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A Façade of Solidarity

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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/42j5q0z7>

ISBN

978-0-367-74378-9

Author

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Publication Date

2021-09-03

DOI

10.4324/9781003157540-8

Peer reviewed



Routledge Studies in Cultural History

EAST ASIAN-GERMAN CINEMA

**THE TRANSNATIONAL SCREEN, 1919
TO THE PRESENT**

Edited by
Joanne Miyang Cho



ROUTLEDGE



First published 2022
by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this title has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-74377-2 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-74378-9 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-15754-0 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003157540

Typeset in Sabon
by codeMantra

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6 A Façade of Solidarity

East Germany's Attempted Dialogue with China in *The Compass Rose* (*Die Windrose*, 1957)

Qingyang Zhou

The Soviet Union attributed paramount significance to cinema due to the medium's potential to exert spiritual influences on the masses and to mobilize them behind the struggle for socialism.¹ To foster collective efforts for the realization of socialist ideals, the USSR encouraged transnational film exchanges in the form of multilateral film import and export agreements, film festivals, and co-productions among members of the Eastern Bloc.² In line with this ideology, the German Democratic Republic (GDR)'s state-sponsored film studio, DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft), co-produced a number of films with other socialist states during the Cold War. Specifically, DEFA co-productions in the 1950s strove to both educate the public about East Germany's new allies and, at the same time, present the GDR as a powerful European nation deserving recognition from the international community.³

This chapter explores the cultural relations between the GDR and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the 1950s through *The Compass Rose* (*Die Windrose*, 1957), an anthology film that epitomizes East Germany's quest for socialist transnational alliances. Produced with sponsorship from the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF),⁴ the film consists of five distinct personal narratives of women's struggles for a better life in Brazil, the USSR, France, Italy, and China. The GDR coordinated and supervised the production of the individual segments by the five participating countries, while also taking charge of editing, translation, and compilation during postproduction. The first four segments of the anthology are presented with their original foreign-language dialogue, which is more or less faithfully summarized or paraphrased by East German narrators for the GDR audience. In the concluding Chinese segment, however, the narrator impersonates a minor figure in the diegetic world, without translating any of the Chinese characters' spoken dialogue.

Investigating the underlying power and gender dynamics manifested in the complex processes of linguistic exchanges in *The Compass Rose*, this chapter begins with a discussion of the diplomatic relations between

the GDR and the PRC in the 1950s and the 1960s, which served as the social and political background of the film's production. The second section then uses Mariana Ivanova's research on the DEFA studio's early history, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's theory on transnational feminism, and Quinn Slobodian's study of race and racialism in East German visual culture to frame the analysis of the film's opening sequence. The third section expounds on DEFA's translation practices in the Chinese segment and its effects on the aesthetics of the film's imagery by drawing on Nataša Đurovičová's concept of *translatio* and Lisa French's discussion of the female gaze in documentary film. I argue that the narrative framing of the film as a travelogue trivializes the encounter between the East German audiences and their socialist comrades as merely sight-seeing. At the same time, the linguistic dynamics of the Chinese segment invite comparisons between the culturally sophisticated GDR and an ideologically backward China. Whereas the visual element of the Chinese segment filmed by Wu Guoying (吴国英)⁵ portrays the PRC as a progressive socialist state eager to embrace modernization, the German voiceover added by DEFA during postproduction misrepresents the Chinese dialogue, plot, and images, thus representing the PRC as a traditionalist society, in which conservative views about women's incompetence in the public sphere still remain predominant. In this sense, DEFA severely undermined Chinese women's self-determination through a process of *Entmündigung*, thereby literally taking away their freedom of speech.⁶ As a result, the GDR missed an opportunity to establish genuine solidarity with the PRC.

Friendship and Brotherhood? East Germany's Diplomatic Relations with China in the 1950s and the 1960s

Establishing stable relations with the PRC was of paramount importance in the 1950s, due to the GDR's intense rivalry with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) for international recognition. Both the GDR⁷ and the FRG⁸ strove to posit themselves as the sole legitimate representative of the German people. However, the GDR's initial attempts at recognition by the Western world faltered as transnational alliances were drawn along the lines of Cold War ideology. The GDR's political marginalization was exacerbated by the FRG's implementation of the Hallstein Doctrine in 1955, which threatened to sever diplomatic relations with any country, except for the Soviet Union, that recognized East Germany.⁹ Trapped by a lack of diplomatic success in Western Europe, North America, and the Third World,¹⁰ the GDR soon sought to consolidate its relations with the PRC. Indeed, the fact that the world's most populous nation joined the communist camp would corroborate the legitimacy of the political path undertaken by the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED).¹¹ The SED

soon depicted the two nations as having similar political histories, in that both states were founded in the first week of October 1949, and both struggled to compete against or take control of its capitalist counterpart—West Germany and Taiwan.¹² Official rhetoric characterized the GDR and the PRC as belonging to a socialist family under the leadership of the Soviet Union¹³ and united in the struggle against imperialism.¹⁴ Whereas West Germany merely regarded China as a business partner, East Germany constructed its relationship with China on notions of friendship and brotherhood.¹⁵

