of living than other Asian countries. Those who teach English full-time can command a salary of 27,000 USD a year, which translates higher in Beijing, as the average Chinese employee in a white-collar job earns 6,000 USD a year.

What is the appeal of Beijing? I questioned why so many ‘smart slackers’ were drawn to the city. Certainly part of the appeal was due to China joining the World Trade Organization which many of my ‘smart slackers’ interpreted as an expanding and fast growing market providing more employment opportunities for foreign workers. Many of my informants saw Beijing as the city with the most potential for allowing a better standard of living than “at home.”

“Like the student expat population, they are more eager with learning Chinese and so their abilities are higher. They are practicing good Chinese and they are on the WTO bandwagon. They see money and career opportunities. I see more young expats seeking work but they are so ignorant. You ask them why they came to Beijing and their standard answer is the WTO and that Beijing is the place to be. There’s not much weight behind those words. A lot of Chinese Americans or Chinese Canadians come here to rediscover their roots.” (Mary, April 1, 2002, Bar Street)

Interludes

Beijing serves many purposes; one in particular stands out in my informants' characterizations of their lives in Beijing. Beijing provides a fundamental purpose in the interlude from their lives back home. This sense of freedom from responsibility is evident in how 'smart slackers' behave in Beijing.

I learned these 'smart slackers' do not have a career plan or set goals except for vague notions of what they want to do in their field although they do not hold jobs in Beijing commensurate with their degrees. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, many teach English yet they have may have degrees in architecture, business administration or computer science. It was therefore unclear how their experience in Beijing was helping them to build a career. Out of ten formal interviews, only three people told me that they had not been students prior to coming to Beijing. The idea that they were taking "time off" from their lives repeats throughout most of my conversations with my informants. Over the course of numerous informal conversations with other 'smart slackers', it emerged that perhaps it wasn't their career goals that brought them to Beijing so much as it was the fact that they did not want to start their career life at home. I was interested in learning more about their decision to put their careers on hold. Three people told me considered the lack of job opportunities in Canada and England that influenced their decision to move to Beijing.

Beijing is a critical factor in creating a "better life" for 'smart slackers'. Yet, I found that while I spoke to them about meeting their long-term goals, few told me that they had been accomplishing their goals. As an example, nearly all of my informants said that they wanted to save money but most complained that they were constantly

broke. Many said that they wanted to get a better job in Beijing but few seemed to look for one or changed companies. Many informants told me that they wanted to settle down with someone in Beijing but were nonetheless promiscuous. These 'smart slackers' told me that they wanted to drink less, and get in shape but they were found on Bar Street four nights a week. Everything they seemed to say was opposite to what they were actually doing. I made the decision avoid questioning their contradictions directly as I did not want to challenge their actions but instead chose to observe others to see if this was consistent with these 'smart slackers' or a specific few. My findings showed that it appeared consistent amongst individual 'smart slackers'. In the end, I felt the best method in understanding this behaviour was to reflect on my own experiences and behaviour as a 'smart slacker'. I came to the realization in my own life in Beijing that there are numerous events happening in Beijing, even if it's just having dinner with someone I had not seen in a couple of weeks, to attending someone's going away party. These distractions from my goals was sporadic and would occur for short periods of time, when I would realize that I had deviated away from my field work or gone to Bar Street instead of exercising in the health club in which case I would re-focus my attention on my goals. Furthermore, I noticed that I along with my informants would say, "I have plenty of time to get things done" even though it may not have been the case with all my goals. The hypothesis that I came up with was that the type of life style and possibilities in Beijing feels unlimited because 'smart slackers' admitted that they did not know when they would return to their homelands therefore, they did not always set a deadline to complete the goals they set for themselves.

What other factors surround these discrepancies between stated goals and lifestyles in Beijing? It may be that Beijing distracts ‘smart slackers’ from their goals by offering a lifestyle that few have ever had the opportunity to experience. Although their salaries are high, weekly dinners, social drinks, purchasing DVDs and counterfeit clothing from one of the many markets quickly consume their incomes. As I already explained in the previous chapter, many foreigners find that Beijing can be a lonely and isolating place to live so they seek entertainment outside of their homes. Beijing can fulfill their goals and they are willing to pay nearly any price for that to happen.

“Working here for me means having everything you want and having a high standard of living, you do not have to scavenge, that why I came back. I get access to jobs that I could never get back home in Canada.” (Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks)

“Beijing is a “revolving door” of “who’s who and what’s what”; people like to concern themselves with what’s going on in other people’s lives. It’s sort of like creating contained celebrity status, without the wealth and paparazzi.” (Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks) *(There is a movement especially in the expatriate magazines highlighting gossip about foreigners and event and establishments for entertainment purposes) (Emphasis mine)*

“I think that the expat community shelters a lot of people who come here, not because they want to fit in but because they want to escape where they came from. They move here expecting adventure, feeling for something fresh but they arrive and feel lost and confused and the adventure leaves so they start to look for something else. That something else is always Bar Street. What other choices are there? Bar Street is the opposite of fresh. It’s safe, and it’s familiar.” (Ronald, April 26, 2002 Bar Street)

To understand this phenomenon, I sought the advice of foreign workers who had been in Beijing for a number of years. The recently arrived foreign workers as “old hands” refer to them. The “old hands” I spoke to, informed me that in 1998, the economic boom in Beijing had peaked, and the need for foreign knowledge and related work experience was high. Although China remains the fastest growing economy in the

world, there has been a definitive shift in what China seeks from the West. Presently, there are fewer positions in local Chinese industries or international agencies being offered for 'smart slackers' than there were three years ago. It is most evident in the lack of employment opportunity advertising in the English weeklies.

“People, especially ‘smart slackers’, they love Beijing for being so high-end. But you know it’s not that easy here. People get this misconception that they can make it in Beijing with like no problems and that everything should be handed to them but this is not reality. It’s tougher to be an expat here, like I said, jobs are harder to get. Nowadays, you need minimum Chinese conversation to land a job that’s not teaching English. And how many English jobs now ask that you need at least some Chinese to teach English. Again, going back to what I said, we forget that the locals are learning English and educated foreigners aren’t as needed as they once were. The expat pool will dry up eventually and then the party will be over.” (Louise, October 23, 2002, Lady Street)

Harry is a retired American commercial airline pilot who started a private consulting company with a British executive in Beijing two years ago. Harry first came to China in the mid-1970s on a cultural exchange program, teaching English in several southern provinces. Later, he came to Beijing for several months before returning to the United States. By the time of his retirement, Harry had tragically lost both his wife and his son, which he says, helped him decide to take a sojourn in China. Although he had not planned to stay, a business opportunity convinced him to settle in Beijing for the time being. Harry rents a villa in the north of Beijing and is a member of the Beijing American Club, a private social club that caters to American and local Chinese entrepreneurs. I met Harry through a mutual acquaintance and although he does not fit into my informant criteria, I was eager to hear from a “packaged expatriate.” Harry invited me to his company office and gave me a tour before we sat down for the formal interview.

“Beijing is becoming more affluent. There are 3 million cars on the road and there are 13 million people who live in this city. You have to ask yourself how much the infrastructure can hold itself. It’s booming now, but there will be a bust. It’s basic economic law. It’s a long time coming that China thawed towards the West. But saturated markets like this will not last. Look at it this way, since 1977, when I first came here, there were no cars on the road. None. There were maybe, three hotels. And cars were so rare, that you would think a parade was passing by, that is how unusual the sight was. Nowadays, you can’t cross the streets because of traffic. Oh yes, the divide between the haves and the have nots is increasing. Our company was doing well two years ago and now, well, things have slowed down, but it’s to be expected. China is going after big business; mass production is what they are hedging their bets on. Small businessmen like us will make some money, but not a lot. It doesn’t matter to me, I’m retired and my family is gone so I can take the gamble here. But expats in your age group are starting to feel the pinch. The boom won’t last.” (Harry, April 4, 2002, his office)

China is attempting to position itself as one of the leading manufacturers and exporters of clothing and textiles for Western companies. There is little need for foreign employees in most factories and warehouses. Foreign knowledge and skills is required in the upper echelons of the corporate world, but sadly, few ‘smart slackers’ possess the requisite training, education or experience. This quickly becomes a reality within the first couple of months that they are in Beijing, yet most stay, seeking out other employment.

How are ‘smart slackers’ able to remain in the country? The ready feasibility of attaining a temporary work visa allows ‘smart slackers’ to easily gain entry into the market. Unlike Europe and North America, China requires little more than proof of a foreign passport in order to issue a visa. I applied for a cultural and education visa and instead I received a six-month business visa, one that few non-sponsored foreign workers are able to get. It is unclear how I was able to get such a visa, but I believe it was because I went through an agent in Montreal who used her contacts to secure the visa for me. Most ‘smart slackers’ use a simpler method to arrange a work visa. They arrive in

Beijing with a thirty-day holiday visa and then apply for a three-month work visa. At the end of these three months, most book a flight to Hong Kong for a day or two and get their visas renewed. The rate of success appears to be high as most foreign workers I knew used this method. It seemed that few had applied for a work visa in their home country.

For those who cannot afford to leave the city even for a day, there are free lancers who advertise in the English speaking weekly magazines. A six-month work visa through a free lancer can cost upwards of 340 USD. My informants told me that this method was technically illegal as the Public Security Bureau (PSB) and Chinese agencies outside the mainland were the only proper channels for acquiring a visa. Regardless of the legality of the method, some 'smart slackers' use this service as it is considered the cheapest and easiest way to obtain their visa extension. The visas ultimately come from the PSB and whether or not the free lancer has sufficient "guanxi" to obtain the visa is another aspect of Beijing life which 'smart slackers' have learned to deal with. This flexibility in visas perhaps contributes to my informants expanding their stay in Beijing. The visa process is certainly not a deterrent as it is easy to get and relatively inexpensive.

Every foreign worker learns at some point that what may be illegal can become legal if the right person with the right connections is involved. Specifically, having a Chinese middleman as a representative can solve nearly any issue for foreign clients. However, there are limitations and consequences to this practice. There was one instance when this use of guanxi and the law did not pan out. Specifically, Gary, the former corporate lawyer, decided to apply for a visa through a diluted network connection. In his case, his personal assistant had passed on the request to someone else who passed it on to someone else. By the time Gary's passport reached the PSB, not all those involved in the

guanxi network had managed to convince the immigration officers to supply the visa.

The passport, along with a 1,000 USD fine issued to Gary.

“My assistant spoke to my financial backer about my visa. They decided that I should try and get a discount because I wanted the “Z” visa, which is harder to get. The “Z” visa allows you to work for a year, with unlimited entries. But I didn’t renew on time because I forgot so I didn’t have a choice but to ask my assistant to do it for me. I gave him all my documents, and the money and the passport. He sits on it, I don’t know how long, but long enough that I get a phone call from someone at the PSB who spoke English telling me that now, I have three days to come up with 1,000 USD. Turns out, my assistant passed it off to someone he knows who said he would get me my visa for, I don’t know, 2,000 Yuan. So my assistant agrees to 2,000 until the guy says that he wants double that and won’t take care of my visa until he gets the money. It’s blackmail. Now, I don’t have a choice but to leave Beijing. I have to pay for the day flight to Hong Kong. This mess is going to cost me at least, 1500 USD.” (Gary, October 10, 2002, World Trade Centre)

With the government approval to work in China, it is important to understand what ‘smart slackers’ offer to Beijing in terms of “foreign knowledge and experience” is reflected in the types of jobs they hold and aspire to in their escapes. As I have already mentioned, the majority of ‘smart slackers’ teach a foreign language. The most common language to teach in Beijing is English. Regardless of their academic training and skills, non-packaged foreign workers often find themselves as clerks in embassies or as English teachers thus limiting their work experience and their ability to share their knowledge with Chinese industries.

An evident shift in the proportions of Chinese staff recruitment to foreign staff found in the number of study visas issued by the Chinese government. It has lifted many restrictions for Chinese students to study abroad so now, more Chinese university students given permission to study abroad than ever before. Chinese repatriation coupled with a foreign degree translates into being hand picked for jobs in international corporations and state owned companies. Although the latter does not pay high wages,

the benefits and positions of authority are tempting to many young professionals. Therefore, it is not surprising how many students actually return home to Beijing. With the *guarantee* of employment, these young adults have more promising futures at home than they may have abroad.

“The transnationals who left China to study abroad are coming home to work and they are coming home with a foreign language and experience. In a way, they became expats themselves and they can command a higher salary and status. This is a direct challenge to the non-packaged expats who want to work as consultants. Except for teaching English, these Chinese transnationals can get the jobs that would have gone to expats.” (Mary, April 1, 2002, Bar Street)

These young Chinese professionals are filling the positions, which were held by foreigners. These professionals, unlike many ‘smart slackers’, have the advantage of knowing two languages (more importantly, native Mandarin and English) and understanding how business works in the foreign market as well as the Chinese market. Most ‘smart slackers’ do not have a fluent grasp of the language and lack a good understanding of Chinese business culture. This leaves them little alternative to the teaching jobs.

Yet, not all of these factors deter foreign workers from coming to Beijing. The government policies towards granting visas will continue to play a large role in the influx of foreign workers. Furthermore, ‘smart slackers’ continue to view Beijing in a vague way, as the place that will somehow launch their careers. Although most foreign workers have a post-secondary education, many do not necessarily find a job in their field, such as the two lawyers who taught English or the computer programmer who taught English.

For ‘smart slackers’, Beijing symbolizes the place where they will get the work experience they need to get a better job back home. The employment opportunities in Beijing are by their definition meant to catapult their careers. Whether or not this occurs

when the smart slacker comes home is debatable. There is a vague rhetoric of international experience, yet I have little evidence of this experience being a great (or greater) asset to the smart slacker on their return to their homelands.

In Tara's experience, people back home did not always place emphasis on overseas experience, as managers felt that the concept of work travel was "weird" and that employers were not trusting of other business practices, especially when the job overseas was teaching English.

"Back home, people are lukewarm to travel experience (employers) or think it's weird. But it changes you, and maybe it is envy that you went away from your employer (how fellow colleagues back home feel). But for the traveler, you feel like you have nothing to talk about with those who have not traveled. Why wouldn't I talk about the kinds of jobs I did abroad then tell a potential employer that my job in China was easy or unrewarding? They don't always see the value of overseas work, but I do. I know that they can't understand it, and I think they resent the fact that I know." (Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks)

I have found that the overseas experience of my colleagues and me receives mixed reactions. Some employers react with more interest to foreign experience asking questions about labour and business culture abroad while others appear less interested and ask questions relating to domestic experience.

Money Matters

The economics of 'smart slackers' differs greatly from the packaged expatriates. 'Smart slackers' are often paid in Chinese Yuan, although their salaries may be calculated in foreign currency with wages deposited into a Chinese bank account. Under Chinese law, it is illegal to take Chinese currency outside of the country, as China does not trade on the world market, there are no standards of exchange, and therefore, it is worthless to take Chinese currency out of the country. The government policy aims at ensuring foreigners spend their money in China during their stay.

Tourists to the country made aware that they should leave the country with half the total of money that they had when they passed through customs. This law is not as guarded as it once was. Most foreigners leaving the country can get away with carrying large sums of money on them, although there is the possible risk that customs may discover it. The general opinion seems to be that a fine issued to the traveler and they would pay it before boarding.

