



# CHINA REVERSE

A documentary by **Judith Benedikt**

A 2014, 91min



## Credits

Director & DOP: **Judith Benedikt**  
Research & Script: **Judith Benedikt, Gregor Stadlober**  
Sound & Sound Design: **Andreas Hamza**  
Assistant Director & Translation: **Weina Zhao**  
Editors: **Andrea Wagner, Niki Mossböck**  
Assistant Editing: **Peter Jaitz**  
Postproduction: **AV-Design – Uli Grimm**  
Color Correction: **Klaus Pamminer**  
Sound Mixer: **Synchrofilm – Alexander Koller**  
Graphics: **Gisela Hesser**  
Producer: **Peter Janecek**

**27th February in cinemas**

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## Press

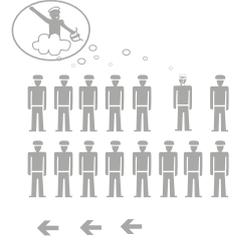
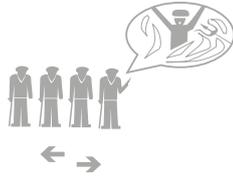
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Trailer  
**http://vimeo.com/117317742**

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## Short Synopsis

Most of them ended up in Vienna by chance, working in a Chinese restaurant to earn enough money to start their own business or pay for more relatives to come as well. It was a life of endless work. Only when they could finally relax somewhat, vital questions started to emerge.

China Reverse questions everything, without asking much. Life could have been so different - not in Europe, but in China. Those who stayed, took advantage of the economic boom.

For some, there's still time to jump on the bandwagon. China Reverse looks behind the facade of financial success, noticing casual details, an antique porcelain dish, native songs, and a wishful smile for the future, which cannot help trembling.



## Synopsis

What did she miss most when coming to Austria? "Nothing," she says. She worked hard and had no time to think about things like that.

"Open every day" says a sign at the restaurant where she works. That's how she worked since coming to Austria in 1986. It's only today that she says, "We work, but we have to live as well."

In the evening, sitting in a restaurant at the Danube, he adds, "I've managed to get here, so I have to be successful."

China Reverse accompanies Chinese people who, many years ago, came to Vienna more or less by chance, looking for a better future. In the meantime they have accomplished a lot, but they still constantly work for a better future, these days more for that of their children.

Homesick? Maybe, but what for? Returning is not really an option. Too much has been built up in Austria, too much missed of what happened in China. Quite a few of those who returned soon enough have large profitable companies today and have to chuckle when thinking about those who stayed abroad.

"You don't know if you did it right or wrong," she says. "That will be decided by the grandchildren." The things you buy are an investment in the future of your descendants, like the expensive private school to which her friends send their children.

"So far we have neglected coffee," he says, while pouring a brew suited to Chinese cuisine to a group of Chinese businessmen. New business opportunities beckon. Globalization mixes everything - goods, places, and people.

The subjects of "China Reverse" could live anywhere in Europe. They would eat the same food, do the same work, and be similarly successful. They have lived in Vienna for a long time already. The two worlds are inseparable, yet they become pensive when speaking about China. We observe how they go about their everyday life, in which they restlessly follow new ideas, hardly allowing themselves a break. The camera concentrates on subtle aspects of their lives. The few moments, when the focus is directed at the underlying doubt, are sufficient to put everything in question without asking anything.



## Press Release

„Wherever there is a moon, there are Chinese people“, says a Chinese expression - so obviously they can also be found in Austria. The Chinese are considered to be a rather quiet group of migrants. One doesn't hear much of them, because, like everywhere else in the world, they adjust relatively quickly to the conditions in the country. They have a very pragmatic approach, don't complain a lot, organise their lives themselves and if they want to, they get in with the already existing community without any problems. They „don't make problems“, but solve them, mostly by mutual support.

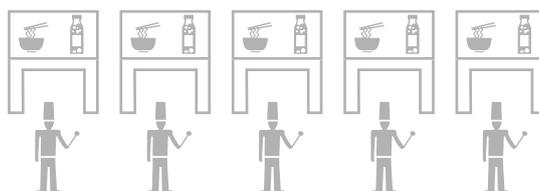
Most Chinese migrants in Austria come from the southeastern province Zhejiang, which is known as the „Land of Fish and Rice“. So it seems only natural, that many of them had worked and still work in the food service industry: Hu Jinzhu worked in her sister's restaurant for a long time, until she took over the big supermarket known as „China-Zentrum“ on the Rechte Wienzeile. Shan Jiaqian is the successful owner of the Far Eastern fast food chain „Mr. Lee“ and Xie Feiru owns a restaurant and a cinema in Mistelbach, Lower Austria. Furthermore, she founded the Association of Chinese Women in Austria.

