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LOSERS AND WINNERS

WORK IS JUST A PART OF LIFE

A DOCUMENTARY BY
ULRIKE FRANKE AND MICHAEL LOEKEN
GERMANY 2006 | 96 MIN.
35 MM | COLOUR | DOLBY SR
WWW.LOSERS-AND-WINNERS.NET

400 Chinese workers break down the Kaiserstuhl coke factory in the Ruhr Valley into manageable parts and ship them back to their homeland: disassembly in the West – reassembly in the Far East. Dortmund's last coke workers find themselves helping the Chinese to dismantle their own workplace.

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WITH

Mo Lishi	Rainer Kruska
Liao Lianchun	Werner Vogt
Wu Guangyou	Gerd Seibel
Pan Jinhua	Peter Grimm
Han Yühong	
Wang Jianfeng	
Wu Hong Hu	
Liu Guo Heng	
Wang Zhi'an	
Lei Qing	
Zheng Xi	
Li Xingwang	
and many others...	

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CO-PRODUCER:
WDR
Goethe Institut

IN COLLABORATION WITH:
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SPONSORED BY:
Filmstiftung NRW

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This is "News from China" bringing you an update on our manned space flight. Today at 5:20 a.m. the launch ceremony began, with President Hu Jintao and other leading comrades in attendance: "I am convinced that you will remain calm and collected, with a clear head, and will master this great and honourable mission capably and courageously. We wish you great success in your endeavour and await your triumphant return."



THE FILM

For one and a half years, film-makers Ulrike Franke and Michael Loeken watch as a gigantic industrial site is dismantled, documenting the stories accompanying its disappearance: how the coke workers in the industrial Ruhr Region experience the arrival and working methods of the Chinese, their feelings upon seeing their pride in their work vanish along with what was the most modern coke factory in the world, but also the strain and conflicts the Chinese workers face during their 60-hour work week far away from home and family, caught between euphoria and doubts about their future.

Two worlds collide. But who is ultimately the winner and who the loser when jobs and the “economic miracle” that made them possible leave their country of origin and a whole region of Germany experiences first-hand the impact of the phenomenon of globalization, while in the Middle Kingdom new visions come and go with each passing day?



SYNOPSIS

In the centre of the Ruhr Valley the famous “heart-beat of steel” has gone silent. Almost imperceptibly, nature is reclaiming the once-busy factory halls and industrial sites. The conveyor belts have come to a standstill, the cooling towers are empty – after only eight years in operation, the ultra-modern coke plant at Kaiserstuhl, built at a cost of 1.3 billion DM, was shut down in December 2000.

Spring 2003: A Chinese worker dressed in the traditional blue labourer’s overall surveys the vast factory grounds, making marks on steel beams and walls. A new microcosm has sprung up in northern Dortmund, a small Chinese outpost – dynamic and efficient. A village of housing containers has been set up for some 400 Chinese – with community rooms, an industrial-size kitchen with giant woks, and satellite dishes so they can watch TV shows from home. Hungry for wealth and the status symbols of western industrial culture, scores of Breakdown workers have joined the Chinese project manager Mo Lishi in Germany, along with a young Interpreter and a few Cooks, in order to bring back to their homeland yet another “steel souvenir”. Highly motivated citizens of a low-wage country come face-to-face with financially better-off workers in an industrialized nation who are now suddenly bereft of future prospects – since the former are about to transfer the latter’s erstwhile source of power and prosperity to their own homeland.



The dismantling of Kaiserstuhl proceeds at breakneck speed, driven forward by constant pressure from corporate management and the promise of a few perks: Every four weeks the Chinese select the seven hardest workers amongst their ranks as "Workers of the Month". Their reward consists of a photo decorated with a sash of red paper flowers, hung on a canteen wall together with a few flowery, but in any case politically correct, words of praise.

Meanwhile, the German "shutdown managers" stand by and watch helplessly as their workplace is broken down into moveable sections. At Kaiserstuhl, where up to 800 people used to work, the last 30 employees are now supervising the so-called Shutdown Department – including electricians Rainer Kruska (53) and Werner Vogt (52).

Among the Germans, who are supposed to provide logistical support for the dismantling process, a mood of scepticism and a distanced stance prevail with regard to Chinese colleagues and what they view as their careless methods. Communication between the two groups is difficult, misunderstandings a daily event. By 10 o'clock in the morning, half of the shift is already over for the German workforce. During their breakfast break, they talk over coffee and rolls about the financial losses they will suffer due to their enforced early retirement, and they speculate about the Chinese workers' attitude toward life, their working techniques and their cooking. The dismantling forges ahead, unstoppable, daily parading before their eyes the loss of Germany's, and indeed Europe's, industrial work base. For the Ruhr Valley workers, this is a stab in the heart, for they have worked all their lives in the coke industry.