Changing money at any major hotel or bank branch, to convert Chinese currency into foreign currency is no easy feat. For each transaction, the customer receives a receipt and must return it to the bank in order to buy foreign currency. Again, it is possible to exchange half of the Chinese currency, and often, the teller will tell the buyer that the bank does not have enough to cover the amount requested. These tactics are part of China's plan to keep hard currency in the country.

Bank transfers are not possible except in Hong Kong. There are few Western Union branches, are used in receiving money, and it rarely sent. The representative will often give refusals along with vague reasons as to why the money cannot be transferred. The most popular option is to buy foreign currency on the black market. There is a well-liked and honest dealer on North Bar Street. In his small newspaper kiosk, he deals with nearly every currency on the foreign market (except Malaysian, as both countries do not trade). I went with a close friend who had dealt with the dealer on several occasions and found that he was honest and gave better rates on exchange than banks. More importantly, the currency he handles is real. Counterfeit money is so rampant in China that foreign workers worry about leaving the country with fake notes. Stories of 'smart slackers' returning home to find out that the money they had brought with them was

counterfeit circulated between groups. In spite of this concern about counterfeit money 'smart slackers' feel that they have gone to great lengths to get the money out of the country.

Foreigners soon discover that taking money out of the country will not be as easy as perhaps they thought. Even though there are ways around the strict monetary laws, most 'smart slackers' use this as an excuse to spend money and "live it up." Where else is there to go for entertainment than on Bar Street? As I have already explained in the previous chapter, apart from rent, most 'smart slackers' spend their money on social activities, particularly through food and entertainment. There are limited opportunities to save money for their futures back home because the laws in place encourage them to spend what they earn.

There is another aspect of money that lies in the social fabric of expatriate lives in Beijing. Its members understand a class issue involved within each group. 'Smart slackers' and other young professional types have commented to me their awareness of the class they have fitted into. Foreign students at the universities whom I befriended are conscious of the role in which they find themselves. Packaged expatriates and diplomatic staff have also verbalized to me, how other foreigners perceive their positions in Beijing.

My understanding of the class differentiation and attitudes towards it comes out of my research; my discussions with foreign workers and the apparentness of the way foreigners live and behave in Beijing. This stratum exists out of economics, not nationality, age, or gender. As I have already discussed, my research shows that foreigners interact with one another more than they interact with the local Chinese population. Furthermore, foreigners come together by two main factors: shared or

common language, and their “foreignness.” It was common to hear ‘smart slackers’ discuss the “packaged” expatriates and hear the envy in their voices when they spoke about their villas and luxury apartments. On the other side of these envy however, there was a spoken consciousness about the pitfalls of having that lifestyle that so many of these ‘smart slackers’ envied. Regardless of status, social pressures and emotional anxiety can affect all expatriates. Different expatriates told me numerous stories about the heartache and sometimes suicide of wives and teenagers who felt an overwhelming pressure to live in Beijing. Many expatriates, including two wives with whom I worked at the language institute, especially recounted to the loneliness of the wife. Both felt isolated at home, so they went out and got jobs in as teachers as an excuse to leave the house.

“Expats from corporations or embassies get pampered a lot. They are paid housing, benefits, and a driver and often paid in US dollars or Pound Sterling (which has a higher value than other currencies making their salary higher in China). Embassy people tend to drive here because the insurance is expensive and they can afford it. Packaged expats get a housekeeper who would take care of the laundry and a driver to chauffeur them around. But when you get the housing (paid for), there is no time to enjoy it. They work you like a dog. The spouse will enjoy the housing for a while until she realizes that she is alone all day and most of the night. Then she finds herself trying to get out of the house because she’s cooped up, trapped almost. It’s actually better off landing deals and then finding your own housing. Packaged expats always have to work and travel. They don’t have the freedom to enjoy their money or their lives here. Embassy wives are bored and some do a lot of charity and functions. Some can’t work because you are already on salary from the government or you can only work in the embassy in low-level jobs. Some study Chinese. Wives suffer from boredom and they become almost like teenagers; they get annoyed when you miss their pyjama parties. They do not understand that I need to work and earn a living and cannot afford to go out with them all the time. The wives shop a lot and set up fashion shows and orphanages. There are problems though. Divorce for expats can go as high as 60 percent of all marriages. Hospitals offer a lot of counselling. There are always little rumours that bored housewives get boyfriends. Some go to the gym religiously to fill in the day. One woman I know lost all this weight and had the most amazing body. But it wasn’t healthy; she just kept going to the gym like it was an obsession. Turns out, she was having an affair for years with some

young, young man. I tell you though she looked great. No wonder.” (Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks)

Nicola who had a small income from teaching Russian to young students understood how the class system worked in Beijing. Nicola was the daughter of two Russian diplomats who had lived in Beijing for a number of years. Nicola would often reminisce to me about her life in Beijing before her father passed away. They lived in a diplomatic compound with servants and socialized with other Russian diplomats and entrepreneurs in the Russian neighbourhood, which offers Russian bars, restaurants and imported Russian prostitutes. The district is easily recognized by the Cyrillic writing and numerous fur shops. Nicola certainly enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle during her youth, even in Russia until her father’s sudden heart attack, which was fatal. Afterwards she says things had changed dramatically as her mother returned to Russia and was allotted a “sub-standard” apartment. When Nicola returned to Beijing, this time as a language student, her status was lowered, something which she often spoke about. Nicola expressed bitterness about her “poverty” and her struggle to reclaim her old life. Now with a new job opportunity in Beijing, she hopes to achieve her goals.

Jane was a forty-two year old American who worked in Silicon Valley as a tech writer for twelve years before deciding to move to China. Jane is a seasoned traveler who lived in many American cities as well as the Middle East. Jane was working as a script editor at China Central Television and was researching China’s use of media propaganda. I met Jane in the youth hostel where I stayed for three months and am still in contact with her since leaving China.

Jane’s ambition was to gather enough editing experience before trying to move to Hong Kong. However, Jane did not manage to move, as the visa restrictions are strict.

She ended up breaking her contract and slipping out of Beijing before her employers could find out. By law, as she was working in a government office and was supplied an apartment by the government, she could have been fined several thousand Yuan for breaking her contract. Jane worked alongside many other “foreign experts,” the official title of a script editor. Jane saw similarities between Beijing and Saudi Arabia. Jane described these similarities when we sat down for a formal interview in my bedroom in the youth hostel in which we were both living.

“Here is definitely a class system in place with foreigners. English teachers are the lowest class here, excluding university language students. But it’s the same everywhere. In Saudi Arabia, nurses were considered the lowest class. I know that there are nurses here, foreign nurses working in the joint medical centres or the embassy clinics. But, I think it goes on how many foreigners are doing the same job. In Saudi Arabia, there were always nurses coming in, getting work. But there weren’t as many English teachers. Here in Beijing, it’s the opposite so of course, the English teachers are at the bottom of the ladder. Well, university students and then teachers.” (Jane, March 5, 2002, youth hostel)

Jane makes an interesting point in regards to the number of positions. It can be easily argued that there are more teaching positions available, and thus more teachers in Beijing than medical staff or executive managers. Furthermore, there are so many teaching positions, salaries are not competitive nor are they lucrative in comparison to other jobs.

When a ‘smart slacker’ does invest in an evening away from Bar Street, the revelations are often profound.

“I went to see the Shakespeare play the other night and I saw so many people that I’ve never seen before. It was a different entertainment scene these people were older. They looked like they had money. I couldn’t believe it, I was so surprised because after a while, you get used to seeing the same people and you forget that there are so many other expats that you don’t know or have seen. You know the established types who live outside of the city. We don’t know about them.” (Gary, July 14, 2002, his apartment)

Gary mentions that these are people “you forget” which is common amongst ‘smart slackers’. Their routines often limit them to certain areas and establishment in Chaoyang. Therefore, one might see diplomatic cars and compounds throughout one’s day, but it may go unnoticed that ambassadors are being chauffeured or executive managers are on their way to their villa in the outskirts of town.

Entertainment is not restricted to bars and other drinking establishments. International DJ’s, Shakespearean plays and classical concerts often take place throughout the year. Although Shanghai arguably gets more foreign venues, Beijing has been hosting an increasing number of foreign events.

“Any international function like comedy shows, concerts, high-end international concerts, plays, international DJs and of course, the embassy balls represent the community. It’s brings everyone together which is something that is almost impossible to do here. So these special events highlight that point that expats do share a common culture. These events do make you feel united; it’s like a celebration of being in Beijing and being a foreigner.” (Louise, October 23, 2002, Lady Street)

The functions, which Louise is referring to, are held throughout the year and are well publicized in the weekly English speaking magazines. Although tickets to the embassy balls as well as the appropriate dress and tuxedo are expensive, with tickets starting at 90 USD, concerts, plays and musical venues held throughout Chaoyang are more affordable. Tickets to each venue differ, yet the prices are often between 10 USD and 50 USD. Income and occupation often distinguish foreign workers along with their home address, or the ability to speak Mandarin. However, there is isolation between wealthier expatriates and those who do share their socio-economic standing.

“Income and salary is the number one thing to distinguish expats. They don’t mix. You rarely see the expats with the smaller incomes mixing with the wealthier expats. It’s not that they look down on each other because it’s possible to change your position. You can go higher here, earn more, it is fluid. It’s a lot easier to

work your way up but I think that most expats are happy to be in their group.”
(Louise, October 23, 2002, Lady Street)

Although it is possible for foreign workers to climb the social ladder and move up in a company, these opportunities do not often occur. Most foreign workers, especially ‘smart slackers’ do not change their position because they do not remain in Beijing long enough to do so. It takes years to learn the language well enough to attain a managerial or executive position in a company, especially since so many multi-national companies and foreign services recruit staff from their homelands. The fluidity to which Louise referred is becoming a myth. As I have already discussed, there is a decline in lucrative jobs and most foreign workers are finding themselves being regulated to lower paying teaching positions. What needs to be remembered is that Louise lives in Shanghai and often referred to both cities as the same even though they are very different. Shanghai is the banking and financial capitol of mainland China and the standard of living is higher. The foreigners I met in Beijing who had lived in Shanghai often pointed out the discrepancies between the cities, noting that Beijing was “behind” Shanghai in terms of wealth. As I have already explained in the previous chapter, Beijing is trying to “catch up” to Shanghai through developing the city in order to entice more foreign investors. Harry, the retired commercial airline pilot, appeared to understand the obvious socio-economic differences even in a group that shares many similarities. Yet, it is the differences, which many of my informants discussed with me.

“The class issue with expats is curious. Corporate expats of course can afford to go to functions that many of their fellow expats cannot afford to go to. Operas, musicals from home are very dear, the Beijing American Club alone costs about 10,000 USD a year to join. Very expensive but at the same time, very isolated. We don’t mix often because we can afford to do things that you can’t. I go to events, which cost me upwards of 2,000 Yuan. You go to bars and pay 10 Yuan because that is what you can afford. I am sure that you young people feel at home

in that environment, but I certainly would not. Too noisy, too late in the evening and it's not something that I would personally be interested in. The embassy balls, which I do enjoy, cost 700 Yuan, sometimes more, for a ticket and you ladies need to buy your gowns and your shoes. Very pricey. But you have your own entertainment. Bar Street is not for old men like me. (Laughter) There's little appeal for people my age to go to that area. I go to my club, and I have a drink there." (Harry, April 4, 2002, his office)

Harry went on to explain that the sojourn, which so many young people take, used to be about "roughing it." Backpacking through Europe or South America, was ideal for many youths, who understood that the trip would include sleeping rough, not, having a large disposable income and the eventual return to an affluent life? However, Beijing offers a disposable income and depending on how the youthful sojourner wants to live, it can include a more comfortable version of "sleeping rough" in a Chinese apartment and drinking in cheaper establishments. Yet, this lifestyle is certainly more affluent than that experienced by backpackers travelling through Europe.

Gary described the divide and the unity between foreigners in Beijing.

"Maybe there is a divide but it's not as great and the high level managers will talk to you. I think that's really important. They may be making more money than you and have a better job and live better than you here but they won't ignore you like they would back home, in a way, there's more solidarity. We focus on the commonalities and put aside our differences because they're not so important here. The big thing here is that the cost of living is relatively cheap and we can both eat at the same type of restaurants and do things we can't do in our respective countries. I think it's called high living. "I think that money and salary put us into different categories but it doesn't seem to make much difference with each other because we make a significant amount of money, so we're all basically doing well." (Gary, July 14, 2002, his apartment)

Although Gary states that there is interaction between the groups, he admits that he never socialized with them. The only instance when Gary has met these executives was through his former post as an instruction supervisor. Part of his duties was to sell courses to large foreign owned companies where he met with foreign staff. In terms of

cost of living, Beijing is relatively high and rent prices, as I have already mentioned are competitive with Toronto and other prosperous cities. Furthermore, the restaurants, which Gary is referring to, are usually Chinese cuisine and not the foreign specialty restaurants. Therefore, although one can live in relative comfort, those with a larger disposable income can live even more comfortably.

Legal Matters

When I asked my informants what aspect of their lives they enjoyed most in Beijing, the answer was overwhelmingly linked to their freedom. Those I spoke to admitted that they were primarily interested in individualism. They went about living their lives in any which way they choose. This freedom balances on the constant flow of foreigners entering and leaving Beijing. The flow keeps things fresh and new, with memories of old mistakes and scandals being diluted with the ever-changing faces of foreigners. While it is difficult to build long lasting relationships, it is easy for ‘smart slackers’ to continually recreate themselves and their identities.

Particular ‘smart slackers’ admitted to me that they viewed Beijing as an oasis of amazing food, cheap clothes, cheaper booze and promiscuous sex. Laws seem not to apply to foreigners. It is a dangerous misconception but one to which most ‘smart slackers’ subscribe claims such as “foreigners are needed in Beijing”, “we’re above the law because we’re wealthier than the average Chinese person”, and “the police won’t arrest us because we can fake ignorance” or “what are they (the police) going to do, I can’t speak Chinese”? A favourite misconception was that diplomatic cars (or cars with the diplomatic plates) were never pulled over for violations. These are spoken by ‘smart

slackers' in a voice of authority even though these do not hold any truth. What compels them to believe this?

The financial benefits that 'smart slackers' receive help create these ideas of invincibility. Furthermore, it is reinforced by the subservience of many local Chinese, especially their Chinese girlfriends and/or their students. The treatment, which a foreigner receives in Beijing, is often more personalized than back home. Foreigner workers get a lot of attention from the locals, who are often curious about foreigners. Students often lavish praise and compliments on their teacher as a sign of respect and gratitude. This type of attention is often new for many foreign workers who quickly feel "special" in Beijing. Coupled with a higher standard of living, many are seduced into thinking that they are above the law because of their "special" status.

There are laws in place, yet many foreigners appear ignorant of most of these rules. Even the obvious laws like illicit drug use or buying sexual favours from prostitutes are often ignored. Embassies provide literature on the consequences of breaking the law in China, yet few appear to take notice. I never got a clear answer as to why these 'smart slackers' continually disobeyed the laws. I suspect that it is because of their sense of privilege in Beijing. However, the reality is, foreigners are as vulnerable as everyone else should they break the law.

I often observed occurrences of foreign workers breaking the laws such as littering in the streets, taking alcoholic drinks outside the establishments, drinking alcoholic beverages in taxis, illicit drug use, and violent fights between male expatriates in the streets. The latter often took place in the summer months when the largest crowds of foreign workers congregated on the pavement of both sides of Bar Street. In the rare

case that a police car passed by, it was after the fight broke up and the crowd had dispersed. The police do not appear to have much to do with the crowd or the individuals who were fighting, or so the stories say. The only instances of police intervention I ever heard from 'smart slackers' were for paying housing fines.