The GDR strove to propagate the two nations' affinities through cultural exchanges with the PRC, a strategy inaugurated by a "Month of German-Chinese Friendship" in June 1951. The administration distributed millions of pamphlets, books, and political posters and screened recent Chinese films, including *China's Daughters* (*Die Töchter Chinas*, Ling Zifeng and Zhai Qiang, China 1949),¹⁶ *Sun over China* (*Sonne über China*, Sergei Gerasimow, China/USSR 1950), and *Victorious China* (*Siegreiches China*, Leonid Warlamow, China/USSR 1951), introducing to its citizens such diverse topics as modern Chinese political thought, Chinese art, and life in the PRC.¹⁷ In the following years, the GDR dispatched delegations and art ensembles to visit China and commissioned a number of ethnographic documentaries and literary travelogues to further educate the East German public about China's history, culture, and people.¹⁸ Between 1954 and 1960, the GDR produced 14 documentaries about China,¹⁹ ranging from ten-minute newsreels to feature-length films, a number greater than all of the DEFA films about other East Asian countries combined.²⁰

Although the GDR's efforts to promote a positive image of China as its ally and brother nation seems extensive and substantial at first glance, one should not regard the massive scale of the propaganda as proof of its efficacy, far-reaching influence, or sincerity. The fact that East Germany lacked Chinese-language specialists and produced few quality translations of Chinese texts compared to West Germany²¹ made it unlikely that GDR audiences were introduced to complex subjects such as Chinese music, art, and literature under adequate guidance and accurate instruction from China experts. Moreover, since the vast majority of GDR citizens did not have the liberty to travel themselves,²² their perceptions of the PRC were especially susceptible to the orientalist subtext of GDR literature, photography, and documentaries about China. Specifically, feature-length documentaries such as *China—A Country between Yesterday and Tomorrow* (*China—Land zwischen gestern und morgen*, Joop Huisken, 1956), *Strong Friends in the Far East* (*Starke Freunde im Fernen Osten*, Bruno Kleberg, 1956), and *We Sang and Danced in China* (*Wir sangen und tanzten in China*, Gerhard Jentsch, 1959), as well as travel literature such as Gerhard Kiesling and Bernt von Kügelgen's *China* (1957), invariably compare a sentimental depiction of

the commoners' suffering and misery under the corrupt dictatorship of feudal China with images of a rapidly industrializing and democratic People's Republic. These literary and filmic travelogues' reliance on stereotypes, including female oppression,²³ cheap labor costs,²⁴ and urban criminality,²⁵ to depict Imperial China recycled similar discourses that had circulated in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century. At the same time, descriptions of the PRC's industrialization and democratization efforts after 1949 served as a foil for corresponding domestic projects in the GDR. The exotic backdrop of East Asia could not only revitalize the stagnant aesthetics of DEFA's propaganda films,²⁶ but also reinforce the GDR's relative supremacy as a more highly industrialized country compared to the PRC, whose economy was still heavily dominated by the agricultural sector in the 1950s. Therefore, the GDR's seemingly egalitarian construct of "brotherhood" was in fact a self-serving and self-aggrandizing project. For East German audiences, the splendid and lavish color photography in *China—A Country between Yesterday and Tomorrow* and in the literary travelogue *China* was no more than an enticing and refreshing entertainment. Without personal connections and genuine firsthand experiences of China, "friendship" was only an illusory construct reduced to empty slogans, devoid of a realistic base and immediate relevance in daily life.

Indeed, the tenuous nature of East Germany and China's "brotherhood" quickly gave way to decades of diplomatic stagnation upon the Sino-Soviet Split of 1960, after which the PRC severed its existing relations with Eastern European states.²⁷ In light of the drastic changes in the political atmosphere, the SED swiftly reversed its previously positive portrayals of China and began to characterize the PRC instead as a "dangerous traitor,"²⁸ "enemy," and "pariah."²⁹ The party canceled the "Week of German-Chinese Friendship" initially planned to take place in early 1960³⁰ and criticized the PRC's policies related to the People's Commune.³¹ During the next few years, the GDR gradually ceased publication of Chinese newspapers, as well as books by Mao Zedong and other Chinese thinkers,³² halted film co-production and import/export projects,³³ and organized numerous events with party members and the general public to reverse the previously constructed narrative of solidarity.³⁴ East Germany's facile efforts at representing China as a worthy partner in the realization of socialist ideals crumbled for a lack of sincerity—an attitude reflected in the narrative framework and linguistic politics of *The Compass Rose*.

DEFA's Quest for Prestige: The Opening Scene

In the first few years after the establishment of the GDR, DEFA's internationalist focus strategically contributed to the new state's nationalist

agenda. In her article on DEFA films of the 1950s, Mariana Ivanova argues that the co-production of high-profile, multilingual films served both to reclaim the East German film industry's prominence within the European film market and to promote socialist film art as a means of securing diplomatic recognition of the GDR in the wake of the Hallstein Doctrine.³⁵ Condemning Hollywood's domination of European cinemas, DEFA lured European talents to Babelsberg in order to rebuild its war-devastated film industry and boost the domestic market.³⁶ Co-productions with other European countries, such as France, Italy, Sweden, and West Germany, not only secured DEFA films' admission to international film festivals based in Western Europe, but also nurtured the studio's reputation as an acclaimed institution.³⁷

As an ambitious international enterprise involving six countries from three continents, *The Compass Rose* reflects DEFA's quest for international recognition. The East German film studio employed renowned Dutch documentarian Joris Ivens as the supervisor of the entire project, though individual segments were filmed by teams from each participating country. The co-production seems to have struck a balance between the capitalist world (France and Italy), the socialist world (USSR and PRC), and the nonaligned Third World (Brazil). Nonetheless, the film's sponsorship by the pro-Communist WIDF³⁸ and the participation of prominent left-leaning talents including Brazilian author Jorge Amado, French actor Yves Montand and actress Simone Signoret, as well as Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo and screenwriter Franco Solinas³⁹ enabled the film to become an outlet of socialist ideologies. In fact, the film's leftist stance caused immense difficulties for the French and Italian teams during production due to government censorship.⁴⁰ In this sense, *The Compass Rose* was a political artifact that allowed DEFA to both showcase its high status as the center of a transcontinental co-production and propagate socialist ideologies through film art.