The workday for the Chinese is considerably longer: they toil sixty hours a week, live in common quarters and save every penny for home. Some want their children to enjoy a better education. Liu Guo Heng is saving for a yearned-for, but expensive, wedding. The cook wants to purchase shares in his employer's company, increasingly convinced of its prospects for success. But first, their mission abroad must be completed – entailing one and a half years without a visit home. Chinese television and infrequent phone calls to wives and children constitute the men's only contact with their homeland. "Say 'Daddy' to me one more time", requests one man, and thousands of kilometres away a child sings a song for his much-missed father. All in a desperate attempt to feel somehow closer to loved ones so far away.



The Chinese have neither the time nor the money to get to know Germany, or even Dortmund; a bus ticket into town seems far too expensive, even with what is by Chinese standards a bountiful monthly pay check of 400 euros. Only project manager Mo Lishi is in a position to visit the city once in a while. His favourite destination is the Mercedes dealership, where he can marvel at steel in what is for him its most perfect form. "This car is very good", he remarks with satisfaction, grinning from ear to ear. "I'm going to take one home with me." His tiny cubbyhole at Kaiserstuhl, in which he both lives and works, is adorned with a Mercedes poster showing both an older and newer model by the German automaker. Inspired by its message, Mo Lishi has written a few personal lines about those who depart and the new ones who come and can look forward to a life full of promise. After all, Mo Lishi is convinced that he will soon be sitting behind the wheel of a new car and driving off into a better future – just like all of China. During his next visit to Germany, Mo Lishi says, he would love to be able to take the German Airbus factories back home with him.

There is rarely any contact between the German and the Chinese workers; they merely eye each other warily from a distance. The tools of the trade favoured by the Germans are rules and regulations for safety and environmental protection – just the things the newcomers like to ignore. They use tricks to try to circumvent the rules – after all, the "old foreigners" are hardly present at the site for



more than eight hours at a time, and what they don't see won't hurt them. But the remaining German workers at Kaiserstuhl insist on asserting their authority – right up to the bitter end. With his expert background, Kruska makes sure that the Chinese don't simply "do whatever they want to". Improvised electrical connections are dismantled again, ladders precariously connected by wire are pulled away from the ceiling and disposed of, welding regulations are cited for the umpteenth time. It seems as though the Germans are unable to let go, as if they unconsciously want to delay the dismantling and simply cannot resign themselves to their final loss of power and the reversal of roles. The view of the German's fastidiousness when it comes to following rules changes, however, when a Chinese worker almost dies in an accident – a "small work mishap" for which the only remedy proffered by the Chinese consists of quotations from Mao.

The last time he walks through the field of rubble that once was the grounds of the coke plant, Kruska opens circuit boxes and doors, presses switches that have long lost their function, gazes into disembowelled cable shafts and tries to uphold the appearance of a routine check – but he and his German colleagues have changed during these final weeks of the breakdown. The confidently triumphant proclamation "They'll see – it will never work!" is no longer heard. The Germans are increasingly tense and sad – along with their workplace, they are also losing a piece of their homeland. Creeping insecurity can be felt as to what concrete impact the impending changes will have on their own lives. How is it possible to keep busy when no longer working, and what will it be like to be at home with the wife all day long? Even before the plant is completely disassembled, Kruska and Vogt are changed to a status called "Short-time work 0", then to "Adjustment" and finally to early retirement. None of these terms is sufficient to describe the fact that there is no longer any work for them in this society; there seems to be no need for them anymore, nor indeed for their entire occupation. What they cannot foresee is that all the economic forecasts will prove wrong and the sale of the coke plant a tragic mistake. Today, there is spiralling demand for coke on the world market, spurred not least by the booming economy in China itself. The price per ton of coke went up in the years after Kaiserstuhl shut down from 30 to 550 dollars – as if globalization had a bitter sense of ironic humour and had chosen Dortmund-Mitte of all places as its punch line.



"As far as work discipline is concerned, it's only a question of solidarity. It's like a troop unit at war. If all troops show solidarity, they win the battle; otherwise they lose. What's important is that they are aware of their responsibility to each other. You might call it a collective feeling of glory. This is the only way can we become invincible – so get used to it."

Li Xing Wang,
head of the steelworks



Your film documents the dismantling of the Kaiserstuhl coke factory in Dortmund by a big Chinese corporation, resulting in the loss of hundreds of jobs to the Far East. When and how did you find out that this was happening?