The use of bribes and guanxi however, did not always guarantee one's freedom. I was informed that there are Canadian citizens incarcerated in Beijing. When a close friend of mine visited the Canadian Embassy to submit documents, a friendly staff member revealed to him that she was on her way to a jail just outside of Beijing to visit seven Chinese Canadians who were being held on drug smuggling charges. Their sentences at the time were unknown. When he probed into the conditions of the jails in China, she would not answer.

Eddy is a twenty-five year old American who had been living in Beijing for five years. Eddy worked in a private school an hour outside of Beijing and commutes by bus three days a week to teach twelve hours each day. Eddy lived on the edge of Chaoyang District, in a newly built Western apartment complex. Along with being bilingual in Mandarin, Eddy is semi-literate in Chinese characters and spent much of his free time with his closest friend who is from Beijing. During the summer months, Eddy came to Bar Street at least twice a week. During the winter however, he opted to stay home and save his wages for his annual summer holidays. When we met for a formal interview at his apartment, he offered some insight as to why so many foreigners appeared to be breaking the laws.

“Few people expect to stay, which gives reason to why they break the law or why they are always fighting. Have you noticed that it is always men and they are always fighting over a girl, sorry, a Chinese girl. It's really competitive. Look at how they try and show off who has the better Chinese. Bar Street reinforces the

worst stereotypes. It's always the young white guys, who had too much to drink, who needs to prove to everyone how tough they are. Isn't that the Alpha-Male Syndrome? They spend money, falling over drunk, harassing women. White Western men are enjoying the demand. They get jobs, they get paid well, and they get women falling all over them. They get this taste of the power of desire. They can suddenly have whatever they want. And what happens then? Are they grateful? No, they're not. They turn around and beat up anyone who challenges their power or tries to make themselves up more than they are. So one guy challenges another guy and all of a sudden, it's chaos. And who gets stuck in the middle of it all? We do, us who go to Bar Street to meet up with friends and have our 10-Yuan beer. None of us need this. It's so reminiscent of high school. And it's not like they're improving relations between us and the locals. That's not the image that any of us need." (Eddy, April 15, 2002, his apartment)

Eddy made some very interesting points about the "chaos" that comes out of these fights. On one occasion, I witnessed a fight between two white men, who were in their mid to late twenties. The crowd that surrounded this fight involved at least one hundred people, possibly more. Although I asked four spectators what the fight was about, no one seemed certain. However, this did not deter them from watching the violence. On the contrary, one Swedish national joked that it was free entertainment. As the crowd grew larger, I returned to my local bar and asked the two owners, both of whom spoke English, what they thought of the fighting that occurred near their business. Both owners joked that Westerners were naturally prone to fighting, although they could not explain why this was so. For both of them, fighting came with owning a bar and so long as no one fought inside their bar, they were not interested in knowing what occurred outside even if it was chaotic.

On a separate occasion when he was visiting me, Eddy and I spoke informally about the rise in the numbers of violent clashes between foreign workers in South Bar Street. I was interested in understanding why the police were rarely present in Bar Street, especially during the summer months when the number of patrons was significantly high.

‘I don’t know what the police do, if anything. Do you remember when we were on your bike, when was it, July? We double rode, you were pedaling and we came up the back way of Sanlitun? Those three African guys came flying out of Rainbow? One had blood all over his shirt and he and his friends were fighting with those Americans? Were they American? Whatever Isn’t Rainbow owned by those Moroccan guys? I saw the shutter come down fast. That night was crazy! Five fights in one night, with no police around. So, there’s your answer. The crowds stop traffic in the street, so the cops don’t get close. And no local is going to call the cops. They hate the police with a vengeance because of they think the police are corrupted. They probably are.’ (Eddy, September 5, 2002, SOHO)

Here Eddy is referring to an incident, which occurred at the beginning of August.

I had joined up with Eddy and had offered to drive him around on my bicycle. As he sat balanced on the back rack, I navigated through the lanes until I came up to a large crowd. As I slowed down and pulled over to let Eddy off, three men, whom I later found out were from Nigeria, came hurtling out of the Rainbow Bar, a bar owned by Moroccans. The three Nigerian men began arguing with three white men, although I am not certain about their nationalities. A fistfight commenced and the crowd suddenly grew larger and at that point, Eddy and I cycled through a parallel lane to get to a bar.

Eddy makes a valid point about the spectators blocking the traffic. North Bar Street has two lanes for two-way traffic and a guardrail that runs along the wide sidewalks. Although North Bar Street is as crowded as South Bar Street, patrons are regulated to walking on the sidewalk and not in the middle of the road allowing traffic to flow except for the constant traffic jam. However, South Bar Street is a maze of lanes and paved roads, with no indications of the sidewalks and the traffic lanes. Therefore, patrons gather on the street and use the unclear traffic lanes to walk from one establishment to the next. Most taxis that I took to Bar Street would ask to let me out at the top of the road instead of trying to navigate through the swarms of people and cars. This traffic gets progressively worse as the crowds grow larger in the summer months. It

is during these summer months that fights between foreigners appear to occur. Eddy's theory about the crowds preventing the police from getting to the fight which is often over in a matter of minutes along with the lack of interest the locals have in contacting the police appear accurate.

A less dramatic tale of incarceration happened to Gary, the former corporate lawyer, who was arrested after neighbours claimed that he was trying to break into an apartment in their building. I had been in Beijing for two months when Gary recounted his tale of spending an evening in jail. We were leaving work in a taxi, heading to a bar in South Bar Street when he retold his story.

Gary had returned to his apartment in September and found that someone had broken a key in the lock. He decided to edge onto the window seal and slide open a window. Before he could accomplish this, the police had arrived and arrested him. Gary spent four hours in the jail cell while the police tried to find a translator. By his account, the police fed him and looked ill at ease about having a foreigner in their cell, especially one who could not speak Mandarin. Eventually, a translator did arrive and the matter was quickly settled with the police letting him go and the translator contacting a locksmith on his behalf. Here lies the evidence that ignorance of the language and the foreign face will not necessarily keep any foreign worker from being arrested or kept out of jail in Beijing, yet there are 'smart slackers' who continue to behave as if they are above the law.

Relationships

These ideas of freedom and interludes are apparent in the types of relationships, which 'smart slackers' seek in Beijing. Romantic encounters are often short-termed, as few female 'smart slackers' find a mate to settle down with. On the other hand, male

'smart slackers' experience the opposite as their attention is sought after by their female peers and young Chinese girls.

A few 'smart slackers' were honest enough to admit that they did not have any intention of ever returning home with their Chinese girlfriends and would immediately break up with any girl who questioned their relationship or who demanded too many things. They realized that this was exploitive behaviour but shrugged it off. For many, Beijing signified a place where they could fulfill their sexual fantasies and indulge in their sexual desires. I never encountered one 'smart slacker' who married their Chinese girlfriend or even was engaged to her.

On an individual basis, it was not clear why Chinese women were drawn to foreign men. Both my male and female informants admitted that the individual motives of many of the Chinese girlfriends were deceptive in the sense that they displayed emotions in order to get money, a foreign passport or gifts. Many male 'smart slackers' confided to me that they often questioned their Chinese girlfriends' motives, especially when they asked for favours. Some of my informants revealed to me that their Chinese girlfriends explicitly asked for money or gifts, while others insisted on moving to their boyfriend's home country to live with him.

Nearly all of my female informants often complained about the behaviour of foreign men towards Chinese women. Men in Beijing admitted to me that they rarely had any difficulty meeting Chinese women and many find themselves going through several relationships in a short amount of time whereas their female counterparts found it very difficult to meet expatriate men who were willing to settle down with them in Beijing. Most 'smart slacker women' told me that they often felt neglected, ignored or used by

foreign men in Beijing. Nearly all expressed to me feelings of resentment and anger at the promiscuity of foreign men in Beijing. Even foreign men admitted that they have the upper hand when it comes to dating in Beijing. None has denied the fact that they can have their pick of dozens of Chinese women and smart slacker women, feelings that are often new to them

Nearly no 'smart slacker' women I met had managed to develop a successful personal relationship with a foreign man due to the promiscuous behaviour of their male counterparts. Although there were some unions between foreigners, most of them did not last. A recurring reason I heard for this was infidelity on the man's part. There are some exceptions to this. I knew of three long-term relationships between foreigners, which appeared to be strong. One of these couples had met in their home country while the other two had met in China.

In terms of relationships developing and ending so often in Beijing, I was interested in why so few foreign women were able to develop an intimate relationship with local Chinese men. The responses to this question became more apparent to me the longer I stayed in Beijing. Many women admitted that they sometimes experienced a sexual attraction to Chinese men, yet many felt that Chinese men were either intimidated by them or they felt that the language barrier was too great to overcome. Furthermore, many smart slacker women I spoke to perceived Chinese men as more traditional, who sought out relationships with Chinese women as they faced more pressure from their family to marry young and begin a family. During the time in which I taught English, nearly all of my adult students were married or had a girlfriend and were often surprised when I told them that at age twenty-eight, I was still unmarried.

Although in my classrooms at the language institute, my male Chinese students would often compliment foreign woman on their beauty, some students told me they would not ask a foreign woman out because of the language and cultural barrier. This led me to question whether smart slacker women ever initiated a one on one conversation or asked a Chinese man out on a date. The responses I got from single women were consistent. None admitted to asking out a Chinese man. The main reason seemed to be that few of the young Chinese men for whom the women felt attraction, were single. Other women feared that their forwardness would intimidate the man, and feared being embarrassed by rejection. Throughout my conversations with these women, other reasons began to appear. Nearly all the women said that they did not like the subservient nature of Chinese women and resented the idea that they too should be subservient with a Chinese man. They felt that their Chinese language ability was not strong enough to sustain a deep conversation. During these conversations with me, many women would also discuss their plans, which did not involve living in Beijing, thus the idea of committing to a man who could not travel outside of the country was not feasible. Most felt that if they were to develop a relationship with a man, it would have to be with someone similar to them, i.e. someone owned a foreign passport, was highly mobile and shared language and culture similarities, in other words, an expatriate.

Although on the surface, it may appear that expatriate women get less attention from the opposite sex and therefore, miss the personal ties that accompany it; in fact, expatriate women miss a lot more. The presence of a Chinese partner can bring many advantages, foremost are the language opportunities, contacts and cultural exchange.

There were some exceptions. Although it is still rare to see a foreign woman with a Chinese boyfriend; recently, there have been some unions, although not many. Traditionally, foreign women accompanying their husbands to Beijing were segregated. The nightlife was also very segregated to foreigners, putting women at a disadvantage to meeting locals while their husbands and bachelors interacted with Chinese staff at work and were thus exposed to the culture more so than their wives.

I was interested in learning how smart slacker men met their Chinese girlfriends. I questioned whether they met at work, if the girl was a student of theirs, were they introduced to the girl by a fellow smart slacker or through one of the hundreds of personal ads in the English weekly magazines. The most popular form of meeting a Chinese woman was through a mutual friend or language student. Many smart slacker men said that they would chat to the women they saw in bars and clubs. Few said that they responded to personal ads as they felt that the ads were misleading or false. They felt that meeting face to face allowed them to deduce whether or not the girl was an opportunist (after money, a foreign passport) or if she was genuinely interested in them. Regardless of the men's suspicions, many of my informants told me that the greatest benefit of seeking a Chinese girlfriend or plutonic friend was the opportunity for language exchange. By spending time with their Chinese partner, they were in a position to improve their Mandarin while getting a unique perspective on Beijing.

Setting Goals

Essentially, my informants were divided in what they wanted to achieve in Beijing. Although nearly all had taken some Chinese language courses, some desire to learn the language fluently, while others were interested in learning survival Chinese.

The extent to which the smart slacker wished to learn the language was often reflected in their choice of social activities.

Upon arrival, many foreign workers were motivated and eager to learn the language and some customs as a way of educating themselves and not appearing ignorant in front of others. They sought out Chinese friends and partners but within three months, they tire of it and use their limited proficiency for daily activities while focusing their sights on recreational activities such as Bar Street. This three-month period is commonly referred to as the “honeymoon phase.” What is interesting to note is that every smart slacker I ever spoke to spoke about the honeymoon phase.

Initially, I understood the honeymoon phase to represent a type of ritual appeared to occur for everyone I met. However, this phase is important in understanding not only how my ‘smart slackers’ planned their stay, but how it often changed the course of their lives in Beijing.

“Well, everyone goes through phases. There’s the honeymoon phase, then the fed up with everything phase, then resignation, like ok, I’m here and I am just going to deal with it and then the last stage is when you settle into your life here. The honeymoon phase is best, everything is new and exciting and fascinating. You want to learn Mandarin so you sign up for classes that cost a fortune and then you learn enough, so you stop going. You may want to learn about the history, or calligraphy or something else Chinese. And then you learn just enough so you’re not completely ignorant and then you go to Bar Street and suddenly, you only have foreign friends and your Chinese lessons are over so you learn not to waste the money again. Because who needs all that anyway? You hang around with foreigners you don’t need Chinese. And if you teach English, why know Chinese?” (Tara, March 6, 2002, Starbucks)

Tara, the native Montrealer, did sign up for Chinese lessons on three separate occasions but never managed to complete the month long training and her level of Chinese appeared to remain at the survival level. Tara continued to teach English as a freelance teacher throughout the city, trying to save for her condominium in Toronto.

She also started to go to nightclubs in Bar Street. Towards the end of the summer, Tara had not saved enough money, nor had she found a permanent place to stay. By her own account, she had never settled in since coming back to Beijing for a second time. Tara left Beijing within three days of deciding to return to Canada.

Louise's experience with the honeymoon or enchanted phase lasted for three months before settling down with friends and drinking less. As Louise lives in Shanghai, she informed me that there were also a large number of expatriates in Shanghai as well as numerous western styled bars and clubs. However, she claimed that the honeymoon phase in Beijing lasts longer as there are more bars and clubs, and more importantly, the drinks in these establishments were five times less expensive than in Shanghai.

“Well, we go through the same similar cycles. First is the enchanted phase where everything is so great. Then the young expats go through a student phase where they exploit the city by going to bars, getting drunk all the time and generally acting like idiots. Then you fall into the good stage where you want to find good friends and settle down. Then you go to the next stage, which is all about learning more Chinese and meeting some of the locals and remembering why you're here in the first place. It's a very reflexive stage. You have your life pretty much in order and now you're looking to fulfill yourself while you're still here.” (Louise, October 23, 2002, Lady Street)

Beth was thirty-three years old and came from the Gold Coast of Australia. She first arrived in Beijing in November of 2000 with a boyfriend and returned home alone to finish her computer science degree in October of 2001. Once her degree had been completed, she came back to Beijing in February of 2002. I met her the first week I was in Beijing. We were introduced by a mutual friend and I remained in contact with her throughout my stay in Beijing. When we sat down for a formal interview in April in a bistro close to the Silk Market, she was taking Chinese lessons at a polytechnic and worked full time as a language instructor. By April, she had made up name cards and

was trying to earn money by cutting hair. Her clientele were all foreign workers in Beijing. Beth's attempts to branch out resulted in her being hired by a five-star hotel's salon. This opportunity did not last, as she had to work on commission and found that she had few customers.