At least economically speaking they all „made it“ here and don't want to go back to China, even if the still existing atmosphere of departure has great appeal. Mister Wu however, who was also in Austria for a long time, dared to take the step: He opened a restaurant and a coffeehouse in Chengdu, which expertly attracts the local population with Austrian tourist stereotypes.

The filmmaker and cinematographer Judith Benedikt interviewed them about the reasons for their migration and their hopes and expectations at that time, in her insightful movie „China Reverse“. In the course of this, it becomes apparent that for most of them, Austria was not a dream destination. Partly it was coincidence that they ended up here, in other cases family members of theirs were already here, so it was an obvious choice. More than 20 years after their migration, their children are already grown up and are making their way, which might lead them somewhere completely different yet again. That's how a multi-layered portrait of a go-getting generation comes to be, a story about cultural exchange and about what it means to create a home far away from one's home.

**Andreas Ungerböck**

Editor of: ray FILMMAGAZIN



## Director's Statement

When I came back to Vienna after my first visit to China - a five-week trip in 2004, for the first few days after my return, I, like many other travellers, had to fight off the feeling of being foreign to my own home. Solely the many Chinese businesses in my district established some feeling of familiarity of the past weeks.

The area surrounding Vienna's Naschmarkt and specifically Kettenbrückengasse are centres of the Viennese Chinese community. One doesn't only find the only Chinese bookstore in Europe here, but also many other small grocery stores, a hairdresser, two restaurants, a Chinese cellphone shop, the editorial office of a Chinese weekly newspaper, the association of the province Zhejiang and a Chinese travel agency.

In China, people who leave their country to rebuild their lives somewhere else, are also called bridge people. I started to get interested in their stories and wanted to know how the people ended up here. In the interviews I did during my research I heard a lot of similar stories. Most of the time there were family members who already lived here and they almost always ended up in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant in the beginning. Then they worked hard and put a lot of money aside, with the goal of clearing their debts from being smuggled across the border and to open their own restaurant.

A lot has changed in the meantime. The food service industry is complaining about shortage of staff - a consequence of the strict immigration regulations, but also of the economic recovery in China. Meanwhile, many Chinese men and women live and work in Vienna as well as in China.

I feel that in „China Reverse“ we show Vienna as an example of how the situation is in many European cities, which means that in a way I am also telling the story of Chinese migration to Europe.

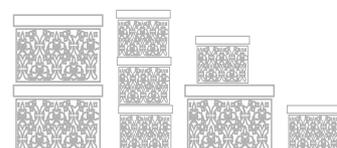
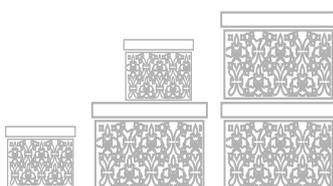
According to the numbers of Statistics Austria, in 2008 there were 8.633 people living in Vienna, who were originally born in China. But estimates of organisations working with refugees talk about there being 20.000 - 30.000 Chinese people in Vienna, the majority of which come from the region Zhejiang, more specifically from the city Qingtian and the city Wenzhou. Qingtian is a county and a city with about 480.000 inhabitants in the Southern Chinese province Zhejiang. The city lies in a narrow valley in a mountainous region. A wide river divides Qingtian into the old part of the city, which has been growing constantly and the new part of the city, which only just formed during the boom. Since China loosened its laws for leaving the country in the 80s, about 230.000 people from the region emigrated, mostly to Europe.

As soon as one gets to know individuals from a country, the stereotypical thoughts that one had about the people and the country itself, change. The Austro-Chinese are well aware of the prejudices and the myths surrounding them. That's why, at the beginning, they are rather sceptical towards Austrians. Because of my frequent visits in China, I could finally gain the trust of the community in Vienna.

The life of people who have left their home and their family to start a journey into the unknown has always fascinated me. They all take a piece of their home country with them to their new place of residence and build their own small world which reminds them of home.

Home has long become a geographically independent term.