ULRIKE FRANKE: I was born and grew up in Dortmund, so to speak in the shadow of the blast furnaces. My parents' allotment garden bordered on the grounds of the Westfalen steel-works. Michael comes from a town close to the Ruhr Valley and we both feel very closely bound up with the people here and with the region. That's why we are interested in the region's development. We found out about the impending disassembly of Kaiserstuhl while doing research on another topic. The fact that the Chinese are breaking down entire industrial complexes in Germany and shipping them off to China is in itself nothing new; they've been doing that since the mid-1980s. Zündapp was the first plant to go, and others followed. Kaiserstuhl, however, was an industrial site that was still the most modern in the world at the time of its shutdown in 2000, after being in operation for only eight years. We felt compelled to take a closer look.



Which concrete aspects and conflicts ultimately motivated you to tell the story of the plant's disappearance?

MICHAEL LOEKEN: After visiting the site a few times and becoming acquainted with some of the possible protagonists, we learned that 400 Chinese were to come over and the last of the German workers at the coke factory would help them to dismantle their own workplace. It was clear that this was a perfect story for a documentary. Everything fit: it was an exciting subject, and there were good protagonists – seasoned, authentic Ruhr Valley people. The unity of place and time was right; the breakdown was to take two years and everything would take place on the grounds of the coke factory – in a microcosm in which two utterly disparate cultures would come together and be expected to work side by side. How would that work out? We anticipated that it would be suspenseful, very bizarre, very funny, but also quite serious and sad. The storyline that would unfold here was impossible to predict. And based on the personal fates, the "small" stories, one would be able to get an idea of the "big picture", the state of the world. That's a stroke of luck for any filmmaker.

Was it easy to obtain permission to shoot from those in charge on both the German and Chinese sides, and to persuade them to play a role in the film?

M.L.: We quickly met with approval from the official side and were granted permission to shoot. We were also given our own passes with which we could visit the site whenever we wanted to. The main work in a documentary is to win the trust of the protagonists. That took some time. We got to know their work routine, their daily habits. This included a hearty breakfast with treacherously strong coffee, and rolls with raw minced pork and onions at nine o'clock in the morning. We became familiar with their work and their anxieties, their inability to comprehend why their state-of-the-art plant, their pride and joy, was being given up and they were being let go to face an uncertain future. We also learned of their resentment against the Chinese and were sometimes embarrassed by how they talked about them. When the Chinese then came onto the scene, it was different because we could at first not communicate on the level of language. But with time our respect for their work and sincere interest in them as people and their lives built trust and granted us access. Personal relationships developed with certain people, and they then became the protagonists in our film.



How long did shooting last altogether? Where did you face difficulties, where were you pleasantly surprised?

M.L.: We accompanied the entire dismantling of the coke factory with the camera – that is, over a period of one and a half years, during which we spent over one hundred days on the grounds shooting. At the beginning of the project, we first had to get to know the exact processes and communication structures in order to be able to understand what was going on. What's more, we didn't have a budget until shooting was half over. We were unable to interest any of the television stations in the topic; maybe we didn't try long or hard enough. But we knew we wanted to shoot the film and we had to start because the breakdown was getting underway and we couldn't wait any longer. Back then we always said: the Chinese are breaking down this gigantic factory faster than we Germans can procure financing for a documentary. Now that the film is finished, we have to admit in all fairness that they rebuilt the plant in China faster than we were able to edit our film. At any rate, since we didn't have a budget, we not only directed the film, but also did the sound and camerawork ourselves. It was a wonderful experience. Immediacy, a very intimate situation, freedom. It was liberating: you film differently, the way you always wanted to, without consideration for formats or specifications. An enriching, worthwhile experience.

U.F.: At some point, after a relatively short time, we were simply part of the breakdown process. We were there at the site before the Chinese arrived, and they immediately got to know and accept us as part of the plant – even though in the beginning they did show some shyness and scepticism. I think at first they thought we were there to keep an eye on them, but in the course of the dismantling work they came to trust us more and more and opened up to us.

How did you manage to get close to the protagonists? How did you communicate with the Chinese workers – were there interpreters who accompanied you during the shooting?

M.L.: We spoke with people at length about their lives, their families and their points of view and regularly asked them to explain their work to us. They could sense that we took a sincere interest in them and that made it possible to build mutual trust. Alone the fact that we were at the site from early morning until late evening, in every kind of weather, convinced them that we took our work seriously.

U.F.: In the first few weeks, we could only communicate with the Chinese using gestures. It was

a special situation that took some getting used to. We learned that people can communicate even without speaking each other's language, because you can see emotions. This was a very valuable experience, incidentally, because after all, a documentary is ideally about images and sounds that speak a universal language and should be able to get by without too many words. The further shooting progressed, however, the more we depended on the help of the interpreters. Only then could we ask detailed questions about things we had previously only suspected or felt.