"I learnt Chinese for 5 months and then I gave up. It's too expensive. I got over it. The honeymoon period is so over for me. Now, I keep thinking that maybe I'll go home to the Gold Coast. There's nothing left to do here. I'm bored. You make friends, and they leave. You make more friends, and then they leave. It's exhausting. You really have to make an effort to meet people. But it costs money. I am so tired of this money trap. I can't afford to do the things that I want to do." (Beth, April 4, 2002, Silk Market)

Beth eventually left Beijing in January of 2003 and returned to the Gold Coast. Her plans to become a freelance hairdresser did not work out due to the low number of customers she was getting at the hotel. Furthermore, she eventually moved out of the apartment she was sharing with a friend and did not want to invest three months rent into a new place. When I first met Beth, she was found on Bar Street three nights a week. However, by the end of summer, Beth did not come out to Bar Street as often. Although I never found out from her, the reasons behind her decision to stay away, a mutual friend informed me that she had been having financial and personal problems.

Going Home

I met numerous people throughout my ten months in Beijing who eventually returned to their homelands, there were three cases of 'smart slackers' who returned to Beijing. I have limited information concerning these cases, although I was in Beijing for one, and was corresponding with someone who was in her homeland but who had eventually returned. The third case was recounted to me by a mutual friend of the person returning to Beijing.

The first case of a smart slacker returning to Beijing was Roger who came to Beijing in 1992 to teach English. He was in his early thirties and grew up in Toronto. I met him on my second day in Beijing and he first brought me to Bar Street. Roger worked as an English teacher for four years before finding consulting work in various foreign firms. He later became employed as manager in an American oil company for three years but was laid off when the company decided to cut back on the high expatriate salaries. Although Roger had taken a bi-annual leave home to Toronto for short holidays, he had not lived in Canada for a decade. From the time he was laid-off to the time he packed up and returned home, only two months had passed. Friends of Roger's had organized a going-away party yet the guest of honour failed to show up. I was informed that he taken a flight to Toronto two days later.

Roger had been in Toronto for three months when he decided to come back to Beijing. I had the opportunity to meet with him upon his return. We met up in his favourite bar in South Bar Street and sat down for an informal talk about why he decided to come back to Beijing along with his curious behaviour prior to returning to Canada. Roger explained to me that his dismissal from the oil company had left him devastated. He realized that he could no longer afford his Western style apartment in Chaoyang nor would he be able to continue to afford his comfortable lifestyle. Roger admitted that he had made the decision to leave Beijing almost immediately after losing his job. Upon arriving in Toronto, he met up with family and friends and started to work out his options. However, he felt disconnected from everyone he knew in Toronto. Although he searched for employment, he could not find any opportunities, which interested him. Furthermore, he felt Toronto was very stale and uninteresting especially as his friends

always appeared to be working. Roger explained that he came to the realization that he felt happier in Beijing and began to miss his life there so he booked a flight back to Beijing. I asked Roger if he was planning to stay in Beijing to which he replied that he was going to spend one more year in the city before moving to Vietnam, as he had always wanted to live there.

As I have already explained, Nicola was twenty-two years old and came from Moscow although she had lived in Beijing on two separate occasions. Nicola had a good command of English and was a student at Beijing University where she was studying Mandarin although she rarely attended classes and had a basic ability to communicate in Chinese. Nicola lived in a dormitory on the school campus in the Haidian District. She was in Beijing for one year when she decided to return home to Moscow to finish her degree in tourism. Nicola was expected to sit for government exams in order to qualify as an official tour guide. Nicola was not new to Beijing; she had spent a total of three years there as a teenager when her parents who were Russian diplomats had been assigned to Beijing. I was introduced to Nicola by a mutual friend and she became a close friend while we were in Beijing.

Nicola had returned home in October 2002 but kept in contact with me via email and informed me that she was planning to move back to Beijing the following year. Nicola finished her degree and received her tourism qualifications before being hired by an import and export company that dealt directly with suppliers in Beijing. The company offered Nicola an employment post in Beijing as a purchaser and she agreed to go back, this time with a competitive salary. Although she told me that she could find work in Moscow as a tour guide, the salary was not as lucrative and she expressed concern about

having to bribe police officials, whom, she claims, routinely confiscate tour guides official documents in order to receive bribes. Furthermore, Nicola revealed to me that a small one-bedroom apartment costs 500 USD a month in Moscow yet she could live comfortably in Beijing for half the cost.

Bob was thirty-six years old and had lived in Beijing and Shanghai over six years. Bob was born and raised in Toronto, where he went to law school and eventually became a civil court judge. Bob moved to Beijing in 1996 where he worked as a legal consultant for various international companies, although I do not know the reasons behind his decision to move. After suffering a severe depression, he decided to move to Shanghai where he was quickly recruited as an immigration specialist for Canada, Australia and New Zealand by a Canadian entrepreneur. However, after three years, the immigration laws in the three mentioned countries released a policy to freeze any immigration for an unspecified amount of time, therefore, the company in which Bob worked, closed. Bob had considered staying in Shanghai and looked for work but his inability to speak any Chinese greatly limited his options. Therefore, Bob decided to return to Toronto in December 2002.

I was introduced to Bob through my roommate Patsy in Beijing, who had once cared for him during his depression. Patsy and I have stayed in constant touch through phone calls and emails since I left Beijing. Patsy informed me that Bob arranged to return to Beijing for March 2004 because he had developed personal problems and found it overwhelming working in Toronto. Patsy offered to let Bob live with her in Beijing, which he says, helped Bob decide to move back to China. Patsy revealed to me that Bob had not begun to research any employment opportunities in Beijing.

Conclusion

Beijing remains a city of opportunity, one where foreign workers can experience an interlude from their lives back home. By negotiating through the local labour markets, expatriate workers such as ‘smart slackers’ are able to experience a more privileged lifestyle than most were accustomed to. There are many presumptions about travel, especially ones tied to self-reinvention, moving out of the past and into the future and the freedom of not having to answer to anyone. It can be argued that the laws in place condone this kind of behaviour, as the local police rarely seem to get involved in any disputes or petty crimes committed by foreign workers.

In terms of future jobs, my informants admitted that they had only a vague notion of how Beijing was going to serve their careers. Many spoke about enhancing their communication skills as an English teacher that Beijing had strengthened their “survival skills” in a foreign culture and language skills. However, most had acquired only basic Mandarin and could not read or write Chinese characters and, therefore, their own “survival” rested on adapting to the local culture for day-to-day activities while escaping into Bar Street for the familiar. ‘smart slackers’ who wished to improve their Chinese language skills often arranged for a language exchange partner or took additional classes. Male ‘smart slackers’ sought out Chinese girlfriends and thus benefited from learning the language through communicating with their partners.

In the following chapter, I will review literature on migration and movement and indicate how this is relevant to my own ethnographic work.

CHAPTER FIVE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RELEVANCE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature on migration and movement in the second part of the Twentieth Century until the present day and to indicate how this literature is relevant to my own ethnographic concerns. This chapter will review the contributions made by anthropologists to the consideration of such issues as mobility in the global market, the transnational movements of goods, services and labour as well as the shifting identities, which these movements have shaped. Moreover, I will discuss my encounters with 'smart slackers' and the relevance of the group of young mobile professionals and how they are part of a transnational movement.

Anthropologists have been contributing to a growing discourse devoted to understanding aspects of globalization concerning mobile travellers including migrant workers, corporate sponsored migration, expatriates, cosmopolitans, sojourners, guest workers, and trans-migrants. Contemporary anthropologists have been looking at the inter-connection between people and places, especially the meanings, motivations, and influence that has developed from travel. Similar to the "Grand Tour" of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Europe which provided the wealthy and privileged few opportunities to explore the Western Europe, today's Grand Tours involve privileged youth backpacking through Europe or South America. Even the British Royal Family maintains this tradition by sending their offspring to a year's volunteer service abroad before they commence university or military service. This tradition has expanded beyond royalty and aristocratic families, to involve an increasing number of middle-class youth from the Commonwealth and other countries. There are an increasing number of options

to choose from in terms of working abroad or extending a holiday. Organizations such as student's foreign exchange programs, Student Work Abroad Programs (SWAP), inexpensive packaged tours, and the Eurorail pass marketed for the youth traveler. There are migratory travel in which people cross borders for temporary work while keeping ties with their country of origin. Expatriate workers, consultants, diplomatic staff, guest workers, au pairs, transnational workers, and refugees all practice contemporary forms of travel through space and time.

Motivations and Causes for Migration

Globalization has affected not only how people travel, but also how nations view migrations. As migration increases, many nations attempt to encourage select migrants to settle within their borders. Specifically, skilled or entrepreneurial migrants are seen as desirable while unskilled labour workers and refugees are viewed as undesirable, even though nations do struggle with finding ways to enforce the rules and attempts to control who migrates to their country is often lacking (Castles, 2002: 1150).

China is no exemption to the rule in attempting to control and regulated foreign workers, however, the ability to enter the country on a thirty-day holiday visa and renew under a six-month work visa is the simplest way to stay in the country. I relate back to when I first applied for a visa in Montreal, I did not submit a resume nor was I neither asked to fill in any details concerning my level of education or work experience nor was I asked to reveal my Social Insurance Number. The only information asked of me was to explain the purpose of my trip. Unbeknownst to me, I received an 'F' visa, which allowed me to work for six months and granted me numerous entries into China. Ironically, Beijing does not permit Chinese labourers from other provinces to work in the

capital. Identity cards issued to all nationals born in Beijing and failure to show the card to the local police can result in the labourer returning to their village. This inequality reflects Beijing's desire to attract skilled workers and dissuade unskilled workers, which are a surplus.

Just as globalization has influenced nations' reactions to migration, so to have it influenced how people migrate. With access to foreign images through media resources, along with the increase in literacy and education, migrants are better prepared to travel. Stephen Castles (Castles, 2002: 1149) argues that cultural capital as the knowledge and understanding of foreign cultures along with social capital understood in the form of networks, aids the migrant to make a safe journey to their new home. Social capital, Castles states, is important as migrants follow similar paths to migrate as those before them, often taking similar routes and landing in the same urban centres. These networks do not solely serve immigrants who have recently arrived, they also serve as a way to circumvent the immigration flows even when governments attempt to limit or control immigration. Personal networks allow migrants to seek entry into the country through kinship in the form of family reunions. Migration is not simply the movement of people through time and space, the migration of labour forces aids in the development of commercial centres. With the development of businesses comes the creation of the new middle class. Business migration is a prosperous, global achievement, creating jobs worldwide all the while controlled by elite agencies and institutions. These institutions allow migration to continue even though governments may try to impede it (Castles, 2002: 1149). 'Smart slackers' use their higher education and professional skills, including the knowledge of the particulars of a foreign language equipping them with the

resources to teach. However, unlike other skilled migrants, 'smart slackers' are not typically entrepreneurs. 'Smart slackers' are equipped with both cultural and social capital. For those who choose to migrate to China, there are many resources available during their adjustment period in Beijing. Note however, that the Chinese government does not provide these resources; expatriates already living in the capital create them. Bar Street for example serves as a site in which newly arrived expatriates can make contacts with other foreign workers, as well as seek out advice from foreign patrons. Similar to Castle's arguments, the expatriate communities are established and thus have created the prototype in which newly arrived expatriates can copy, aiding them to settle into their lives in Beijing.

Personal networks which 'smart slackers' create differ however, from Castles description. There is little emphasis on creating a personal network with existing expatriates in Beijing prior to the 'smart slacker's departure. Due to the availability of work visas and the concentration of foreigners in one predominant area of Beijing, foreign workers need not rely on pre-departure preparations. Furthermore, it is important to note the distinction between the type of immigrants, which Castles is discussing, and 'smart slackers'. The latter are not permanent settlers, they are an expatriate group of young mobile professionals who are seeking a temporary interlude from their lives back home and use Beijing and the compressed area of Chaoyang in which the majority of foreigners work, live and socialize.

Types of Migrant Workers

Migrant workers are not one homogenous category. There are many different types of migrants however; there have been in the past fifty years, a majority of three

types of migrants; highly skilled, low skilled and forced migration.. From permanent settlement migration to temporary labour migration and refugees, they remain part of the constant movement of people worldwide.

Highly skilled migrants are well-educated professionals. The first three countries to promote this type of migration were Canada, Australia, and United States. This is a privileged system of entry, adopted by Western Europe and East Asia. The brain drain of educated, skilled workers such as medical staff from Africa and technical professionals from India does not appear to be slowing down. Much of the brain drain began with developing countries that were not in a position to employ their increasing in well-educated nationals and the simultaneous pruning of education budgets in developed countries to look to the developing world to fill their labour gaps (Castles, 2002: 1150). In comparison, low-skilled migrant workers were once a crucial source of labour, especially in post-war years. Similar to the industrial growth that occurred after the Second World War, the reconstruction of Europe greatly depended on low-skilled migrants to help with the rebuilding of the Europe. Low-skilled migration practiced, especially in developing countries: although it is not encouraged by governments as this labour, force is economically and socially problematic. Low-skilled workers often find themselves with irregular work in construction and dangerous jobs and without the legal rights to reside; hence these workers may be very vulnerable to exploitation. As the education systems improves and personal wealth increases, the need for these migrant workers remains, creating a dualistic system of the “haves and the have nots” (Castles, 2002: 1150).

The third type of migration is one, which does not seem likely to diminish. Forced migration affects millions of people worldwide from different causes. War-torn countries cause a mass movement of refugees to cross borders or remain internally displaced while natural and manufactured disasters destroy homes, displacing people, often permanently. People left homeless due to development programs, countries attempt to limit the number of refugees and asylum-seekers from entering their borders. This type of migration is problematic for immigration officials, who argue that it is nearly impossible to differentiate those who are seeking asylum for those who have migrated for economic reasons. The blurring of these two categories makes it difficult to devise immigration policies. Regardless of the type of migration, movements of people interconnected as a condition of globalization. Even with the newer forms of migration, older forms remain, with return migration and retirement migration becoming more apparent. Return migration appears to be growing as migrants returning to their homelands often bring about social and economic change whereas retirement migrants seek out opportunities to stretch their life savings in warmer climates where their savings can allow them to live in better surroundings (Castles, 2002: 152).

In my own research, 'smart slackers' represent the highly-skilled migrants who were attracted to the idea of travelling in order to improve their chances of finding well-paying jobs. They are part of a larger group of skilled workers who are tempted into migrating for economic prosperity and for an interlude. More to the point, they are moving in the reverse direction, from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern, the opposite of what Castle's is arguing. In addition, although the reverse flow of people is small, as Asian, economies continue to expand; their growing importance in the global

market may be an indication of the continuing flow of migrant workers from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern. In particular, this continuous direction of migration may become increasingly significant, meriting study by anthropologists, especially as China is willing to receive foreign workers and are creating the circumstances in which free-lance foreign workers permitted to work and live for an undetermined amount of time.

Furthermore, while many of the people I spoke to have admitted that part of their journey was to escape their lives in their homelands, they have managed to transform this escape into an interlude. There is a much wider set of mobility options open to those who can afford to use them. 'Smart slackers' do not fit neatly into the migrant categories commonly depicted in anthropological literature as traditional migrants are seen as humble, manual labourers and not as skilled workers. 'Smart slackers' are mostly university educated, skilled workers, filling in shortages at the lower rungs of the professional, white-collar ladder in Beijing; positions which many of them admitted to me were not attainable in their home countries. While they pursue their careers and leisure in Beijing, they are also preparing to enhance their status and positions by earning a higher wage and affording an affluent lifestyle. 'Smart slackers' return to their respective homelands could also merit a study involving their class and social status back home, analyzing whether or not it has improved or remained the same.