The socialist leanings of the film project are manifested in the plotlines of all five stories.⁴¹ In the first story from Brazil, due to a severe drought, farmers leave their land to seek new opportunities in the nearby metropolis, São Paulo. While en route, a woman gives birth to a child. The heroine Ana helps her. The annoyed truck driver wants to sell the women to a landowner for a head wage. Enraged by this new form of slavery, Ana beats the abusive driver and the landowner, and the farmers continue their journey to São Paulo. The second segment of *The Compass Rose* was produced by the USSR. The protagonist Nadeshda wants to explore the Soviet Union's new southern territories for a year (an earlier version of the script designates Nadeshda's intended destination as Korea)⁴²; her boyfriend Grischa vehemently opposes this idea. She decides to leave regardless, only to be joined by Grischa at the last moment. The French story recounts how a schoolteacher, Jeanine, helps impoverished renters

against eviction,⁴³ arguing that all citizens have the same rights, including freedom from hunger and the right to a roof over their heads.⁴⁴ In the fourth episode of the film, the Italian heroine Giovanna leads her fellow workers in a textile factory to go on strike by occupying the factory complex. The last segment of the film recounts the achievements of the Chinese protagonist Chen Hsiu Hua⁴⁵ (陈秀华) as the first female leader of her village's agricultural cooperative, depicting how her competence changes the misogynistic views of her former opponents. Due to the sheer diversity of subject matters portrayed in *The Compass Rose*, an extended analysis of all five stories is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, a close examination of the film's opening sequence will yield valuable insights into the agenda of the transnational project as a whole, and the Chinese story in particular.

The opening scene of *The Compass Rose* manifests DEFA's quest for esteem, in that the carefully arranged mise-en-scène represents East Germany as a culturally sophisticated civilization inheriting the European art tradition. The first shot of the film shows a hand turning off a large record player in a medium close-up, announcing the beginning of the story by ending the orchestral music that played through the opening credits. The camera then tracks back, revealing the East German moderator Helene Weigel, who was a renowned actress and the second wife of Bertolt Brecht. The camera tracks alongside Weigel as she walks across the room. A large impressionistic painting on the wall features prominently in the background, while a white sculpture of a person with truncated arms evokes associations with the famous Greek statue, the Venus de Milo. Weigel's costume, a stylish gown with lace and embroidery on the sleeves and around the collar, identifies her as an elegant hostess. The conspicuous presence of the record player, painting, sculpture, and Weigel's dress in this scene presents East Germany as a country with refined tastes in music, art, and fashion, thereby countering capitalist countries' perceptions of East Germans as the "ignorant, unsophisticated, and provincial other"⁴⁶ (Figure 6.1).

Upon situating the GDR in the European art milieu, the opening scene constructs the entire film as a cursory exploration of foreign cultures, with East Germany at the center of the expedition. Weigel's introductory dialogue proposes to lead the audience through a virtual travel around the world: "I would like to accompany you on a journey through other countries, without luggage, in order to make the trip easier. We will see scenes from the reality of foreign countries, short episodes from contemporary life."⁴⁷ She then introduces the protagonists of the five short stories by pointing out their native countries on a globe. By constructing the narrative as a world tour, *The Compass Rose* adopts what feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls the "feminist-as-tourist model." This pedagogical approach typically allows for "brief forays . . . into non-Euro-American cultures,



Figure 6.1 Helene Weigel in the opening scene. © *Die Windrose*, Bundesarchiv, Film: B71072/DEFA-Stiftung/Joop Huisken, Robert Menegoz.

and [addresses] particular sexist cultural practices from an otherwise Eurocentric women's studies gaze."⁴⁸ Weigel's promise of a short, easy excursion defines the audiences' interactions with the foreign characters as superficial spectatorship, similar to a visitor's experience in an ethnographic museum of world cultures, rather than a deep, invested engagement with the characters' specific struggles. This "feminist-as-tourist model" often has the effect of leaving the audience with "a clear sense of the difference and distance between the local (defined as self, nation, and Western) and the global."⁴⁹ Indeed, in the absence of an East German story in this anthology film, Weigel herself represents the GDR. The distinction between "us" and "them" literally becomes the distance between Weigel's body and the model of the globe, which incorporates Brazil, Italy, France, the USSR, and China. The ease with which Weigel points out each country at her fingertips both conveys East Germany's cosmopolitanism and hints at the GDR's cultural superiority as the provenance and commander of this world cruise (Figure 6.2).