In "Loser and Winners" two (work) cultures come up against each other that could not be more different. How did you experience the encounter between the German and Chinese workers behind the camera?

U.F.: The Chinese came to Dortmund to accomplish something: namely, to procure a factory that in technical terms would put them ahead by decades and grant them a secure future. The Germans, by contrast, were involved in a process of destruction – they had to help dismantle their own workplace. For the one side, the breakdown is a step to a brighter future, while the others are losing something they thought would always be there for them. Under these circumstances, the willingness to get to know each other and reach out to the others is naturally very limited. In addition, the Chinese workers had a 60-hour work-week to master. They worked very, very hard – under massive pressure from management, mind you, but also with a clear goal in front of them and driven by the vision of a better life one day. This is the kind of wishful thinking that people here know only from the days of the Economic Miracle of the fifties. The German workers for their part couldn't leave the site fast enough at the end of their shift, except for on a few official occasions. At their workplace they could no longer find an answer to the question of what their future would hold.

M.L.: The two groups really made no attempt to get closer. Among the Germans, a certain arrogance was noticeable – more or less pronounced depending on company rank. As builders of the most modern coke factory in the world, they apparently felt superior. They had no desire to learn anything from the Chinese. They laughed at the way the Asians worked, incredulous at how often they had to improvise. They confiscated tools the Chinese had cobbled together as proof of their inferiority or backwardness. This reflects the typical European pride vis-à-vis the so-called Third World. The Chinese for their part gave the Germans the feeling that they themselves were "the



greatest", having always achieved what they wanted using their own methods.

Towards the end of the film, the German workers speak out incredibly openly about their feelings in the face of losing their work and their home. Which side did you find more open and accessible – the Germans or the Chinese?

U.F.: Trust in us and our project only developed slowly, over the course of time. There was in principle no difference, even though it was of course easier to hold a conversation with the German workers because of our common language. I think that the protagonists also became interested in us, in the sense that we gave them a chance to express their feelings – whether their grief at the loss, their pride in their work and accomplishments, or their hopes and wishes for the future. I believe that the Chinese found it unusual that we showed so much interest in and respect for them and their work. They felt honoured and appreciated.

M.L.: From the very beginning, we were able to develop a good relationship with the protagonists Kruska and Vogt. They were really hurt by the fact that they would no longer be needed in the future, but they hid their disappointment behind a mask of toughness and were happy to be able to show someone what the Chinese were up to and how they were breaching German safety regulations. But the real reason why they agreed to show us around their place of work was to demonstrate that they still had the place under control. We developed a good mutual understanding. And I think that the film was also appropriate for them as a platform allowing them to directly express their emotions and their fears.

"Losers and Winners" breathes life into the omnipresent and yet still somehow abstract concept of globalization, making it more tangible. To what extent did both of you find that your personal view of this theme was influenced by your work on the film?

U.F.: It was never our intention to illustrate concepts like "globalization" or "work culture" with our film, let alone to explain them. Instead, our focus was on the people, who told us their stories and, with them, conveyed a palpable image of the drastic changes that are taking place in today's society.

M.L.: The workers in Germany are not prepared to face these changes. They don't want to believe that the people of the so-called Third World have begun to sally forth and pocket the wealth that we in countries like Germany have for so long taken for granted.

You did most of the camerawork and sound yourselves. The unusual atmosphere of the location and the out-of-the-ordinary conjunction of two dissonant cultures of work and life would surely be a windfall for any filmmaker, but also present a major challenge when filming on a shoestring. Did you have a specific visual concept in mind from the very beginning with which you approached the object under observation?

M.L.: We agreed early on that we did not want to succumb to the gigantism of industry and technology. That would have been out of the question anyway on our budget, and would not fit in with our approach. We were much more interested in getting as close as possible to the people involved and in accompanying them without letting the technical details get in the way. In our case, a lack of funds turned out to be a blessing. Being equipped with all the technical conveniences, with options for using light, dollies and so forth, definitely holds a fascination for us, but telling people's stories on film in an authentic, true-to-life way is our first priority. Technology comes second.

You already started the project in 2003, in a sense spearheading what would become a major contemporary theme – China's economic boom and its consequences have by now become a fixed component of media reporting. How are you experiencing current developments on this front, and how do you view them in connection with the theatrical release of "Losers and Winners"?