In contrast to Southern Hemisphere to Northern, what makes Hong Kong immigrants distinct is because they do not immigrate alone; rather they take their families with them to areas that they have researched. Similar to the astronaut families, these immigrants are prepared, with their resources available; they are in the position to immigrate together instead of having the family members dispersed across the globe.

There are not many differences between these migrants and astronauts except that they chose to leave Hong Kong as a family and settle in one place. Receiving countries often appropriate criteria for migration, limiting the number of candidates. For example, in Canada, there remain criteria that immigrants must meet in order to attain the right to settle (Smart, 1994: 99). There are prerequisites that select candidates based on education or discernable skills, personal wealth, skilled or specialized workers, or business success leaving out those who have not had the same wealth or opportunity as the higher classes in Hong Kong. The desire of Hong Kong immigrants to settle in countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States (in that order) stems from the stable political and social systems along with the high standards of education and compatible culture (Wong, 1999: 144, Smart, 1994: 103).

The emphasis of these countries, including others such as Great Britain, on the policies surrounding skilled and professional migrants reflects the changing patterns of contemporary migration. Anthropology must also shift their focus towards studying this middle-class migration and government policies, which encourage it. At the same time, anthropology can use a comparative study of skilled professionals working in Asia and compare government policies and the lives, which these professionals make for themselves there.

Middle-class Migration

Unlike other types of migrants such as exiles and refugees, sojourners and expatriates stand out as the education seekers, corporate employees, or temporary visitors abroad. Students are often seeking new opportunities in education, moving abroad to attend university. The mobile student's degrees may lead them to overseas positions,

with a higher income potential. The student traveller, sometimes referred to as a sojourner, identifies closely with the expatriate although they may not have the same socio-economic standing. Unlike a tourist's short-lived trip and the migrant's long-term, perhaps permanent stay, as they settle into their studies, the students are left without the professional services of settlement like that of the expatriate, however, mobile students do not necessarily experience the more painful settlement of the migrant who may not be well equipped in foreign living. I argue that regardless of their situations, students make up a small portion of the migratory elite, their status stemming from the privilege of living abroad to further their education and in many cases, learn a new language. This education will likely evolve into a career and perhaps present opportunities to move up from sojourner to expatriate through the degree attained. As an expatriate, they can then experience a prestigious form of travel and foreign living where learning the local language or culture is an option and not a necessity.

Temporary forms of migration through education or work can lead to a type of lifestyle, which Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune describes as a "potential wanderer" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 16). The potential wanderer encompasses other forms of travel such as cosmopolitans and expatriates. The cosmopolitan crosses borders and settles temporarily, knowing that they can exit whenever they choose (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 17). Similarly, I argue, expatriates often encompass travelling professionals, placed in roles that are more restrictive as their employers often dictate their arrival and departure and their attitude towards their host culture can often remain ethnocentric. The student traveller falls somewhere between the cosmopolitan and the expatriate. The student travellers free from the confinement to the same professional pressures of the expatriate

yet at the same time, students do not hold the affluent position of the cosmopolitan. The student traveller may experience a rite of passage from youth to adulthood during their studies abroad, understanding that their life path may involve more movement. Student travellers avoid exposure to the same pressures for assimilation as the migrant, and avoid meeting corporate expectations or become a connoisseur of a language and culture. The student traveller needs only to meet their academic demands before returning home to decide on a career.

Potential wanderers, as Murphy-Lejeune explains, may not have a fixed schedule; they arrive and depart in new cities and will continue to wander should s/he decide on that life path or if they are avoiding external circumstances (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 16). This is similar to the subjects of my own research as they wander from one place to the next, unsure of when they will depart Beijing. These ‘smart slackers’ are divided in their life paths; some revealed to me that they chose a nomadic life, moving from one city to the next, returning home for intervals, before heading off to a new adventure. Yet, a number of ‘smart slackers’ I spoke to admitted that they left their homelands due to overwhelming pressures placed on them by others and sought escape and solitude in a country to which they had no previous ties. ‘Smart slackers’ may be able to make a career path out of their wandering, offering their services by teaching a foreign language or offering their knowledge and skills on a consultancy basis. Will potential wandering establish a prosperous future or will it fail in their expectations? ‘Smart slackers’ expressed to me, their beliefs that their experiences in Beijing will benefit their future, uncertain careers. Many expressed an interest in remaining in a nomadic life, stating that

once the “boredom” set in, they would pack up their lives and move on to a new destination that was not necessarily their homeland.

Unlike these potential wanderers and student travellers, the Hong Kong sojourner travels differently. The high demand for mobility in both capital and personnel has led many Hong Kong investors, entrepreneurs and the wealthy elite to extend their homes, businesses, and families across the globe before the 1997 handover of the British colony to Mainland China. These sojourners referred to as “astronauts” or “astronaut families” (Skeldon, 1994: 11). The name derived from someone who spends a lot of time on an airplane, while at the same time; it serves as a play on words, as home without a wife or husband (Skeldon, 1994: 11). The family divide served many functions; foremost in stabilizing the political uncertainty in Hong Kong by guaranteeing a foreign passage should the remaining family in the territory choose to leave. The economic advantage to having a dispersed family ensures that they have several businesses running simultaneously in different countries. Reunification of family members or parents can often take years, with the uncertainty of where to settle undecided, along with the increasing uncertainty of returning to Hong Kong on a permanent basis (Skeldon, 1994: 11).

What makes these “astronauts” different from other forms of Chinese migrants stem from their privilege in Hong Kong? Most ‘astronaut’ families are bilingual, educated professionals. Unlike their mainland counterparts who are often coolies (labourers) and small market traders, the Hong Kong sojourner is left to decide on which country to emigrate to, which country to invest in by setting up a business (Wong, 1999: 145). These astronaut families are financially capable of setting up new businesses in

different countries while at the same time, keeping familial and economic ties in Hong Kong should they decide to return. Unlike other forms of Chinese migration, the choice and opportunity to return “home” is feasible for astronauts, whereas the mainland Chinese rarely return to China to live out the rest of their lives due to economic and political restraint. Unlike their Hong Kong counterparts, mainland Chinese rarely has the same affluence or ease of movement in and out of the country. Chinese nationals granted permission to leave the country, home remains the village of their ancestors, even though many will never return to the village. For astronauts, the indecision of where to call home resonates, as they continue to seek out new business opportunities and citizenship throughout the world, unsure when they will ever join their families in Hong Kong (Wong, 1999: 143). The Chinese government has taken measures to attempt to entice Chinese entrepreneurs and skilled workers back to China. As the economy grows stronger, Chinese expatriates are being encouraged to return to their homeland.

Unlike the Chinese astronauts whose lives often revolve around setting up homes and businesses outside of Hong Kong, coupled with the uncertainty of reunification with their families or the possible return to Hong Kong, other expatriate travellers face challenges with their mobile lives. In terms of research, the focus on expatriate workers has tended to be on their involvement in professional commitments. However, ‘smart slackers’ are not affected by the same pressures and commitments as astronaut families and other expatriate workers. ‘Smart slackers’ distinction rests in their ability to accept free-lance work and their lack of commitments in comparison to astronaut families and ‘packaged’ expatriates in Beijing. At the same time, they make up a larger group of

expatriate workers, their lack of corporate support places them in a unique and advantageous position to return to their homelands or move on to another country.

Although expatriates are part of the greater migrant movements, they fall into an elite group of workers who use their positions in corporations of free-lancing professional skills as a means of crossing borders. Expatriates are not always immigrants looking to start their lives in a new location or looking for a permanent settlement. Even though they may reside in one country for a decade or more, their stay is often intentionally temporary. Similar to other temporary migrant movements, expatriates may seek out opportunities for employment that may reward them financially or emotionally (Fog Olwig, Sorenson, 2002: 1). An opportunity to travel and work abroad may be appealing to someone who is seeking a break from his or her daily lives, diversity, adventure or a tempting offer of financial compensation. Their livelihood may centre on personal freedom, financial gain or the opportunity to diversify their lives (Fog Olwig, Sorenson, 2002: 5). Yet, the ease of “up and go” is not realistic. Pressures in global market trends are beginning to impose more movement from its employees. Coupled with the struggle to find work at home and the increasing number of downsizing and department relocation to countries such as the Philippines and India, a greater number of employees in older developed countries are facing new career demands. Many professionals may face the difficult decision to leave their careers to embark on a journey that may not guarantee corporate stability or permanent residency in a foreign country. Some of my informants found it difficult to find stable jobs in their homelands while others felt that the Beijing job market would serve them in gaining the relevant work experience they needed in order to attain prosperous jobs on their return home. The inability for foreigners to attain

permanent residency lends to the feelings of uncertainty and temporariness of their lives and careers in Beijing. However, 'smart slackers' are acutely aware of the time restrictions and thus work it into their plans for Beijing. During the more formal interviews, my informants revealed to me that these time constraints were in their indefinite plans surrounding work and eventual leave of Beijing. This uncertainty also held my informants that it made life more exciting in Beijing, time not wasted is often remarked a positive light as it to me; instead, every opportunity to earn money and pursue leisure activities.

Cosmopolitan Discourse

Ideas of what consists of being cosmopolitan differ between anthropologists. Hannerz argues that cosmopolitans are travellers who seek out other cultures. They surrender to the host culture, exhibit a willingness to learn, to immerse themselves in the locals for a period. Cosmopolitans however, do not stay in one area. They are highly mobile and often affluent, setting down in one place to the next, filling up on the local while at the same time remaining in contact with other foreigners in the area. There is a cachet to being part of the cosmopolitan ideal, certain openness to other cultures but with particular limits. For example, cosmopolitans may learn a foreign language, yet may not be able to speak it fluently. Therefore, the language abilities rest in an intermediate form of language survival.

Cosmopolitans possess a willingness to learn from the local culture, the ability to open themselves up to new experiences with a competence to understand the culture. Cosmopolitans are not tourists, as they avoid touristy areas (Hannerz, 1996: 103). They opt to learn behind the scenes rather than take centre stage. Cosmopolitans learn to adapt

and live in the new culture, embracing it. They are people with little concern with nationality or nations; they travel the world as global citizens, visiting urban areas and traditionally, port cities, where there is a certainty that they will not only encounter local culture but other foreigners, thus expanding their network of knowledge and of people (Hannerz, 1996: 103, Wollen, 1994: 189). Their own nationality may not be important to the individual cosmopolitan; however, the economics of their passport draws on nationality. Unlike the tourist, who also benefits from being from a wealthier nation and thus has the economic passport with which to travel, there is a distinction between tourist and cosmopolitan. The tourist is a temporary visitor who sees the sights recommended in travel guides. On the other hand, the cosmopolitan traveller avoids the “tourist traps” and takes a genuine interest in the local culture whereas tourists look for the added benefits of familiarity combined with the exoticism of foreign places such as food, sights, and adventure (Pollock, 2002: 4, Wollen, 1994: 190, Hannerz, 1996: 105).

Ulf Hannerz (Hannerz, 1996: 105) argues that cosmopolitans deplore mistaken for a tourist by the locals. Cosmopolitans are, in his opinion, participants in the local culture, immersing themselves in learning the language, and blending in with the crowds (or as much as possible). The cosmopolitan tries to distance them self from tourists, who are often seen as incompetent in the eyes of the locals and cosmopolitans alike. However, Hannerz points out those cosmopolitans must be capable of maintaining competence in the local culture or the locals too will perceive them as tourists. Tourists are part of the spectators, treating foreign cultures as sport, their incompetence stems from the fact that tourists are not participants in the local culture.

Cosmopolitans can be located all over the world such as the affluent Chinese cosmopolitans from mainland China who fled during the Cultural Revolution when the wealthy and political elite were enemies of the state. Those fortunate enough to reach Hong Kong have built for themselves prosperous lives without ever forgetting the past and the family members who perished in China along with the familial ties cut off after years of political tension. As the year 1997 approached, the deadline for the handing back of Hong Kong to the Chinese government, the Chinese cosmopolitans were already planning their next move away from the territory out of fear, and not curiosity of other places. They were preparing their carefully crafted exits to places where they have family and friends such as those within the Commonwealth nations and the United States.

Many wealthy Hong Kong entrepreneurs adopted the role of a capitalist cosmopolitan. As Hong Kong developed into a leader of Asian economics and financial trade, Hong Kongers took advantage of the global opportunities with investments throughout the world by sending family members to foreign countries to set up both a home and a business. By taking these measures, Chinese entrepreneurs could wait and see what the outcome of the handover would be. Hong Kong entrepreneurs continued to conduct business as usual, all the while holding more than one passport, often to Canada, Great Britain, Australia or the United States in case they had to flee the Communist government. This form of cosmopolitan grew out of a culmination of things. Primarily, the wealthy Hong Kongers were mostly educated, wealthy, unlike many of the peasants and labourers, and petty merchants who had first crossed over to Hong Kong in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century. Furthermore, the ability of Hong Kongers to adapt so readily and easily in other countries is partly because they never conformed to a rigid

identity. Their ability in creating lives, both personal and business in a foreign land stems from their ability to live as Hong Kongers anywhere in the world, including Hong Kong by using economics as their entry point and motivation to travel. Unlike other types of cosmopolitans outlined above, these Chinese capitalists are able to manoeuvre through regional, political and cultural spaces by using their family and financial ties to gain access (Hamilton, 1999: 8, Wong, 1999: 141).

Mainland China has hosted cosmopolitans and other foreign influences in the development projects in Shanghai and Beijing. Historically, Shanghai has always been an important city in terms of financial trade as well as a busy port. From the Opium Wars to the Japanese occupation, Shanghai has housed the invaders, the foreign cosmopolitans and the Chinese. The city has evolved into a “Shanghai Modern,” a city that has been influenced by the presence of foreigners. The evidence is in the number of cafes, bars, and cinemas that have opened up. These social and public spaces allow both the cosmopolitan to enjoy the familiar cultural meanings, which these places hold as well as the local Chinese to enjoy the foreign establishments, adding the meanings to their own respective repertoires. This inclusion of Chinese patrons creates a Chinese cosmopolitanism in which they learn, and adopt foreign practice making it part of a “new national culture” (Abbas, 2002: 214).

Concerning my own research, I have discussed in the previous chapters, how Beijing is responding to foreign influences in its development schemes. Beijing is positioning itself to be the new Shanghai, as foreign companies increase their investment in the capital. The rapid gentrification of the Chaoyang District, otherwise known as the financial district, is having an impact on both the landscape and the local Chinese who

live and work in the district. Similar to the experience in Shanghai, many young, educated and wealthy Chinese are participating in these foreign influenced spaces, listening to Western pop music and consuming Western goods.

While I was in Beijing, the people I spoke with usually spend between one and five years in Beijing. The group of smart slackers with whom I conducted research spoke about the crucial first three months of living in Beijing, which I have referred to as the “honeymoon period.” During this honeymoon period, these ‘smart slackers’ spent short periods of time (between one and three months) open to the ‘other’, displaying for the most part a genuine interest in learning the language, food preparation, calligraphy and history. During this period, the newly arrived may search for Chinese friends, attempting to fit into Beijing society. However, during the course of my research, my informants admitted that they found that after the initial three-month honeymoon stage, their interests and friends changed considerably. Although my informants remained open to the host culture, they were selective about which aspects of the culture they showed interest. As I will explain throughout the following chapters, the group of people who from the focus of my study spent nearly all of their leisure time in the company of fellow foreigners while selecting a couple of Chinese friends or language exchange partners. Their interest in Chinese culture and the learning the language became secondary to pursuing leisure and recreational activities with fellow foreign workers. More over, as I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, although this group of ‘smart slackers’ did not prevent foreigners from joining in their recreational pursuits, tourists were often kept at a distance.