This discrepancy between the GDR's purportedly altruistic *Welttoffenheit* and the narrative framework's de facto nationalist, self-serving nature, and inherently parochial worldview is embedded in the symbol of the compass rose. Toward the end of her introduction, Weigel gestures



Figure 6.2 Weigel points to each country on the globe. © *Die Windrose*, Bundesarchiv, Film: B71072/DEFA-Stiftung/Joop Huisken, Robert Menegoz.

toward a large compass rose shot in close-up and connects this symbol to the five heroines:

Each of these five women differs from one another . . . but they all stride towards a great goal. Their hearts and brains point the way to the future, just as the compass rose shows all seafarers, pilots, researchers, and seekers the path that leads to good goals.⁵⁰

This introduction conjoins images of adventure during the Age of Exploration with hopes for a bright future. It presents the compass rose in an overwhelmingly positive light, as the indispensable tool which allowed European pioneers to guide the world to a new era of globalization. However, this interpretation of world history completely ignores the fact that early modern nautical expeditions unleashed centuries of slavery, genocide, and Western imperialism in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, including in Brazil and China, at the same time as they brought unprecedented wealth to European colonial powers. In addition, the decision to include Brazil and China in this anthology film stemmed mainly from their positions as the largest countries in Latin America and Asia, respectively, whereas France was chosen as

the paragon of Enlightenment ideals, the Soviet Union for the triumph of the socialist revolution, and Italy for the gripping moments of social conflict it promised.⁵¹ The idea that Brazil and China suffice to represent two vast continents with unimaginably diverse cultures and peoples, while the nuances of European culture deserve contributions from three countries (or four, if the German opening sequence is counted), reinstalls the dynamic of white supremacy that the film is purportedly attempting to dismiss. Indeed, as Quinn Slobodian argues in his study of race and racism in East German visual culture, although GDR authorities officially denounced “race thinking,” they continued to rely on nineteenth-century racial typologies in representing global diversity.⁵² Based on an “egalitarian racialism” model, political posters often visualize solidarity in the form of Black and Asian people holding hands with a white (German) person—a model that “abandoned the hierarchy of race without jettisoning the category of race wholesale.”⁵³ Similarly, the narrative framework of *The Compass Rose* merely claims a façade of solidarity with Third World countries, although it does not actually contain genuine attempts at mutual understanding beyond token exchanges. In this cinematic exchange between unequal powers, “the right of representation also remained in the hands of white Germans, producing the effect, arguably subconsciously, of . . . the prioritizing of the white leadership role.”⁵⁴ In an analogous manner of *Entmündigung*, DEFA’s peculiar translation practices in the Chinese segment severely undermine the image of a progressive, modern PRC as initially intended by the segment’s female director Wu Guoying.

A Failed Dialogue in the Chinese Segment

Presented as the last of the five stories, the Chinese segment of *The Compass Rose* was originally titled “The Leader of the Cooperative” (“Die Leiterin der Genossenschaft”).⁵⁵ It recounts the struggle of a young peasant woman, Chen Hsiu Hua, against gender discrimination. Elected as the first female leader of the village’s new agricultural cooperative, Hsiu Hua encounters vehement opposition from her male competitors, who think that women can never succeed in managing a commune. One day, while the men are logging trees in a nearby mountain, a large thunderstorm hits the village. As the loggers hurry back to help with harvesting, they are surprised to discover that the women who remained behind have already reaped all the crops under Hsiu Hua’s leadership. The 17-minute short film ends with Hsiu Hua’s opponents acknowledging her competence and with a joyful celebration of a fruitful harvest (Figure 6.3).

When incorporating the five stories into the final product, DEFA decided to preserve the original foreign-language soundtracks and add German voiceovers to paraphrase the dialogue. Through relinquishing the convention of dubbing, DEFA sought to “strengthen the world-spanning



Figure 6.3 The main character Chen Hsiu Hua in the Chinese segment.
© *Die Windrose*, DEFA-Stiftung / Joop Huisken, Robert Menegoz.

character of the projects by preserving the national idiosyncrasies of the five episodes.”⁵⁶ However, the voiceover of the Chinese segment drastically differs from those in the other four segments. The narrators in the Brazilian, Russian, French, and Italian stories adopt a third-person point of view, summarize the actions on screen, and paraphrase the majority of the heroines’ monologues. The voiceover in the Chinese segment, by contrast, is attributed to a minor character in the diegetic world—Hsiu Hua’s elderly mother, who only appears for several seconds in the film, remains unnamed, and only has two lines in Mandarin. The decision not to fully paraphrase the plot and the dialogue from a third-person point of view was not a result of linguistic barriers in this case, since DEFA had a complete script of the Mandarin dialogue accurately translated into both English and German.⁵⁷

In her analysis of linguistic politics in world cinema, Nataša Đurovičová introduces the concept of *translatio* to highlight the power dynamics through which cinematic flows are regulated. Whereas translation foregrounds the final product of semantic equivalence, *translatio* emphasizes the fact that every decision in the translation process (which language to translate, how to execute it, and under what rules) is a matter of specific transnational power relationships subject to explicitly political

negotiations.⁵⁸ Each set of translation practices “articulates multivalent relationships between a ‘stronger’ and ‘weaker’ film culture, and thus creates various force fields in the interchange between films’ production and reception.”⁵⁹ In the case of *The Compass Rose*, whereas DEFA was a successor to the profoundly influential tradition of German expressionism and Nazi cinema, the indigenous Chinese film industry was still nascent and fragile in the 1950s, having been long overshadowed by Western imperialism and civil war.