U.F.: We never intended to make a film about an issue that is explicitly up-to-the-minute, but rather about material that goes beyond the area commonly explored in the media. A film that does not first and foremost convey information, but instead portrays people's emotions and stories: what makes them happy, what scares them, the loss of their jobs and with them their identity, their visions for the future, their hopes and dreams. Naturally, we also wanted to show how these emotions are expressed, namely through small stories that are often outrageous or funny, sometimes full of meanness and trickery, at once fascinating or endlessly sad. In any case, stories that everyone knows and with which we can all identify. The fact that this all takes place against the backdrop of the debate on raw materials supply of course plays a role in our film, and it makes the situation of the people in it more comprehensible.

Today, the situation on the world market has changed drastically. Now that coke prices have gone up precipitously, no one can deny that it was a major mistake to sell the Kaiserstuhl coke factory to China. How do you think your film will be received – in particular in the Ruhr Valley? Which discourses would you like to spark with your project?

U.F.: Of course, we hope first of all that the people who took part in the film and are directly affected



will be pleased with the result, and that we were able to do the protagonists and the situation justice. The film also has general relevance beyond the specific situation in the Ruhr Valley. Many people know what it's like to lose their job, or at least have experienced how important work is in shaping our identity. "Winning" and "losing" in life means something to almost everyone. And everybody is familiar with the human weaknesses, meanness and small tricks with which our protagonists fight their way through life. If the viewer can identify with these stories, if he can feel empathy and smile or laugh on top of it, we would be very gratified.

Your film is called "Losers and Winners". Whom do you see as the winners in your documentary, and who are the losers?

M.L.: The viewer has to decide that for himself. We had the impression that, at least in terms of the workers, the losers are on both sides, as opposed to their employers higher up in the corporate hierarchy. On the one hand, the Chinese, who almost blindly chase the vision of a better future, working under brutal conditions that give reason to fear that they might not come out of the boom in one piece. And on the other hand the Germans, who are not only losing their workplace, but are also being robbed of their prospects for the future and their homeland. How they come to terms with the psychological problems involved – with the massive loss of identity, for example – remains to be seen.

Interview: Frank Domhan



A film that does not first and foremost convey information, but instead portrays people's emotions and stories: what makes them happy, what scares them, the loss of their jobs and with them their identity, their visions for the future, their hopes and dreams.



DECONSTRUCTING THE WEST

A few rusty signs are all that is left of what was once the heart of the German coal and steel industry – with the decommissioning of the Dortmund coking plant at Kaiserstuhl one of the last relics of the age of coal, iron and steel in the Ruhr has disappeared. Deutsche Steinkohle (DSK), a subsidiary of the RAG Group had big plans for this facility when it opened its doors in 1992 after a five-year construction period. The plant cost? **650 million euros to build and was the most modern of its type in the world. It was to supply the neighbouring steelworks of the former Hoesch AG with coke for many years – according to a long-term contract which envisaged that German steel works would buy German coke.**

When the contract ran out in 1999 however and Hoesch was swallowed up by the Krupp Group, the local industry changed direction and faced East: from that point on the coke was bought from China and Poland – where it cost fifteen euros less per ton. This was the beginning of the end for Kaiserstuhl. The final nail in the coffin came at the end of the '90s when Thyssen and Krupp merged and decided to concentrate their joint production in Duisburg. The Dortmund location was then retired: after only eight years of operation, the furnaces of Kaiserstuhl were shut down and the 450 or so workers were moved to other DSK plants or sent to join the ranks of the unemployed.

THE DEAL

Brazil, India, South Africa – many countries were interested in the Dortmund plant, but none wanted to offer anything higher than the scrappage price. Only Luan Wei, head of the Bochum trading house Famous Industrial was prepared to invest in the coking plant including disassembly and transport – a deal worth? 60 million in total, a fact which became known despite the confidentiality agreement concluded between the negotiation partners. Experts surmise that the pure purchase price corresponds to about half of that amount.

Luan felt that the enormous demand for steel in China's booming economy and his good connections with his native country would make it easier for him to sell the coking plant on to a

Chinese firm. This was a very risky venture, despite the fact that he had already taken a number of factories from Europe to the "Middle Kingdom" – including 48 industrial facilities that were considered inefficient in Germany such as the coal processing plants in Bergkamen and Hückelhoven. Luan's gamble paid off. In January 2003, just two months after signing the contract with DSK, a major player expressed its interest: **the state company, Yangkuang, wanted to acquire the plant for the town of Jining in the north eastern province of Shandong and quickly sent the first engineers to Dortmund, to plan what was one of the largest industrial relocations in history and simultaneously the first ever relocation of a coking plant in the world.**

Since that time, the Chinese demand for foreign factories has continued to grow and Luan's lucrative business is flourishing. For Famous Industrial the search for decommissioned coking plants and other factories goes on. The "Golden Age of Disassembly" has begun.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE RUHR