'Smart slackers' were very conscious about distancing themselves from tourists and university students in Beijing. For example, 'smart slackers', who admitted to me that they preferred the company of those similar to themselves, did not seek out the company of tourists and foreign university students studying in a Beijing university. Tourists are people who may try to take up much of the 'smart slackers' "down time" and no investment could be made in their relationship as tourists move in and out of Beijing in a much shorter time frame. These foreign workers invest much of their social time meeting fellow foreign workers, and do not fit into the tourist idea. Are smart slackers cosmopolitan? I would argue that they are not, in the strictest sense, cosmopolitan, however, smart slackers as I have already discussed in the previous chapters, spend a short period of time in a honeymoon stage. I believe that this honeymoon stage defines the cosmopolitan attitude as it is the time in which they may practice or learn Mandarin, learn the routes around the city, attempt to make Chinese friends and perhaps learn calligraphy or expand their culinary tastes by eating different regional dishes. During the average honeymoon period of three months, these smart slackers are more receptive to the local culture; they enjoy being in a foreign city and enjoy many aspects of the host culture. However, for many, the honeymoon eventually ends and most of the smart slackers in my research began to seek out friendships with other foreigners and leisure pursuits in the foreign spaces in Chaoyang.

As the honeymoon period ended, the group felt that their experiences and the knowledge gathered in that period was sufficient to adapt to Beijing as well providing a badge of cosmopolitanism. Although 'smart slackers' may still occasionally be mistaken for tourists, especially in the tourist areas where they may shop or visit on occasion, they

often resent the mistake, as they feel that they have educated themselves enough to “fit in” as much as a foreigner can in Chinese society. The people I spoke to displayed pride in their accomplishments in being able to live in Beijing, weathering the problems and stresses of living in a foreign country while creating an affluent lifestyle for themselves. Even though none of my informants ever explicitly identified themselves as cosmopolitan, they admitted to me that they felt privileged and worldly compared to the people they knew in their homelands who did not share the same travel experiences or distance.

At the same time, these ‘smart slackers’ are not completely “open” to the host culture in so much that they want to immerse themselves in the local culture. These individuals were limited in their appreciation of the host culture mostly seeking out fellow foreigners to enhance their lives in Beijing. As I have mentioned, the younger, wealthy Chinese patrons descend on Bar Street, the less foreigners visit the area. Instead, ‘smart slackers’ seek out new areas where they can reproduce their exclusive membership boundaries. Therefore, the smart slackers select which parts of the host culture they want to participate in, while at the same time, they search for opportunities to escape the local Chinese by seeking out fellow foreigners in spaces filled with cultural symbols that they identify in their own cultures such as Western styled restaurants, bars, pubs and nightclubs.

However, I propose that Bar Street contains a cosmopolitan attitude. Although individually not all the patrons may fit into the varied cosmopolitan models, the location serves as a meeting ground and exchange of ideas, languages and culture of different nationalities and languages. Aside from language, the space also incorporate different

establishments, ranging from Irish-style pubs to American and European bars and eateries that allow the patrons to recognize the cultural artefacts and local cuisine. Although the patrons are not getting a behind, the scenes look at how many Chinese live, through conversations and the formation of friendships and social networks with each other they are acquiring a behind the scenes look at how other foreign workers live.

Understanding Tourism

Modern tourism began as part of the Eighteenth Century Grand Tour with the aristocratic elite enjoying sea voyages to foreign lands. By the Nineteenth Century, the Age of Industrialism provided the emerging middle class the opportunity to join the privileged in traveling. By the middle of the Twentieth Century, the increase in the number of people travelling across borders for business and leisure outnumbered those who travelled in wartime (Crick, 1989: 310). There is no indication that the number of people currently travelling through international borders is likely to stabilize. On the contrary, Harrison argues that the number of travellers appears to be increasing at a steady rate. Since the 1960's, which saw 70 million international travellers per decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of international travellers. The number of expected travellers by 2010 estimated to be one billion, compared to 750 million people who travelled in 2000 (Harrison, 2003: 13).

Anthropology often sees tourism as a form of acculturation. The literature and research in social science explores the impact of tourists on ecology and the environment, sex-trade and sexual exploitation in many Third World Countries and the economic impact of tourism development and the myths surrounding it (Crick, 1989: 310).

There has been a move in research towards trying to understand tourists and the tourism. The categories and typologies of contemporary travellers, such as backpackers, trekkers, sojourners, are all formed based on certain criteria such as socio-economic, motivation to travel, affluence, method and length of stay that overlap, for example, someone who travels away from their home from business or pleasure for more than twenty-four hours could constitute a tourist. Tourism is seen as escape from daily life, the need for a distraction from everyday lives, it is temporary, irreversible, a way to opt out of responsibility for a pre-determined length of time and pursue recreation and hedonistic pleasures such as drugs and sex, which may be disapproved by the locals (Crick, 1989: 327). Tourists have two defining characters: the emotion or economic planning that goes into each trip and the investment in their travels as their motive is often to seek pleasure on a short-term basis (Harrison, 2003: 36). Tourism abroad geared towards middle class to upper-middle Westerners who have the privilege of leisure time and the necessary resources (financial) to undertake global travel. According to Julia Harrison, the motivations behind the tourist experience is the desire for distinction from the lower classes; there is a cachet associated with international travel, which moves them, higher in class structure as they accumulate cultural capital (Harrison, 2003: 11). More importantly, tourists stand outside other types of global movements like exiles and refugees because tourists have a home to return to, their travels are undertaken knowing that they have the safety of returning home (Harrison, 2003: 35).

Malcolm Crick (Crick, 1989: 327) argues that the predominant image of tourists is of someone who comes into limited contact with locals, sheltered by their packaged tours. Tourists represent a passive group thus allowing an assigned tour guide to lead

them around with little say on their part. Paying for these tours ensures that the tourist does not have to worry about transport, accommodation, food or the task of creating an itinerary for their trip. Tourists may take in a limited portion of local life as they pass through a market on their itinerary even though more time is spent shopping for bargains than trying to understand how the market works and how it reflects the local culture. Tour guides are meant to ensure that the tourists will get a glimpse, however brief of the “other,” without getting too close (Crick, 1989: 327). Yet at the same time, tourists often look for distinction, old-world charm and the remains of ancient ruins, historical sights and primitive places (and people). Tourists search for a place to travel to in order to reflect on the distinctiveness of their own lives but do not invest too much in acquiring the knowledge of the local culture or possible political and or social problems such as poverty. Therefore, tourists get a glimpse of poverty but do not reflect on the causation of the poverty even if they use it to reflect on their own lives. They have the luxury of being sheltered by air-conditioned coaches and three to five star hotels, private beaches and scheduled excursions with expatriate or bilingual tour guides leading them through each site. These tour guides often act as translator, protector from danger and cultural interpreter (Crick, 1989: 327).

Harrison explains that tourists study literature such as guidebooks, pamphlets and web sites offering information on how to plan a trip, what to see and where to stay to the reader. This research on the potential tourist’s part provides them with an idea of where they are going, security of knowing some names of places, phone numbers or a few sentences in foreign languages to use in cases of emergencies. Their planning often reflects what they hope to see and experience. Even with all this planning, tourists still

want to get to know the area on their own terms, more for reflection of their lives back home and are often disappointed with development programs which are too similar to the development in their own country. However, the ancient sites which tourists perceive as authentic are often commoditized through media publications to entice visitors, cashing in on those who want to “see history” (Harrison, 2003: 180).

The foreign sites and customs of the local people consumed by tourists through what Urry called the “tourist gaze,” which is directed towards a “collective” gaze on the local people and the constructed sites (Galani-Moutafi, 2000: 210, Harrison, 2003: 30). No longer do these sites require cultural knowledge and understanding, in contemporary travel, the tourist gaze is not an elite or academic pleasure, rather the tourist gaze is about self-indulgence, leisure, and personal pleasure (Fog Olwig, 2000: 210). The gaze created and amassed through “signs” is what they saw, the photographs they may have taken to remember the signs such as the sandy beaches, the temples, the dances performed by the locals or the exotic foods served to them make up these signs.

Work and Tourism

Tourism literature often portrays tourists as consumers, whose purpose is to indulge in leisure activities, and not work. This division between work and play is not as clear-cut in the opinion of the World Tourism Organization, which argues that business or professional trips is considered a part of tourism. In order to broaden the scope of what consists of tourism and what consists of work, one must look at several kinds of travellers, and their motivations. Therefore, professional workers who travel as part of their job description and migrant tourism workers who fill in temporary, seasonal jobs but who return to their homeland after the season ends, arguably may be categorized as a type

of tourist. Because they spend time traveling to different places as part of their business goals, many professionals may be more inclined to visit “touristy” areas and take in sights suggested by guidebooks as a bonus to their travels. Migrant tourist workers who travel to holiday resorts are often Northern European or North American youths who travel to such places as Greece, Spain, Cuba, Mexico or the Caribbean to work in tourist centres and resorts for an average of three to five months. Their motivation often lies in working in the tourist industry while enjoying some of the tourist aspects in their life and in their leisure time. An important differentiation of working-holiday makers is migrant tourist workers are skilled or semi-skilled workers, whereas the more traditional view of a working-holiday maker was as an unskilled or manual worker who works on farms or the communal kibbutz as found in Israel. Drawing on my own personal experience, Student Work Abroad Programs represent middle-class youth who travel abroad, often during school breaks, seeking out part-time work in order to finance their travels. What used to be referred to as “tramping” (Uriely, 2001: 3) and the still popular “backpacking”, has turned into a certified business, with campus travel agents throughout North America and Europe, specializing in short-term work permits for student youth. The work in which most SWAP participants engage in is not necessarily in their academic field or training however, the experience from travelling in foreign lands and working in a different culture may be rewarding to the participant and provide them with transferable life skills.

The categories above often overlap, non-institutionalized working tourists are seen as participants who work to further their holidays as their journeys and motivations are found in different levels of occupation of work and leisure and recreation activities are closely tied to tourism or tourist activities. The old representations of tourists are

changing, as part of a continuous trend away from packaged tours and coach rides to temporary migrant workers in younger travellers (Uriely, 2001: 3).

The traditional view of a tourist was of someone who spends their time pursuing recreation and leisure by spending money instead of earning it when travelling. Taking “time out” as an interruption of one’s everyday life referred to in many travel writings. What lies beneath this “time out” is the privilege of taking a time away from the responsibilities of everyday life. The tourist visiting post-war torn nations or lying on a gated beach in Cuba privileged in the fact that they could afford to buy the ticket to travel as well as the accommodation. The ability to invest in leisure activities such as travel symbolizes wealth. Even the student backpackers who subsist on a strict budget are more privileged than their peers who cannot afford to make such a trip.

Do ‘smart slackers’ fit into any of the work tourist categories outlined above? Although there are many shared commonalities with many of the non-institutionalized workers, which I discussed above, this group does not fit comfortably into any one category. They are however, closest to the non-institutionalized holiday workers as ‘smart slackers’ represent a largely middle-class, educated and affluent group originating in Western countries.

With the shift away from tourism as leisure to incorporating tourism combined with work, so too has research shifted accordingly. Any type of working tourist comprises a broad scope that can include backpackers, tourist industry workers, and government staff on official tour and professional business travellers who invest some of their free time in seeing the sights (Uriely, 2001: 3). Drawing from my own experiences working in Europe and Asia in the late 1990’s and in the new millennium, there has been

a shift from manual or unskilled work to a more refined, semi-skilled or skilled work in high-tech industry, teaching English as a Second language and filling in temporary positions in offices.

There is a need to understand the individual approach of each traveller in regards to their travels, their motivations: is it to further their travels that they work abroad or are their travels for the work experience? I attempted to apply this question to my own research, asking the individual smart slackers whom I met why they chose to travel to Beijing. Their answers were largely the same and focused on the appeal of living abroad and commanding a higher wage for their knowledge and skills, which could enable them to live a more affluent lifestyle than they had experienced in their homelands. There was however, more to their decision to move than simple economics involving the allure of the unknown, adventure and in some cases, the escape of pressures from home. Throughout my research, the idea of taking a “time out” from their lives resonated among the ‘smart slackers’. Through their narratives, many spoke of Beijing as the place where they could take the time out before returning home to their commitments.

The marketing behind tourist destinations often show sandy white beaches, exotic foods, luxury cruises or hotels that offer the traveller a place created for leisure. The “time out” from daily demands and pressures is even more appealing. At the same time, travellers are often seeking out the “elsewhere” and the “elsewhen”, transporting them away from the present time, allowing the traveller to escape from their lives all the time knowing that their “lives” are waiting for them back home (Curtis, Pajaczkowska, 1994: 201). This comfort of knowing the “exit door” allowed the ‘smart slackers’ to enjoy the “time out” period of their lives while at the same time, they were building up future parts

of their life such as seeking different employment positions which they hoped would benefit them once they returned home.

Defining Transnationalism

Defining transnationalism varies between researchers; however, there has been some consensus that transnationalism is part of globalization of world economic markets. Whether it is the increasing reliance of these markets, migratory labour forces, and government response to increased immigration or importing culture and products, transnationalism appears to influence and affect many aspects of life and livelihoods. Transmigrants are market driven, seeking socio-economic opportunities but often residing in areas or communities of similar ethnic backgrounds and beliefs, thus creating transnational communities. There are different kinds of transnationalism, some look at the special and local, where and when transmigrants leave and where they resettle. Other ideas of transnationalism focus on the goods and services that transcend national borders and how it is in different locals.

Karen Fog Olwig and Ninna Nyberg Sorenson argue that the concept of transnationalism became popular in the 1990s, stating that migrants became interactive with and identified with multiple cultures, which transcended national and political borders. This duality became part of the central focus on the concept of a transnational (Fog Olwig, Sorenson, 2002: 10). This concept is visible as second and third generations of migrants take an interest in their parents' homelands, beliefs and traditions.

The origin of transnationalism is a topic of debate amongst social scientists. Aihwa Ong says that the term 'transnational' first became popular in the late 1970s largely because global companies began to rethink their strategies, shifting from the

vertical-integration model of the 'multinational' firm to the horizontal dispersal of the 'transnational' corporation." (Ong, 1999: 21). It was also during the 1970s that European and North American companies began to invest heavily into China, as part of Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy of 1977. China's example reflects the global market movement, which saw many Western companies investing in the developing world.

Transnationalism is the movement of actors embodied in goods and services, individuals, and companies as the culture has more to do with occupations as transnationalism tied to job markets (Hannerz, 1996: 6). Easily recognizable transnational cultures result from diplomats, bureaucrats, businesspersons, journalists, aid workers and other government agency workers or politicians. Their transnational movements, Hannerz says, is measured in hours, days, months and years as they move across borders to fulfill their duties and it is during these trips, they are exposed to others in this specialized and collectively understood meanings (Hannerz, 1996: 28). Arguably, the idea that transnationalism was first derived from the government officials, media correspondents and religious organizers certainly have their own roots in other types of mobility and migration. However, it is interesting to note that Hannerz argues that transnationalism can avoid definition as a long-term migration. Unlike other migrants, many of which travel from one point of departure to one point of arrival and settle permanently in that new locale, transnationalism can take place within hours or days and can involve more than one national border and more than one arrival destination.