**Judith Benedikt 2015**



## Protagonists



**Shan Jiaqian** has built up an Asian fast food chain in Vienna, which is comprised of 13 branches at its peak. Two of which he still manages even today. „One for each child“, he says and pays his children's school fees with it. Both of them attend the American International School. He is an excellent businessman, always one step ahead. He knows how to make good business and even have some fun doing it. In his eyes there are too many Asian restaurants in Vienna, which is why he decided to go the opposite direction. He successfully exports Austrian products to China, where the new rich currently can't get enough of the exotic, western products.



**Xie Feiru** is one of the central figures of the Chinese women living in Austria. As president of the Chinese Women's Association she knows a lot of people and is always anxious to bring people together and accomplish a better integration of Chinese women in Austria. She herself has worked at a Chinese restaurant in the beginning and as soon as she had the resources, she opened her own restaurant in Mistelbach. Now she runs a bed and breakfast and the only cinema in Mistelbach with her husband.



**Xie Feiru**



**Hu Jinzhu** travelled to Czechoslovakia with a tourist visa in 1988 and came to Austria illegally from there. For five years she had to work in her sister's restaurant until she could finally get her husband to Austria the same way she did. Mister Hu had a good job in China, but his wife had to procure most of the smuggler's fee. To be able to have three children is a big win for them, that life in Austria brings along with it and they spare no effort to enable their children to have a good education.



**Hu Jinzhu**



## Quotes from the Movie *China Reverse*

*I started studying German with the help of our menu.  
During my lunch break I drove to a rich neighbourhood  
on the outskirts of the city.  
I walked around this wealthy area  
learning vocabulary.  
This was my motivation somehow.  
My future should look like this as well.  
The lawns were trimmed more precisely than my hair.*

*Even the fanciest palaces of Europe  
can't compete with the Forbidden City.  
That aura of absolute power,  
corruption, and obedience.*

*„Where I have to, I will stay.  
There is earth everywhere.  
Same air, same heaven.  
You live where it is necessary.*

**Shan Jiaqian**



*I named her Feiru which means "flying",  
so that she flies out  
and explores the world.*

**Father of Xie Feiru**

*I was always quite spontaneous.  
Like flowing water,  
I didn't choose a direction.  
The water flows wherever it wants to go.*

**Xie Feiru**

*Where are you not at home?  
If you feel at home here, then this is your home.*

**Yang Dongping**

*He said, in Europe he has the chance to make money.  
And as long he does, he will try to do just that,  
no matter what the cost.*

**Hu Jinzhu about her uncle**

*I came here, didn't earn much, worked myself to death  
and understood nothing.*

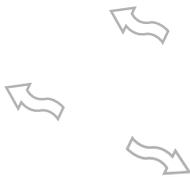
**Yang Dongping**





*Walk along this path,  
always forwards...  
Not too far ahead...  
there is an intersection.  
You can go left  
or straight ahead,  
but you can't stop.*

**from the song „Damo Liulangzhe“  
text: Wang Xiaolin**



## Press Quotes

*China Reverse* is a look behind the curtain, at living conditions, memories of the old home, choir performances in dirndls - traditional Austrian dresses, the pressure to succeed and a certain restlessness between the cultures.

**(Dolomitenstadt-Magazin, Daniela Ingruber, August 2013)**

Judith Benedikt embarks on a journey following first and second-generation immigrants from China in Austria, who are mainly stranded in Asian restaurants in the city and in the countryside. After half a century of migration, mainly in one direction, there is a new current flowing back to the east, due to the economic boom in China. Gradually a new generation is emerging that has to face the fact that China's current boom can also create new opportunities for them. One of the protagonists - a father, who already built up a whole empire of Asian snack stands and restaurants in Vienna - dares the leap back to China, to establish a chain of typical Viennese coffee houses there. Backwards migration.

**(Catalogue Text, Crossing Europe Filmfestival, Lina Dinkla, April 2014)**

"It isn't easy here for people from China," a hairdresser agrees with a client who is complaining that his hair is turning white much faster in Austria than it did in China. Sometimes a family was spread across multiple different European countries in the first years. This group of migrants finds work mainly in the food industry, which means: no day off and the own child sits at the first table in the Chinese restaurant, as one Viennese Chinese woman remembers. "Life is over so quickly. In Austria one looks, life has meaning. We work, but we also have to live," she says today. When a Chinese man offers his opinion to a colleague about the Schönbrunn Palace, that even the most artistic buildings in Europe can't be compared to the Forbidden City, then, as an Austrian, you are not insulted, but relieved. Centuries of cultural history in China are not forgotten that easily.