This power imbalance between a stronger German film culture and its weaker Chinese counterpart manifests itself in the film in multiple ways. First, by impersonating protagonist Chen Hsiu Hua’s mother through her voice, the German narrator Betty Loewen acquires a statutory authority over the Chinese character by becoming the most senior figure in Hsiu Hua’s family. Second, rather than conveying the heroine’s strong persona as a confident, progressive leader fully committed to the welfare of her community in the same way that the four other narrators do, Loewen assumes the voice of a conservative older generation which regards child-rearing and obedience to men as the quintessential role of women, thereby forcefully imposing intransigent, passé views onto a forward-looking new culture. As a result, the German narration significantly compromises, if not completely silences, director Wu Guoying’s portrayal of China’s modernization by only emphasizing gender inequality in old China.

Wu’s original film seeks to highlight the progress that the PRC has made since its establishment in 1949 by using youthful characters to symbolize a dynamic and auspicious future. The establishing scene depicts a child crossing the bridge, sitting on a water buffalo, while engrossed in reading a book. In 1952, Mao initiated a decade-long educational campaign to simplify written Chinese and reduce the country’s high illiteracy rate, especially among farmers and workers.⁶⁰ The child’s apparent passion for reading is therefore a subtle comment on the educational campaign’s efficacy. Wu’s emphasis on the joyful, promising younger generation is made even more conspicuous in the next scene, in which the camera gradually approaches a large group of farmers and their children in a long shot, while the children’s cheerful chanting substitutes all extradiegetic music, thereby conveying an overwhelmingly positive attitude that sets the tone for the entire Chinese segment.

A note of dissonance between the filmic imagery and the German narration occurs as soon as the protagonist is introduced. Wu’s film presents Hsiu Hua as a diligent farmer who puts the welfare of the farmer’s cooperative ahead of her individual pursuits. The scene portrays her feeding a cow and its newborn calf. She is apparently delighted in the addition of a new life, which means additional assets for the cooperative. Hsiu Hua’s best friend Chinlin repeatedly tells her to hurry to the election, but Hsiu Hua wants to first finish the job at hand. Throughout the sequence, Hsiu

Hua's interactions with the calf are so intimate that she even confides to the animal: "You little thing, you came at the right time!"⁶¹ Hsiu Hua appears in this scene as an altruistic motherly figure who devotes exceptional love and care to the assets of the cooperative, willing to sacrifice opportunities for personal advancement to nurture collective properties (Figure 6.4).

However, the majority of the GDR audience would not have perceived Hsiu Hua's altruism through Betty Loewen's German narration and may well have been confused by her voiceover in this scene. Not only is Hsiu Hua's exchange with Chinlin left completely untranslated, but the voiceover's relationship to the characters is still ambiguous at this point of the narrative. Loewen introduces the heroine as "my daughter," although it is only in the next scene—two minutes later—that the audience finally gets to see Hsiu Hua's mother on screen. Even then, the character only appears for a few seconds and thus could have been easily overlooked. The only other information that the narrator gives to the audience is a brief introduction to China's recent collectivization campaign: "Here in the people's republic, we farmers established cooperatives. We share everything: the seeds, the worries, the work, the harvest."⁶² The addition of such factual information might have provided necessary background on China's agriculture, yet it also transforms the characters' intimate,



Figure 6.4 Chinlin (left) and Hsiu Hua (right) feeding the calf. © *Die Windrose*, Bundesarchiv, Film: B71072/DEFA-Stiftung/Joop Huisken, Robert Menegoz.

expressive interactions into impassive and bewildering exchanges. Loewen's repeated usage of "we" in her German narration is especially curious. Devoid of a concrete body onto which these words could be projected, the narration tends to create a dizzying effect by inviting the audience to question where they are situated with relation to what they are seeing onscreen.⁶³ Without speaking to or speaking with the Chinese characters, or in the same language as they do, Loewen's factual explanation of the agricultural cooperative underscores the distinction between what happens "over there in China" and what happens "over here at home,"⁶⁴ rather than establishing a strong sense of solidarity on which the collective "we" could lay claim.

This tension between Wu's film and the German voiceover becomes even more salient in the ensuing election scene. Wu introduces the audience to Hsiu Hua's family members in a medium long shot, in which Hsiu Hua's mother gleefully holds her baby grandson, while the heroine's husband chats with his friends. The big smiles on the faces of the mother and husband construct the scene as a heartening reunion of family members, who are here to offer their support for Hsiu Hua's candidacy. Loewen's German voiceover, however, portrays Hsiu Hua's mother as an orthodox elder who thinks that women's only rightful place is child-rearing in the domestic sphere. The narrator initiates another pseudo-conversation with Hsiu Hua: "I hope she doesn't get elected. This [Leading an agricultural cooperative] is not a task for women, but children, yes. . . . You should not take part in this. It is too much responsibility for a woman."⁶⁵ In reality, Hsiu Hua's mother only says two Chinese characters during the entire scene: "He's sleeping" ("睡啦"), referring to the baby napping in her arms. Whereas Wu's film presents Hsiu Hua's family as a harmonious whole, in which all three members support each other without any sign of strife, Loewen's voiceover forcefully creates an imagined intergenerational conflict between mother and daughter (Figure 6.5).