Three years after Kaiserstuhl was decommissioned the world market was impacted by a development that blindsided the German steel industry: **the growing economic boom in China boosted demand for steel and thus also for coke. Consequently the price of coke skyrocketed from 30 dollars to 550 dollars per ton. Steel became so expensive that medium-sized metal processors here in Germany were severely hit.** German industry now wanted Kaiserstuhl back as the three remaining coking plants in the Ruhr region – the Bottrop plant, Prosper, the coking plant, Schwelgern and the Krupp Mannesmann smelting works – had long been working at the very limits of their capacities. A self-made plight, from which they are attempting to escape via new building measures; no-one wants to be wholly dependent on imported coal anymore nor do they wish to be at the mercy of the capricious fluctuations in the global market. In 2005 therefore the Krupp Mannesmann smelting works applied for a permit to expand and also decided to redevelop the central coking plant of Saar GmbH, Dillingen. In the meantime, RAG has also announced plans to build another coke coal mine in Hamm. Thus coke is returning to the Ruhr and a region that believed that structural change was already behind it is coming face to face with its past once again, although in much altered form: because for most – in particular the former coke workers from Kaiserstuhl – this development is a few years too late.



CONSTRUCTING THE FAR EAST

In the interim, the German steel industry has had to recognize that the world market for coke is now dominated by Peking. The numbers speak for themselves: with some 200 million tons, China met approximately 45 per cent of global demand in 2004 – and the rate is rising. Of the some 700 coking plants across the country, however, only 31 are producing more than one million tons of coke per annum. A fact which lead to a huge modernization and expansion program which also included the purchase and disassembly of modern plants in Germany and other countries. The jewel in the crown of the European acquisitions continues to be the Kaiserstuhl coking plant, which was re-assembled like a giant jigsaw puzzle in Shandong, a strategically favourable region between the huge metropolises of Peking and Shanghai, and re-commissioned. **With the purchase of the plant, the new operators Yangkuang also secured all drawings and plans, which have enabled it to use this new technology across China.** In the meantime, the industry giant has built several coking plants at various locations on the basis of the Kaiserstuhl model, each of which is capable of an annual production capacity of two million tons of coke and is thus making a significant contribution to covering the growing demand for coke in China and throughout the world.

THE DRAGON IS AWAKE

Napoleon Bonaparte once compared China to a sleeping dragon and foretold that when it awoke it would move the world. His prediction has come to pass. In the past two decades, the Communist Party, with a mighty heave and a sharper capitalist approach, has given the country a completely new infrastructure and thus laid the foundations for a major economic boom. In the intervening period, the "Middle Kingdom" has visibly altered the ranking of the most important countries in the industrial world. As the third largest exporting nation in the world, it already ranks ahead of archrival Japan, and experts reckon that in a few years, China will depose Germany as the no. 1 exporter. Because today in China there are 109 million factory workers – more than twice the 53 million boasted by all of the G7 countries combined. China is set to build on this lead even further in the coming years, not least because a formidable share of global industrial concerns and even medium-sized companies are moving their production operations to this low-wage paradise. **It is therefore simply a question of time**

before the Research and Development divisions also go east, after all some 550,000 newly qualified engineers and scientists graduate from Chinese universities every year – more than three times the number of a decade ago.

Even though the risks grow daily along with the opportunities, everyone from the worker on the factory floor to the leader at the top of the party are dreaming of a "Chinese century" – with good reason: China is developing faster than any other country and given that hundreds of millions of workers in the rural regions of this vast country are waiting in the wings for their chance, there is no end in sight. 10.2% in the past year, 9.5% this year, 8.8% for 2007 – according to the Asian Development Bank, this is the rate at which China is growing. Faced with this development, many people here at home are asking the question: where does the West stand? The fear of being overtaken by the Far East and of missing the boat reached Germany and Europe long ago, concrete answers on the other hand have yet to arrive. While Luis de Leon, Managing Director of Deutsche Bergbautechnik, calls for Germans to become more like the Chinese this industrial giant is itself increasingly checking out the greener pastures offered by China: some 2,000 German companies have bought into joint ventures in China as a result of the Asian-Pacific committee of the Deutsche Wirtschaft – Thyssen-Krupp and RAG among them.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR CHINA

The changes in China affect all areas of life and cannot be ignored: even the taxi drivers in the major Chinese cities are finding it increasingly difficult not to lose their way in cityscapes that change on a daily basis. A transformation without precedent is underway and those Chinese who can afford the turnaround are welcoming it with open arms – whatever the cost. While prices rise and the majority of the approx. 1.3 billion Chinese are becoming increasingly impoverished, consumer spending amongst the growing middle classes appears to be escalating exorbitantly.

