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## **From Rivers to Roads: The Depiction of the Chinese Revolution in East German Documentaries**

While the burgeoning Asian – German scholarship in North America has valorised the intercultural relation between China and Germany (Li 2010; Shen 2014; Zhang 2017), the interplay between Chinese and German socialism, particularly in the cultural arena, has remained understudied. In fact, the Chinese Communist Revolution not only led to a structural transformation in China, but also had an impact on the ways in which other socialist states and revolutionary regions engage with their own conceptions of socialism.

In this paper, I will focus on the depiction of the Chinese revolution in East German documentaries in the 1950s. In particular, I will examine *Lied der Ströme* (Song of the Rivers, 1954) by the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens and *China – Land zwischen gestern und morgen* (China – A Country Between Yesterday and Tomorrow, 1956) by Joop Huisken, Ivens' mentee. Both films showcase China in the form of ethnographic travelogues, while foregrounding a sense of political solidarity. In depicting six major rivers across different continents – the Volga, Mississippi, Ganges, Nile, Amazon and the Yangtze, Ivens' film places China in a setting of international workers' movement, celebrating the significant role of Chinese workers in transnational socialism. Huisken's film, by contrast, focuses solely on the construction of Chinese socialism and highlights the rapid development of infrastructure in the early 1950s China.

In scrutinising the depiction of natural and urban spaces in these two documentaries – rivers in Ivens' film and railways/roads in Huisken's film, I argue that, produced from a perspective of socialist solidarity, they challenge the kind of orientalist depiction of China exhibited in other Western cultural products. At the same time, the Chinese revolution serves as a form of selfreflection, through which artists in East Germany could envision their own blueprint of socialism and strengthen their understanding of the socialist ideals.