The asymmetry in the power dynamics between the German narration and Wu's film is acutely reflected in the sheer number of Chinese voices muted by the monotonous German soundtrack. Loewen comments on the election from a singular, highly biased perspective. She in fact *speaks over* six other Chinese characters represented in the scene, each of whom expresses his or her own interpretations on women's rights by debating Hsiu Hua's competence. Leaving all these characters' dialogues completely unacknowledged, the film's use of Chinese is therefore reduced to what Christoph Wahl calls "postcarding," namely "an acoustic flashing of the spectator with a brief sample of a more or less exotic language."⁶⁶ The Mandarin dialogue spices up the narrative and fulfills the East German spectators' fantasies of and longing for a glimpse into Oriental culture, whose clichés and stereotypes are reinforced by Loewen's projection of sexist views onto China's older generation. Deeming the Chinese-language content as unimportant and thus exempting



Figure 6.5 Hsiu Hua's mother (center left) and husband (center right) at the election. © *Die Windrose*, Bundesarchiv, Film: B71072/DEFA-Stiftung/Joop Huisken, Robert Menegoz.

it from accurate representation, such a practice “reaffirm[s] the film’s dominant linguistic centering in for-me-ness”⁶⁷ in that the superiority of the German language and the preponderance of the German narrator’s point of view remain unchallenged throughout. Indeed, the stance that Loewen assumes silences and overrules the village’s two-thirds majority who elect Hsiu Hua as their new leader. It further homogenizes all Chinese characters by winnowing out “unnecessary information” and by reducing dissident opinions into one sole vocalizer, thus depriving the progressive Chinese heroine of her own voice and undermining the modern, forward-looking China that she represents.

In essence, the Chinese segment’s linguistic protocol allows DEFA to engage in an aggressive appropriation. The studio “share[s] in and coattail[s] on the benefits of international film trade”⁶⁸ by using a foreign-sounding and exotic-looking Chinese story to gratify an East German audience eager to enjoy a virtual journey away from their mundane cultural milieu. At the same time, the German voiceover contains and controls the imported content by securing the GDR’s “national air space” against a serious linguistic breach.⁶⁹ Despite its alleged intention to claim an international viewership through multilingualism, the real audience addressed

by the Chinese segment of *The Compass Rose* is in fact smaller than a nation, in that only the Chinese-German bilingual minority would have been fully cognizant of the complicated set of exchanges taking place within the short story. The constant clashing and crisscrossing of languages do not result in a successful moment of mutual comprehension, but instead in abundant miscommunication and missed connections.

Perhaps the most regrettable consequence of this kind of appropriative linguistic politics is the danger of jeopardizing the unique female/feminine gaze of the Chinese film. In her discussion of aesthetic and stylistic characteristics in documentaries made by women, Lisa French argues that female directors often tend to adopt a humanist focus by foregrounding shifting relationships, personal stories, and “domestic environments’ private spheres, particularly the family,” so that their films have a tendency to highlight “emotions and psychological perspectives or interiority.”⁷⁰ The other stories in *The Compass Rose*, all produced by male directors,⁷¹ also depict women’s issues as echoing the overarching theme of the co-production project. However, little attention is given to the heroines’ emotional responses to their unique struggles. Instead, the male directors invariably chose to situate their protagonists in highly dynamic crowd scenes in which they passionately argue with or literally fight against male perpetrators; at times the heroines also deliver propagandistic or pedagogical speeches to mass audiences, as in the Russian and French segments. Never are these female protagonists shown in small private spaces where they engage in candid, intimate discussions of their problems with close family members.

By contrast, Wu devotes an extended scene to delineating Hsiu Hua’s relationship to her mother and husband, as well as her emotional distress upon facing resistance from the dissidents. The scene starts with a medium shot of Hsiu Hua trying to soothe her crying baby, while her mother sits nearby and sews a shoe sole. Seeing that the daughter is too busy attending the child to eat, the mother goes to the kitchen and brings food to her.⁷² While the mother is away, Hsiu Hua wistfully stares at the accounting books in front of her, overwhelmed by the administrative work that lies ahead and feeling betrayed by those who forced the job on her. Later her husband enters the scene and asks what is wrong. Hsiu Hua sobs, then wipes away the tears, while turning her back on the camera. She expresses the desire to quit her new position as leader of the cooperative, but the husband encourages her to carry on with the work and cheers her up by playing with the child on her lap.

This sequence epitomizes the feminine gaze, first and foremost in its acute attention to the traditionally women’s tasks of child-rearing, needle work, and food preparation.⁷³ In addition, by displaying Hsiu Hua’s vulnerable side, Wu’s film humanizes the heroine, rather than overly glorifying her as a selfless leader with an impeccable rectitude in the way that the film’s four other protagonists are represented. The mother and

the husband's supportive attitudes in this scene further demonstrate that the portrayal of a strong female character does not have to come at the expense of sympathetic supporting figures. Rather than forcefully expressing a feminist perspective by having the heroine attain an absolute moral high ground above everyone else, Wu presents a harmonious family in which strong female leadership does not have to mean the woman's alienation from her closest relatives. However, Loewen's German narration, written by Vladimir Pozner, completely misses the point. The voiceover of this scene continues to express the mother's alleged disapproval of her daughter's public career: "My daughter, what are you insisting on? If only her husband could talk some sense into her! . . . Yeah, you know that nobody will make it [managing the cooperative] . . . My daughter has no luck. Her husband supports her."⁷⁴ By further maintaining the imagined fraught relationship between mother and daughter, DEFA reinstates the very patriarchal structure that the film is seeking to deconstruct, thereby relegating the director's attentive portrayal of interpersonal relationships and character psychology to the background.