Finally they want to have the life that has long been the standard elsewhere on the globe: holidays, expensive weddings, branded goods from the West and a good education for their children – all of this costs money but is indispensable for those who wish to be winners in this boom economy.

Economic success has brought optimism to China. More than 75 per cent of Chinese people are currently convinced that their personal situation will improve. This is the result of a global



survey of 17 selected countries in which no industrial nation achieved more than 48% (USA). China is the world champion of confidence – according to the results of the Pew Research Center in Washington D.C. Gone are the days when Chinese people abroad pretended to be Japanese out of shame. Nowadays people are more proud than ever to belong to the ambitious Chinese people.

The notion that capitalism is a “colonial exploitation system” has likewise been consigned to the dustbin of history. Instead more and more Chinese people are enjoying the market economy; it promises them prosperity as we know it in Germany, the home of the Mercedes, which is the kind of standard they aspire to even if the lifestyles and work practices of the Germans leave them somewhat flabbergasted: the fact that a German engineer only works 1,650 hours a year is incomprehensible to them, after all the statutory working year in China is 2,500 hours. Or why the Germans have such an interest in environmental protection and waste their time weeding their gardens for example or cooking for their families themselves is very difficult for the Chinese to understand. Instead they have experts who perform this work faster and better and help people to use their time more effectively and profitably. Because in the “Middle Kingdom” time is increasingly becoming a resource that is in short supply. The tradition, for example, of meeting up with friends and ‘putting the world to rights’ is only rarely cultivated amongst Chinese people. In Peking or Shanghai, breaks like this have come to be considered a luxury.

Such musings and comparisons with other countries are, sure enough, the preserve of only a minority of Chinese people. The majority who live on the land and still make up more than 60% of the entire population are experiencing hard times. Farmers and workers, who were taught from the books of Confucius and Mao that all Chinese are equal, are at risk of being entirely forgotten as a result of this current development. They cannot understand why some people suddenly have more money while their situation has hardly changed or even in some cases deteriorated drastically. Thus grows the gulf between the rich and the poor, a gulf which is constantly fuelling the anger directed at the new affluent class and the government.

The fear of social unrest is increasing; the insurgence that led to the civil conflict in the South Chinese province of Guangdong in December 2005 was an early herald of problems to come. That situation was due to a dispute about land which the farmers of Guangdong had lost to the state authorities and their real estate brokers, while at

the same time arable land all over China is falling victim to the devastating effects of environmental pollution. Contaminated rivers, erosion and desertification are making the very basis of the agricultural way of life entirely impossible in many cases.

City life is also affected by this. Thick smog blankets every medium-sized town and puts the health of the townsfolk at risk. The outlook for the future is even bleaker: in 2010, according to the forecasts of the Chinese academy for environmental planning, air pollution will be the primary cause of premature death for hundreds of thousands of people in China’s major cities.

According to the World Bank, environmental damage will cost China five per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in the future, a figure which finally forced the National People’s Congress to take the decision in March 2006 that pursuing economic growth with no regard to its cost in environmental terms was no longer an option. Thus it was determined that energy consumption would be reduced by 20% within four years, while water consumption should fall by 30% and contaminant emissions by 10%. These goals, however, do not appear to be feasible given the miserly funds earmarked for the state environmental authority, SEPA. If one considers that the Baden-Württemberg Ministry for the Environment and Transport has an annual budget of 2 billion euros and SEPA is working with a budget of only 30 million euros, then the inadequacy of the funds in China is immediately evident.

A large portion of the total 68 million euros in development aid provided to China by Germany (as at 2005) is also being directed into environmental protection programs. The question however is: for how long more? Most recently, since Angela Merkel’s first official visit to China the debate has raged in Germany as to how Germans should now deal with the “Giant of the Far East”: is China a developing country in need of support or a high-tech country that is to be feared? Opinions vary – now more than ever.



LOEKENFRANKE

The film production company loekenfranke is dedicated to documentary film, irrespective of format. The content, the story, is what's most important. It has to be interesting, suspenseful and emotionally moving. Everything depends on good protagonists and the relationship we develop with them. The cinematic format follows the content. Reality is our inexhaustible resource, as perceived through our own subjective viewpoint.