Transnationalism, not simply embodied in actors, goods and services or corporations. Several factors, which make up the complexity of transnationalism, include global capital markets, which destabilize less industrialized countries, technological

revolution in communications and transport, decolonization and universalization of human rights, and expansive social networks, which reproduce transnational migration, economics, and politics (Guarnizo, Smith, 1999: 4).

Transnationalism refers to uses and notions about culture in a global perspective it also involves the human agency in transnationalism brought about by global economics and its practices. Ong shifts the focus on how Chinese elites have practiced mobility in response to the global capital in Asia Pacific countries. Ong supports the position that anthropologists should focus on how ethnicity, gender, race, class and nation constructed under the amassing of capital. There is a need to examine people's daily lives under the context of "cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts" (Ong, 1999: 5). At the same time however, Smith and Guarnizo argue that transnationalism does not occur solely with human migration crossing national boundaries. Transnationalism is also concerned with the flows of monetary funds, corporations, wealth and non-monetary resources, along with political ideas, cultural values, and symbolic objects (Guarnizo, Smith, 1999: 19). Certainly there is a need to look at how economics are being practiced across national boundaries by focusing on the individuals make use of the economic opportunities. In Ong's research, she focuses on the wealthy Chinese elite who use their capital as an entrance into other nations, the reverse flow from Western nations. The flows of monetary funds, whether it is through multi-national corporations or individual investors needs to be contextualized. How symbolic objects, cultural values and political beliefs travel and how they translate into a host culture needs to be examined as they affect the lives and livelihoods of transmigrants.

In relating these theories to my own research, I can find a link in which many transnational actors cross the Chinese border, some spending short periods of time fulfilling business obligations while others spend longer periods of time searching for business or employment opportunities. My informants for example, purposely travelled with the intent of finding employment in Beijing I have already explained, many do so without the support of corporations, government agency or personal wealth. This does not dismiss their other motivations for travel, yet the economic prospects were those that each informant vocalized the most to me. Moreover, it is during this time spent in Beijing that 'smart slackers' search for and find contact with like minded individuals who share the similar experiences and beliefs. This connection marks the language, occupation and leisure activities like that on Bar Street.

The symbolic objects and cultural representations are partly carried by foreigners to Beijing yet it is the host culture that is economizing on their monetary value through importing goods, services and the creation of establishments that cater to both foreigners and the local Chinese who can afford to consume these goods and services. Therefore, the transnational ties in Beijing are not only created by foreign workers, it is also individual entrepreneurs who understand that there is a market for foreign culture and are willing to import it and replicate it.

Cultures often intertwine through transnationalism, although some transnational cultures become more global while others remain insulated. The Western and North American cultures are extended and transformed more as it can be seen when people from those cultures travel, they are spoken to in their language and recognize their own cultural symbols in those centres (Hannerz, 1996: 139). Yet transnational cultures must

originate from somewhere, there must exist a hub of cultural activity that generates within its people forms of symbols and meanings, which carries when they travel to other territories. Some cultures such as North American and Western European, Hannerz says transnationalism as the culture, meanings and language seen as duplicates in other cultural centres with the locals accommodating the visitors in their language as an example. There are varying degrees in which the traveller can remain in his or her own culture by surrounding themselves in the core of the *occidental cultural enclaves* (Hannerz, 1996: 107) and by engaging with others who share the same cultural understandings. Similar to my research in Beijing, Hannerz's occidental cultural enclaves manifested into North and South Bar Street and other popular areas in Chaoyang District. Bar Street for example, serves as an exclusive part of Beijing where Western goods consumed and with foreigners given service in English, as it is the most commonly spoken foreign language in Beijing. This cultural enclave is most often frequented by people from North American and Western European cultures and have attempted impose a membership to the area through their actions. Examples of these actions are by an overwhelming majority of patrons speaking English, with people in similar occupations and ethnicity. Moreover, the majority of patrons to the Bar Street area seek out new locations in which to congregate, once again building up and discarding areas and establishments, leaving behind a growing Chinese clientele, thus attempting segregation. Bar Street certainly represents part of a foreign community, a transnational community that incorporates not only goods, services and establishments, but also the transmigrants who consume these products and create aspects of their own culture. However, the host country can influence transnational communities in either a positive or a negative way.

On the positive, there can be the acceptance of language, and culture giving the migrants more freedom of choice in the decisions they must make about how they want to build their lives in their new home. On the other hand, discrimination or forced assimilation can cause isolation in the communities and can cause a “mobilizing community solidarity and transnational links” (Castles, 2002: 153). Certainly, many of the foreign patrons in Bar Street are actively taking part in the discrimination of the host culture by supporting the idea of membership; however, this membership is also a reaction against the Chinese host culture that isolates foreigners. The Bar Street community grew out of the isolation and discrimination it received on behalf of the host culture, and it return, discriminated against the host culture through foreign solidarity.

Studying transnationalism has proven to be problematic, as anthropologists such as Hannerz argues, taken more interest in researching Third World populations than other types of transnational populations such as managerial elites. Transnationalism as a study often involves traditional anthropological writings such as kinship, family, migration, and ethnicity. However, in doing so, other potential research overlooked such as the types of relationships that generate from these transnational ties such as managerial elites (Hannerz, 1996: 129). In reference to managerial elites, they remain an under-studied research group. The potential information from transnational businesspersons who travel from world cities to other localities, bringing with them a corporate culture that reflects the similar prestige, power-wielding influence that it retains in world cities. Often the corporate cultures of the transnational businesses duplicated in their new environment and run in a similar fashion to the offices in world cities (Hannerz, 1996: 129).

Beijing is an example of a city in the midst of developing into a world city. Within this rapid change, there are foreign influences, which are negotiating the future of Chinese capitalism. Certainly, I agree with Hannerz that managerial elites remain an understudied research group. My attempts at understanding a subordinate white-collar labour force in Beijing represent a minimal power force. 'Smart slackers' have revealed to me that their desire to climb the corporate and social ladder in Beijing is not as attainable as it was five years ago. This belief can be interpreted as a shrinking foreign labour force whose presence is slowly losing momentum as the Chinese labour force are positioning themselves to take over from the foreigners who hold these overseas posts. Foreign workers eventually face the decision to return to their homeland or move on to another country. This is not to say that the presence of foreign managerial elites will disappear completely, on the contrary, they in all likelihood will remain, and however, the numbers of positions will most likely decline. 'Smart slackers' may find themselves regulated to the lower managerial positions and teaching jobs as more local Chinese meet the criteria that transnational companies demand. Therefore, although the transnational ties may never cut in Beijing, they will certainly shift towards the host culture.

Many governments are in a crisis as their population is ageing, leaving large gaps in the labour force. In order to fill in these shortages, Bailey explains, governments are seeking foreign workers to work on a temporary basis. Their presence in the nation-state needs regulation so that nationals avoid feelings of disenfranchisement. This achievement is through temporary or restricted work permits, visas, tightening rules, and regulations to attain citizenship (Bailey, 2001: 416).

Such was the case in my ethnography. China's government issues temporary visas and work permits that is renewable on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis. Citizenship, the government has ruled, is not an option as China's work permits are temporary and short-term although there are methods to prolong work visas. China is taking advantage of foreign workers knowledge, skill and desire to work in Asia. However, this is not unique to China; other countries have welcomed foreign workers such as Vered Amit found in her study of expatriates in the Grand Cayman Islands (Amit, 1998: 46).

How do economic actors define transnationalism? Aihwa Ong uses the term *flexible citizenship* to describe subjects who are sinuous and react on opportunities. These are changes in political and economic forums through their mobility and displacement (Ong, 1999: 6). Flexible citizenship includes subjects who use their pursuit for capital accumulation and higher (or retained) social standing by negotiating their lives through mobility flexibility and responding to market, government and cultural establishments, their lives take on new meaning and structure concerning family, gender, nationality, class and capitol. The role of the anthropologist therefore, is to question how peoples' daily lives influenced by cultural politics of specific powers, cultural institutions, regimes and markets. Flexible citizenship derives from combining "discipline and escape" (Ong, 1999: 19). Transnationalism does not eliminate the judicial and legality of borders and government control however, escape may play an important role in many transnational lives. Yet escape from government rules and sanctions that allow or disallow the flow of people and capital is not possible. State authorities may not have full control of these mobile subjects, but at the same time; they

are not free from state power. Ong argues that anthropologists have often overlooked the individuals who are part of transnational movements who must deal with “cross-currents of cultural winds at home, in transit, and upon arrival in what may be only a temporary place of residence” (Ong, 1999: 93). Professionals and international managers are at an advantage as their employment and status allows them an easier access to global design of cultural diversity, ethnic hierarchy and citizenship and thus can use their employment to manipulate and access these environments with more ease than other types of migrants. At the same time however, these professionals do not work in free-flowing conditions and are subject to the same control imposed by nation-states. Therefore, global markets and international business demand employees (especially high-level management) to possess the necessary skills to conduct themselves in transnational settings, adept at economic success and accumulation while at the same time accepting that economic markets and nation-states are in control.

Certainly, what Aihwa Ong argues about flexible citizenship is evident in my research. “Smart slackers” are using escape as a motivation to travel and work in China; however, discipline is not the strength that many ‘smart slackers’ had. The ability to seek out employment opportunities and the ability use their skills and education in Beijing is formidable, however, ‘smart slackers’ do not benefit from their flexibility like their ‘packaged’ counterparts. Those working for transnational corporations benefit more to the economic success and higher social status and hierarchy than their independent counterparts. For many ‘smart slackers’, Beijing holds the opportunity to join the managerial elite, opportunities they may not get if they remained in their home countries. At the same time, ‘smart slackers’ are hoping to use their opportunities of work

experience to advance their economic and social status in hopes of using it when they return home. However, control of visas and length of stay, 'smart slackers' understand that these opportunities are temporary and the Chinese government is willing to allow for foreign workers to remain on a temporary basis, thus both parties benefit from this arrangement.

Mobility as part of employment seeking or work relocation programs appear to be increasing. Capitalism under globalization has resulted in trends like subcontracting, new commodity markets, rapid communication by digital and wireless communications. Furthermore, there is also the demand for migrant labour, and rapid travel has all contributed to the nation-states having to re-shape regulations concerning migration (Nonini, Ong, 1997: 10). This late capitalism has also led to a reorganization of labour forces that have led to subcontracting, outsourcing, higher levels of temporary, part-time and seasonal postings, and flex-hour arrangements. Production is segmented and deskilled. Globalization has not brought about despair in all sectors, managerial and other executive postings have created transnational executive postings. Fields and institutions such as finance, legal, technical and commercial services have all faced the expectation of flexibility in time and space. These professionals do not receive exemption from being highly mobile, highly flexible in terms of work environment, career, and urban setting. Professionals who accept these conditions may themselves as part of global managerial elite (Nonini, Ong, 1997: 15).

Attempts at understanding transnationalism has shown that migration does not concern itself solely with one-way movements, that of migrants leaving one location and arriving in another. It is interesting to note that while low-skilled and low-paying jobs

are increasingly moving from developed countries to lesser-developed countries, new commodity markets for the products made in the Third World is set in the First World. India serves as a positive example of outsourcing to developing countries. Coupled with an affluent, well-educated and segregated demographic, high-tech companies are seeing the advantage of outsourcing technical jobs at a fraction of the cost. The labour force can provide skilled workers without having to pay the high salaries that are in demand in developed countries. However, parts of Asia must deal with the outsourcing of factory and assembly jobs that pay very little with the product shipped back to the First World countries. Certainly, Donald Nonini and Aihwa Ong are correct in saying that globalization has made a positive impact on the white-collar sector, and there is no lack of young, motivated, educated and skilled workers from the West searching for these managerial opportunities outside of their homelands. Outsourcing is one example of companies searching for the best skilled and cheapest labour force, there is also a movement of young workers who are willing to follow the outsourcing trail in hopes of finding work, even if that means leaving the developed world and working in the less developed world, such as 'smart slackers'.

Transnationalism arguably, is inseparable from migration. Traditionally, migration was ties cut from their homelands and migrants expected to learn the local language, assimilate into the local culture, and adopt the national identity. Integration into society does not solely rest with immigration; the globalization of the economic markets has led to a transnational practice of goods and services. As world trade increases, transnational corporations are positioning to control the movement of goods and services like never before. The replacement of larger production plants with smaller,

highly skilled mobile production units has brought about a risk of job security to those who work in the plants in developed countries (Castles, 2002: 13, Van Hear, 1998: 251).

The destabilizing effects of corporations downsizing, government policies on reducing deficit and multi-national corporations outsourcing jobs have, as Vered Amit notes, has created a 'generation of youth' in developed countries who have the higher education but are unable to find permanent, salaried jobs (Amit, 1998: 47). At the same time, Amit says that with the increasing demand for a 'flexible global workforce' has largely ignored the need for a system, which recognizes these conditions for global flexibility. Therefore, workers are in a dilemma between work responsibility and family, foreign residence and citizenship entitlements (Amit, 1998: 45).

Effectively, multi-national corporations have aided in creating a new transnational class, an elite group of mobile professionals who are becoming elites in terms of social and economic status regardless of cultural background. These mobile professionals may not be elites in their culture, such as 'smart slackers', yet they position themselves to 'ride the wave' of economic development in other countries and thus advance their social class. As in Beijing, young, educated, middle-class professionals are temporarily benefiting from the globalization of marketplaces by making themselves available to China's demands for a foreign workforce by leaving behind the uncertainty of salaried positions at home.

Questioning Elitism

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed different types of migrants and migratory patterns. Some of the themes developed are concerned with middle-class migration, affluence, professional and skilled migration and leisure travel. Yet the

themes above do not address the power issues in anthropology such as studying horizontally.

Anthropology as a discipline has historically come out of and largely remains part of an occidental intellectual elite. Yet, if anthropology represents intellectual elite, they are merely a smaller part of a large order of elites, with professional gatekeepers heading the group. More over, societies found throughout the world each have elites, controlling aspects of society (Shore, 2002: 1).

What constitutes elite? Historically the meaning was sacred, referring to those as chosen by God. Elite as a concept describes the eclectic. In the Eighteenth Century, the term elite evolved into the rankings of the feudal system. From the Nineteenth Century, the meaning of elite has been retained, as those associated with class structures and power in mass society. However, the reference to elite became generic, used to describe those who had power and privilege in society (Marcus, 1983: 8).

Elites are not clearly marked and there is some ambiguity in understanding what constitutes elite in any society. Does elite refer to a privileged group in society or individuals of a group who control power? What kind of power do elites yield? Can the middle-class professionals in Berlin, New York or London represent elites? Are expatriate workers in the Caribbean, Asia or Africa part of elite groups? Perhaps the formation of elites ties to particular sectors, such as business, politics, and education. One obstacle in researching and understanding elites, as George Marcus (Marcus, 1983: 9) argues, is the very elites one desires to study are not always visible. Elite “locates agency in social events by evoking the image of a ruling, controlling few, while being intractably vague” (Marcus, 1983: 7). If this is the case, then social scientists face the

challenges of locating and contextualizing the types of elites, they are interested in studying.

Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984: 133) argues that the middle and upper classes in the West are responsible for using higher education as a means of securing their elite position in society. Those, he argues, with the economic capital have influenced the education system in order to ensure their “social reproduction.” The rising number in university degrees in many parts of the Western world has contributed to the devaluation of the degrees. This devaluation may be one of the factors encouraging people to leave their homes in search of work. The exodus of university graduates in Canada to the United States has been continuous; therefore, the government began promoting the local job markets to overseas skilled workers in hopes of replenishing the lack of labour. Similarly, in Beijing, foreign workers and local Chinese alike are seeking employment equipped with degrees from a cornucopia of universities around the world.

Often, the question of class separates the elites in society recruited by a specific class. However, in order for elites to attain their status, they must prove themselves capable of this privilege as amongst elites. On the other side, individuals in society must acknowledge, and accept elites in their positions of power or revolutionize against the social orders and replace one establishment with another (Marcus, 1983: 9).

In regards to the group of expatriate workers, with which I am concerned in this study, they each had completed a university degree or had come very close to completing one and even though their degrees were in a wide range of disciplines, they often ended up teaching English. In addition, although they had attained a high social and economic position in Beijing, most of the people I spoke to revealed to me that their backgrounds

had been middle class backgrounds. Their status in Beijing did not change in terms of moving into the upper-middle class. 'Smart slackers' remained middle-class due the existing class system in Beijing. As most 'smart slackers' are employed as English instructors, they form the largest work group and thus earn the lowest wage in comparison to executive managers, consultants and government employees. Therefore, although 'smart slackers' enjoyed a higher standard of living, their status did not rise as most were young professionals who were attempting to build a professional background in Beijing before making their way back to their homelands or moving on elsewhere. Could it be that on their return, they will eventually rise up in society through their travel and professional experiences and become part of a larger group of elites in the corporate world? Perhaps it is possible although this would require a new study of returnees.

In relation to my own research, I do not necessarily regard the 'smart slackers' as belonging to an elite organization, however, the *personal view* of some of these informants was that they were associated with a group of elites which was based on a class system determined by employment. The people I spoke to believe that they are at the lower rungs of the social order in Beijing amongst foreigners. Those employed by multi-national corporations, referred to as "packaged expatriates" and their families, my informants claim, hold the highest position. The second rung incorporates embassy staff and specialized workers such as nurses and doctors. This second rung is sometimes indistinguishable with the first rung as some embassy employees and government agency staff often experience similar benefits to corporate expatriates such as subsidized housing and larger personal incomes. The third rung in the class system constitutes smart slackers and other professionals who earn a living by working in Beijing, independent of any

corporation or government institution. This group includes people who came to Beijing on their own initiative and often end up teaching English as a second language or hold lower level management positions. The fourth rung is the foreign university students who spend most of their time studying Mandarin, Chinese calligraphy or traditional Chinese medicine at the local universities. The lowest rung are foreign tourists who enter the country on the standard thirty day holiday visa and who may spend part of their holiday socializing with the semi-permanent foreign workers in Bar Street. This class system is not rigid in Beijing; it is possible to move from the lower rungs, although there is exclusivity between the rungs. Corporate expatriates may belong to the Commerce Associations or privatized business groups, which accepts members who are executives and who can afford the 10,000 USD club fees. Even the embassy balls, usually open to any foreigner who can afford the 100 USD or more ticket ensures exclusivity as many foreign workers cannot afford to splurge on the ticket and the formal outfit needed to meet the strict dress codes. The villas and compounds found in the suburbs of Beijing are equipped with their own security fences, security guards and booths, nannies, house cleaners, drivers, shops, salons, and recreation centres. With rent prices as high as 10,000 USD a month, only a select few can afford that type of lifestyle in Beijing, emphasizing the diversity amongst the foreign workers along with providing feelings of class differentiation.

Nevertheless, the economic divide between the first three rungs in the class system is large enough that it is noticeable in the way members of each rung interact with one another. Many of the 'smart slackers' revealed to me that their desire was to move up the rungs, by securing better paid jobs and moving into Western style apartments. I

suggest that these informants distinguish elitism as part of a class system, with elites at the highest class, or first rung and that there exists opportunities for the lower rungs to raise their social status through work opportunities. Some 'smart slackers' may feel part of an elite group because their financial earning capabilities have found it possible to live a type of lifestyle that would not necessarily be as attainable in their homelands.

In her study of British port making families in Portugal, Jean Lave discusses the enclosed British social circles between port families and British management employees who serve the families. The enclaves of the major port makers and their exclusive social groups discussed. Family associated firms hold tours of their estates, allowing journalists and important customers to get a tour of port making and bottling in Oporto, Portugal while at the same time, the guests drink in private clubs, dine on elegant meals and savour port. The meaning behind these grand tours links the families reminding the journalists and customers of their social prestige.

The port gentry must work hard in order to maintain their privilege and status. Few families can vie for the power and influence in the port producing region. The sites of elitism surrounded in the daily social activities of the British such as attending church service, school and club functions, in order to reassure the families of their roles in society. The gentry's roots date back to the eighteenth century when British merchants first traded in Oporto. Their families would later join them and the interest in the vineyards grew into a dominating trade of port wine. Contemporary problems have arisen however, with the emblematic British enclave not contributing as much to Portugal's economy as port exports have been in decline. The tours, which the gentry's

families and corporations host act as a reminder of the communal life that serves their elite status although this may be a distorted reality (Lave, 2002: 169).

Lave argues that the community of British port makers along with the combination of the family and the corporation and the British expatriate men who manage their affairs have created an exclusive and elite community. The duties of maintaining the community divides with the men handling the “executive” affairs while their wives contribute their services to the other work involved in the institutions of the community. The exclusion of all others, mainly the Portuguese is one tool used by these elite families to maintain their presence and influence in Oporto. The influence of the port gentry based through kinship ties and although there are outside contributions such as Portuguese financing, British expatriate managers and pillars of the community their support to these old families reinforce the power and influence they have in Oporto. The port making families believe that their lives will continue or improve as offspring continue the family business (Lave, 2002: 169).

The subjects of Lave’s research, had build roots in Oporto, with a family history, kinship ties and tradition to port making in that region. Yet in Beijing, there is an economic power held by multi-national corporations and individual entrepreneurs. Independent foreign workers use their skills and higher education to seek out employment opportunities while participating in an expatriate community largely found in Bar Street.

However, the guesswork involved in locating elites is easier by the establishment of private business clubs and formal engagements such as balls and charities. Wealth in Beijing is evident with the sight of new housing complexes developed along with

imported luxury cars driven. However, it is not so evident who the owners are, nor is it evident how much wealth these individuals have amassed. There are no official tours around the villas and private clubs; however, there are charities, publicly run by many of the expatriate wives who invest their time in setting up or managing charitable organizations. For 'smart slackers', there is an awareness of the affluence that some foreigners have in Beijing, however, it is separated from their lives and most knowledge about these elites are gathered through networked gossip. I became acutely aware during my stay in Beijing that there were many foreigners who had social prestige and status that was rarely seen on Bar Street or in the surrounding areas in which 'smart slackers' lived. The class divide does not solely separates where people live; it also separates how people live their daily lives. 'Smart slackers' used the knowledge collected through the gossip channels to piece together what may occur in other people's lives, yet similar to the gaps of anthropological studies of elites, the empirical evidence on which they relied was limited.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at different forms of middle-class migration and work tourism. I chose to focus on the reversal migration from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere. Migration studies have largely focused on the South to North or below to above migration practices. However, with the rapid growth of many Asian markets, especially the Chinese market, social scientists may merit research into studying the migratory shift even though migration remains relatively small.

The globalization of the economic markets has led to a small, yet significant reduction of jobs in developed countries as outsourcing and deficit reduction programs

become more commonplace. Professionals from developed countries are increasingly facing demands for flexible mobility, unclear citizenship and work entitlements in foreign nations and family responsibilities. Those who choose to participate in the global market workforce are contributing to elite workforces who navigate across the globe using their work commitments to cross borders.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Introduction

In summary, this thesis concerns itself with one category among the growing number of foreign workers who are blurring the lines of migration. Equipping themselves with their academic achievements and limited professional experience, 'smart slackers' seek out adventure in Beijing, yet maintain that their stay albeit temporary, is part of their goal to achieve valuable work experience which they can later market in their homelands.

This research highlights the diversity and complexity of contemporary forms of migration. 'Smart slackers' do not fit comfortably into any form of migration. They blur the lines between expatriates, cosmopolitans, guest workers, and to a lesser degree, tourists. They borrow from each category without committing to any one such as working in white-collar jobs, which reflects the image of an expatriate. 'Smart slackers' are temporary workers, filling in shortages with an undecided although officially limited time frame. They rely on their professional capacity and education to further their travels, combining it with a limited attraction in touring Beijing.

Due to the blurring of these categories, 'smart slackers' are hard to define. Even though I have outlined the subtle class differences between different foreign workers in Beijing, the class system is not rigid and upward mobility is possible. Furthermore, the economic rewards are different for 'smart slackers', who make a lower salary and are often free-lance workers, in comparison to other foreign workers while the classic notion of expatriates has tended to be applied to people attached to sponsoring institutions such as government, corporate, military or colonial.

Although ‘smart slackers’ do not fit prevailing images of more humble migrant labourers, they represent a new kind of skilled migrant labour force, filling shortages in the lower rungs of white collar, managerial positions. At the same time, by maintaining employment, they are able to sustain themselves and prolong their stay in Beijing thus avoiding having to return home. “Smart slackers’ are not tourists, but this motivation to prolong their stay highlights work tourism. Employment enables ‘smart slackers’ to stay in a foreign country, one in which they have no family or professional commitments, but unlike tourists, the time of their departure is not fixed. Furthermore, ‘smart slackers’ tour principally one area of Beijing, Chaoyang District. During their sojourn in Beijing, they establish a home, a network of friends, and areas where they seek out entertainment. The narratives that I collected did not speak of these foreign workers looking to move on to another part of China. They established themselves in Beijing although they did not know for how long, and they all expressed the desire to eventually leave China and return to their homelands.

The ‘smart slackers’ rationale of ‘taking a break’ are clearly indicated in their narratives about escape, searching for adventure and taking advantage of the demand for foreign labour in China. However, being employed runs counter to the idea of ‘taking a break’. Much of that emphasis is on the notion that foreign experience is (more) valuable or useful in their homelands. Although this was repeated throughout the narratives recounted to me, few ‘smart slackers’ ever had prior foreign experience and could not specify when, where and how this experience would be used in their return to their homelands. I have some doubts about the value of foreign experience versus local experience. As mentioned in Chapter 4, I relate how my own past foreign experience

received a lukewarm reception my own return to Montreal. Human Resources personnel from several companies where I interviewed did not always view foreign experience as valuable as 'home experience' let alone as more valuable.

The research findings in this thesis show in part, that conditions are changing in many developing countries. More over, until recently, many developing countries sought foreign workers to fill in labour shortages, as foreign knowledge was valued. However, in China's case, outside experts are more contained; positions traditionally held by foreigners now appear to fill with local Chinese professionals.

The importance of work experience lacks the conjoint with the notion of gap years, which often means to be temporary, often short-term breaks between school years. Similar to gap years, other common interludes may involve a short-term interval when youths travel abroad between finishing school and beginning a career path. Other interludes may involve long-term travel combined with work. However, for many 'smart slackers', their interludes in China are an indefinite period of time spent abroad travelling and working while trying to decide what life and career path the individual traveler wishes to take upon returning to their homeland. The notion of interlude is appropriate here, although 'smart slackers' are older and are in a linear life cycle stage, they have not made definitive plans for their future. What largely defines 'smart slackers' is their uncertainty about their futures, and the vague notion that Beijing and their experiences there will aid them in choosing a career or a life path once they return to their homelands? However, most of my informants revealed that they were unsure when they would leave Beijing and although most taught English as a second language they did not perceive teaching English as a career prospect.

Most 'smart slackers' I encountered taught English as a second language even though their academic qualifications were in other fields. The abundance of job postings for foreign workers in Beijing are in the teaching sector, which does not require specialized training other than being a native speaker of the language and possessing good communication skills. The formal interviews revealed that most participants did not want to begin a career immediately after graduation although there were four who had begun careers and subsequently left them in order to travel. However, working in untrained fields does not fall into traditional views of travel such as planned business travel, tourism, seasonal migrant workers, and working holidays. The type of white-collar work and long-term travel 'smart slackers' are participating in requires transferable skills, qualifications (native speaker), and education (post-secondary).

The foreign workers I encountered were free-lance workers, and although they participated in tourist activities, they were not tourists because of their gainful employment. Bar Street is part of Beijing's tourism, and 'smart slackers' participate in tourist activities in the area. However, 'smart slackers' perceived Bar Street as an exclusive part of Beijing where familiar cultural practices took place and where like-minded people in a similar work situation sought friendships, romance and network expansion.

'Smart slackers' sought out pleasure and friendships with other foreign workers through leisure pursuits in Bar Street. Access to Bar Street allocates to foreign workers, from predominantly from Western countries, where English is the most widely spoken language in the area. It is an anglophile culture, and although no tourist or local Chinese patron has service refused from the establishments in Bar Street, 'smart slackers' create

their own boundaries by associating primarily with each other thus creating a divide between patrons. However, as foreign workers make up the largest number of Bar Street patrons, membership is clearly marked.

In looking at the narratives of 'smart slackers' it is clear that they often initially spent time learning about the local culture, taking language courses to learn or improve their Mandarin, sampling a range of culinary dishes, educating themselves in local customs, often by creating friendships with local Chinese. However, this was short lived. The first three months in Beijing, commonly referred to as the 'honeymoon period', which I argue is characteristic of the cosmopolitan attitude. 'Smart slackers' allow themselves to be introduced to new experiences by their Chinese friends, picking and choosing what they want to experience, similar to the cosmopolitan attitude described by Ulf Hannerz. Yet, after three months, many admitted to tiring of the 'Chinese experience' and opted for something more recognizable, such as Bar Street.

'Smart slackers' often considered themselves cosmopolitan because they lived in China, they had a degree of proficiency in Mandarin, they could navigate through local cultural meanings, and they had foreign friends who were not from the same country as themselves. They felt like they had a badge of recognition because they could live in Beijing.

Concluding Remarks

The absence of a rigid class system, the relative easy access to work visas in China and the higher standards of living most 'smart slackers' experienced in Beijing reflect a new world movement of travellers who are not youths taking a gap year, nor are they corporate expatriates fulfilling contractual obligations. Furthermore, many of the

'smart slackers' I encountered participated in tourist activities yet they did not identify with the foreign tourists in Beijing and did not fit the typical tourist model as they are employed in Beijing.

The findings in this thesis remind the reader that categories of migration are packed too tightly, thus not allowing for variation or subjectivity. I have examined how a group of free-lance, skilled workers whom I have referred to as 'smart slackers' represent a larger middle-class migration who travel not solely for either business or leisure, but in a calculated combination of both which separates them from being either wholly an expatriate or a tourist. Although 'smart slackers' are fulfilling employment obligations, these obligations were made independent from their departure from their homelands as they seek out employment (and in many cases, apply for work visas) upon arrival in Beijing. However, even without corporate support, 'smart slackers' remain expatriates. They are white-collar workers, and not humble migrant workers, they leave their homelands in search of adventure and employment opportunities.

This type of expatriate worker, who seeks to combine travel and work into an interlude, is not unique to Beijing. Possible future research could focus on similar travellers in other locations around the world and the kind of lives and experiences of these expatriates. Another research angle could concentrate on what occurs when these expatriates return home, what kind of employment they find, if their foreign experience benefits the individual or what kind of influence their foreign travels have on their plans, if any.

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