Moreover, DEFA's deliberate choice to put the short East German segment at the very beginning of the film while designating the Chinese segment as the coda⁷⁵ invites one to draw a comparison between the two nations: whereas the GDR is a cosmopolitan, culturally sophisticated nation eager to explore the outside world, conservative views still staunchly defend gender inequality in the PRC. The stark dichotomy between Loewen's German narration and Wu's film does not promote solidarity. Instead, it allows European viewers to enjoy a sense of cultural and ideological superiority over their Chinese counterparts, thus obstructing any kind of meaningful communication between the two nations. In other words, the linguistic politics of the Chinese segment only allows the GDR to speak *about* China, not *with* China.

Conclusion

DEFA's ambitious transcontinental co-production, *The Compass Rose*, may have initially intended to present the PRC as a dynamic, forward-looking nation deserving of brotherhood and friendship with the GDR. However, the film's touristic perspective frames the interactions between East Germans and their foreign comrades as superficial sight-seeing, rather than a genuine attempt at mutual comprehension. The symbol of the compass rose precisely represents a lack of understanding for Third World countries, which would in turn result in a failed dialogue with the PRC: while East Germans regard the compass rose as a groundbreaking invention, which unleashed an era of legendary expeditions and rapid globalization, they ignored the colonialism, carnage, and subjugation of the non-West as a major consequence of these endeavors. *The Compass Rose* attempts to portray women around

the world as members of a larger community, where heterogeneous cultures and local specificities do not bar them from becoming united in the common struggle for a brighter future. However, the hermetic structure of each segment designates linguistic border-crossing via narration and paraphrasing as the sole interzone where transnational encounters could take place, while intimate in-person contact with the Other is excluded from the narrative framework. Since the film's linguistic politics hinge on appropriation, the GDR's dominant, patriarchal systems of knowledge and power remain unchallenged despite the film's cosmopolitan façade. Local concerns about women's rights remain the specific problems of each individual nation, and the representation of these problems is subordinated to the cultural, political, and market interests of the GDR.⁷⁶ As a result of the Sino-Soviet Split in 1960, the GDR and the PRC would not resume film co-productions until the late 1980s, but even then, the rapid disintegration of the Eastern Bloc prevented any meaningful correction from the problematic path undertaken by the collaborators in the 1950s.

Acknowledgments

The archival research presented in this chapter was supported by the Gelfman Summer International Fund and the Department of Cinema and Media Studies Travel Grant of the University of Pennsylvania. I would also like to thank the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv in Berlin, the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv in Potsdam-Babelsberg, and the DEFA-Stiftung for facilitating my research, allowing me to watch and read about DEFA films on China, and giving me permission to use screengrabs of the film in this chapter. In addition, I am very grateful for the insightful comments of Dr. Meta Mazaj, Dr. Christina Frei, Dr. Simon Richter, and Dr. Joanne Miyang Cho, whose suggestions on earlier drafts helped me revise this chapter to its current form.

Notes

- 1 Richard Taylor, "Soviet Cinema as Popular Culture: Or the Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. Nepman in the Land of the Silver Screen," *Revolutionary Russia* 1, no. 1 (1988): 43–44.
- 2 Marsha Siefert, "Soviet Cinematic Internationalism and Socialist Film Making, 1995–1972," in *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War—Exploring the Second World*, ed. Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 162.
- 3 Mariana Ivanova, "Die Prestige-Agenda der DEFA: Koproduktionen mit Erich Mehls Filmfirma Pandora (1954–1957)," in *DEFA International: Grenzüberschreitende Filmbeziehungen vor und nach dem Mauerbau*, ed. Michael Wedel et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), 219.
- 4 Joris Ivens, DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilm, to Alberto Cavalcanti, Festival international du Films, Cannes. March 3, 1954. Bundesarchiv, DR 118/1769.