FESTIVAL PARTICIPATION (selected)

Berlin International Film Festival, International Documentary Film Festival Munich, International Documentary Film Festival Leipzig, Duisburg, The New Festival New York, Umea, Cork Film Festival, Max Ophüls Festival Saarbrücken, Film Festival Mainz, Lünen, Poel, International Film Festival Würzburg, Diagonale Graz, Febio Festival Prague

AWARDS/NOMINATIONS

2003

German Film Award (nomination)
Soldatenglück und Gottes Segen
Best Documentary

2002

Audience Award at Film Festival in Mainz
Herr Schmidt und Herr Friedrich

2001

Grimme Award (nomination)
Herr Schmidt und Herr Friedrich

2000

Grimme Award (nomination)
Ein Sommer und eine Liebe, Folge 1-4
(Director: Dieter Bongartz)

1999

Grimme Award (nomination)
Und vor mir die Sterne

FILMS (directed by Ulrike Franke, Michael Loeken)

SCHIFFERKINDER (in preparation)
feature-length documentary | 35 mm

LOSERS AND WINNERS
96 min. | feature-length documentary
35 mm | 2006
WDR/ARTE and Goethe Institute

WENN DER TOD UNS SCHEIDET
Leben nach dem Abschied
90 min. | documentary | 2005
NDR

DIE LIEBE BLEIBT
Wenn der Ehepartner stirbt
43 min. | documentary | 2005
NDR

SOLDATENGLÜCK UND GOTTES SEGEN
Über das Leben im Einsatz
90 min. | feature-length documentary
35 mm | 2003
WDR/Arte | Distributor: Real Fiction
Special commendation

DIE REISE ZU DEN WALEN
... und andere Kinderträume
75 min. | documentary | 2002
NDR

HERR SCHMIDT UND HERR FRIEDRICH
73 min. | feature-length documentary
35 mm | 2001
NDR | distributed by GMfilms
Special commendation

UND VOR MIR DIE STERNE
Das Leben der Schlagersängerin
Renate Kern
90 min. | feature-length documentary
35 mm | 1998
NDR/Arte | distributed by Salzgeber

PRODUCTIONS

ENTFÜHRT
Menschenraub im Kalten Krieg
53 min. | documentary | 2004
WDR/Arte | directed by Erika Fehse

EIN SOMMER UND EINE LIEBE
5 x 30 min. | docusoap | 1999/2000
WDR | directed by Dieter Bongartz

**DIRECTORS**

Ulrike Franke, born 1970 in Dortmund. Studied theatre, film and television, romance literature and art history in Cologne. Received educational grant from the Filmstiftung NRW in 1992 in the field of film directing. Continuous work on various television and feature films. Has worked since 1996 as author, director and producer. Lecturer on documentary film at the isf – International Film School Cologne, member of AG DOK and from 2001 to 2005 on the board of the Filmbüro NW.

Michael Loeken, born 1954 in Neviges. Studied theatre, film and television in Cologne. Wrote screenplay and directed documentary "Ich hatte schon begonnen, die Freiheit zu vergessen" in 1981. From 1982 to 1996 worked as sound mixer on several documentaries and fiction films for TV and cinema. Has worked since 1996 as author, director and producer. Member of AG DOK and the award committee for film funding of the Filmbüro NW (2002) as well as in the Production II award committee for the Filmstiftung NW (2003).

CINEMATOGRAPHY

A large portion of the camerawork was done by filmmaker Michael Loeken himself; Rüdiger Spott joined him as cinematographer for the last third of the project.

Rüdiger Spott received his training as cinematographer at the GDR television academy and has worked as projectionist and theatre photographer. Since 1984 he has acted as TV consultant for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on television projects in Africa, Barbados and Lebanon, and since 1988 as freelance cinematographer with a focus on documentary film. In addition to several features for public and private television stations in Germany, he has also done camerawork for films for the BBC and PBS TV, USA.

EDITING

Guido Krajewski is managing director of the postproduction firm Cut Company in Cologne. Since the early 1990s he has been editor of several cinema and television productions – including the documentary THE FINAL KICK (1994, directed by Andi Rogenhagen), The Big Pink (1994, directed by Kolin Schult), NICO ICON (1995, directed by Susanne Oferinger) and East Side Story (1997, directed by Dana Ranga and Anrew Horn) as well as various Tatort television shows featuring Detective Schimanski, and Wilsberg episodes.

MUSIC

Maciej Sledziecki, born in Danzig, studied music at the Prins Claus Conservatoire in the Netherlands. He has lived and worked in Cologne since 1997, creating scores for many television and cinema productions (including ALLEIN by Thomas Durchschlag) as well as working on improvised music and free composition. Sledziecki was persuaded to do the score for LOSERS AND WINNERS after he had seen the edited version and was certain that, "the film had a power and topicality that could be excellently supported by music". It was agreed that original Chinese music would be used in part, but not to plagiarize Chinese music in the score. Instead, Sledziecki's music for LOSERS AND WINNERS, while based on Asian harmonies and melodies, underscores the fact that the context is always the European point of view of a foreign culture.



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