**(Radio FM4, "Crossing Europe, bis nach China", Maria Motter, April 2014)**

"Benedikt held almost 100 interviews. The three characters that are portrayed in the movie should represent the experiences of Chinese immigrants in Vienna. Very personal sequences show the mentality of the Chinese men and women who stayed here. They are hardworking, future-oriented, pursue profit and the chance to rise in social status, with flexible business models and the desire for the best education for the next generation. They are modest and can easily adapt and often stay amongst themselves."

**(mokant.at, Timon Mikocki, Mai 2014)**

"Benedikt's documentary is objective and precise. She offers a very close look into the life of our Chinese fellow-men and women. The approach she has found to the people that are portrayed is admirable."

**(Crossing Europe Filmfestival 2014, "Kino-Brücken nach China", Timon Mikocki, April 2014)**

"Not only does it focus on the shifting labor world but particularly the struggles with low income and the working experience in 21st century Europe with an even greater divide in income groups caused by job shortage, cheap labor and the realities of globalization and the high cost of living in the aftermath of the economic crisis in 2008."

**(Celluloid, Steven Yates, Oktober 2014)**



# Judith Benedikt



**Judith Benedikt** Judith Benedikt was born in 1977 in Lienz, Austria.

1998 - 2007 University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Department of Film and Television: Camera Technology and Cinematography with professor Christian Berger, Editing

2010 - 2013 professorship at the Fotoschule Wien

*China Reverse* is Judith Benedikt's directorial debut.

## Filmography Directing

### **China Reverse (2014)**

feature documentary D & C: Judith Benedikt

P: Plaesion Film und Vision

Crossing Europe 2014, This Human World Festival 2014

## Filmography Cinematography (Selection)

### **Schwangerschaft und Gesundheit (2016)**

feature documentary

D: Thomas Fürhapter | C: Judith Benedikt | P: Navigator Filmproduktion

### **Was geht (2015)**

feature documentary

D: Anna Katharina Wohlgenannt und andere | C: Judith Benedikt (2 Teile) | P: Nikolaus

Geyrhalter Filmproduktion

### **Female To What the Fuck (2015)**

feature documentary

D: Katharina Lampert, Cordula Thym | C: Judith Benedikt | P: Katharina Lampert,

Cordula Thym

### **Dau (2015)**

feature film

D: Ilya Khrzhanovsky | 2nd Unit Kamera: Judith Benedikt | P: Phenomen Films

### **Was wir nicht sehen (2014)**

feature documentary

D: Anna Katharina Wohlgenannt | C: Judith Benedikt | P: Plan C Film | Hofer Filmtage

2014

### **Transferred Memories – Embodied Documents (2014)**

art installation

D: Ana Hoffner | C: Judith Benedikt

### **Von oben nach unten von rechts nach links (2012)**

experimental film

D: Flora Watzal | C: Judith Benedikt | Diagonale 2013

### **Die Vaterlosen (2010)**

feature film

D: Marie Kreutzer | 2. Kamera: Judith Benedikt | P: Novotny Filmproduktion | Grand Prize

Best Feature and Best Cinematography of a Feature Film Diagonale 2011, Honorable

Mention Berlinale 2011

### **Hana, dul, sed (2009)**

feature documentary

D: Brigitte Weich | C: Judith Benedikt | P: Ri Filme | 62nd Int. Filmfestival Locarno 2009,

Viennale 09, Grand Prize Best Documentary Diagonale 2010

### **Heim ist nicht daheim, (2009)**

feature documentary

D: Julia Laggner | Steirischer Herbst 2009, Diagonale 2010

### **Bleiben will ich, wo ich nie gewesen bin (2007)**

short film

D: Libertad Hackl | C: Judith Benedikt | Local Artist Award Crossing Europe 2007,

Honorable Mention Filmriss 07, Thomas-Pluch Script Prize for New Authors Diagonale

2008, VI. Festival Internacional del Cine pobre, Gibra,Kuba

## Technical Information:

Running Time: **91 min**  
Languages: **German, Chinese**  
Subtitles: **German, English, Chinese**  
Format: **HD**  
Screening Format: **DCP 16:9**  
Sound: **5.1, Stereo**  
Shooting Locations: **Vienna, Mistelbach, Qingtian, Shanghai,  
Shaoxing, Wenzhou, Chengdu**  
Shooting Time: **July 2011 - May 2013**  
Completion Date: **April 2014**

Theatrical Release: **February 27th 2015**

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