- 5 Wu Guoying's name was spelled in multiple ways, as "Wu Kuo-ying," "Wukuo-Yin," "Wu Kuo-Yin," or "Wu Kuo Yin" in contemporaneous correspondences between DEFA and the Chinese studio and in secondary literature. Bundesarchiv, DR 118/1769; Thomas Heimann, "Von Stahl und Menschen: 1953 bis 1960," in *Schwarzweiß und Farbe: DEFA--Dokumentarfilme 1946–92*, ed. Günter Jordan and Ralf Schenk (Berlin: Filmmuseum Potsdam, 1996), 72; Günter Jordan, *Unbekannter Ivens: Triumph, Verdammnis, Auferstehung. Joris Ivens bei der DEFA und in der DDR 1948–1989* (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2018), 123. I decided to follow modern pinyin conventions when transliterating Chinese characters into English.
- 6 I would like to thank Ulrike Brisson for proposing this term to me at the GSA conference in 2020.
- 7 Quinn Slobodian, "Introduction," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 2.
- 8 Uta G. Poiger, "Generations: The 'Revolutions' of the 1960s," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 646.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Siegfried Bock, "Der Freundschaftsvertrag von 1955," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Beziehungen der DDR und der VR China*, ed. Joachim Krüger (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002), 35.
- 11 David G. Tompkins, "Divided Nations: Building and Destroying the Image of China in East Germany Through the 1960s," in *Germany and China: Transnational Encounters since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho and David M. Crowe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 213.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 214.
- 13 Quinn Slobodian, "'Wir sind Brüder, sagt der Film': China im Dokumentarfilm der DDR und das Scheitern der politischen Metapher der Brüderlichkeit," in *Das Imaginäre des Kalten Krieges: Beiträge zu einer Kulturgeschichte des Ost-West-Konfliktes in Europa*, ed. David Eugster and Sibylle Marti (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2015), 47–48.
- 14 Tompkins, "Divided Nations," 214.
- 15 Slobodian, "Wir sind Brüder, sagt der Film," 50–51.
- 16 The Chinese directors' family names are listed here before their given names.
- 17 Tompkins, "Divided Nations," 216.
- 18 These include Bodo Uhse's *Tagebuch aus China* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1956); Karl-Heinz Schleinitz's *Reisebilder aus China* (Berlin: Kongress-Verlag, 1956); Eva Siao's *Peking: Eindrücke und Begegnungen* (Berlin: Sachsenverlag, 1956); Gerhard Kiesling and Bernt von Kügelgen's *China* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1957); and *Chinesische Reise: Menschenbilder von Gustav Seitz und Eva Siao aus den 1950er Jahren*, ed. Thomas Gädeke (Cologne: Wienand, 2012).
- 19 Quinn Slobodian, "The Use of Disorientation: Socialist Cosmopolitanism in an Unfinished DEFA-China Documentary," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 219.
- 20 Qinna Shen, "Deconstructing Orientalism: DEFA's Fictions of East Asia," in *Re-Imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in Its National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 153.
- 21 Claudie Jousse-Keller, "Quarante ans de relations culturelles sino-allemandes socialistes: RPC et RDA," in *Autumn Floods: Essays in Honour*

- of Marián Gálik, ed. Raoul D. Findeisen and Robert H. Gassmann (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1998), 681.
- 22 Bernd Blaschke, Axel Dunker and Michael Hofmann, "Vorwort," in *Reiseliteratur der DDR: Bestandaufnahmen und Modellanalysen*, ed. Bernd Blaschke, Axel Dunker and Michael Hofmann (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016), 7.
 - 23 Cynthia Walk, "Anna May Wong and Weimar Cinema: Orientalism in Post-colonial Germany," in *Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia*, ed. Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 146.
 - 24 Qinna Shen, "Factories on the Magic Carpet: *Heimat*, Globalization, and the 'Yellow Peril' in *Die Chinesen Kommen* and *Losers and Winners*," in *Imagining Germany Imagining Asia: Essays in Asian-German Studies*, ed. Veronika Fuechtner and Mary Rhiel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), 66–67.
 - 25 Alfons Paquet, *Ku Hung-Ming: Chinas Verteidigung gegen europäische Ideen—Kritische Aufsätze* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1921), 3.
 - 26 Qinna Shen, "A Question of Ideology and Realpolitik: DEFA's Cold War Documentaries on China," in *Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia*, ed. Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 99.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, 96.
 - 28 Tompkins, "Divided Nations," 223–4.
 - 29 Tompkins, "The East Is Red? Images of China in East Germany and Poland through the Sino-Soviet Split," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 62, no. 3 (2013): 393.
 - 30 Nicole Françoise Stuber-Berries, "East German China Policy in the Face of the Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956–1966" (PhD diss., University of Geneva 2004), 170.
 - 31 Tompkins, "The East Is Red?" 417–18.
 - 32 Stuber-Berries, "East German China Policy in the Face of the Sino-Soviet Conflict," 346.
 - 33 DEFA Außenhandel: Import, 1951–1990 (Spielfilme, Kurzfilme). Bundesarchiv, DR 113/97. DEFA Außenhandel: Verkaufs-Übersichten, 1947–1990. Bundesarchiv, DR 113/91.
 - 34 Tompkins, "Divided Nations," 223–24.
 - 35 Mariana Ivanova, "DEFA and the Legacy of 'Film Europe': Prestige, Institutional Exchange and Film Co-Productions," in *Re-Imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in Its National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 85–87, 91.
 - 36 *Ibid.*, 88–89.
 - 37 *Ibid.*, 93.
 - 38 Günter Agde, "Die doppelte Werkstatt: Joris Ivens, die frühe DDR und die DEFA," in *DEFA International: Grenzüberschreitende Filmbeziehungen vor und nach dem Mauerbau*, ed. Michael Wedel et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), 207.
 - 39 Slobodian, "The Use of Disorientation," 223–24.
 - 40 Joris Ivens, DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilm, to Wu Kuo-ying, Chinese Central Newsreel and Documentary Films' Studio. 12 December 1955. Bundesarchiv, DR 118/1769.
 - 41 Despite its official classification as a documentary, *The Compass Rose* contains a considerable number of fictional elements, which the film's extensive use of staging, deliberate construction of the *mise-en-scène*, and repeated script revisions further demonstrate. Agde, "Die doppelte Werkstatt," 212.

In a letter to Alberto Cavalcanti, the film's correspondent with the Cannes Film Festival, Joris Ivens describes each sequence within the film as "a kind of short story in a realistic style between fiction and documentary." March 3, 1954. Bundesarchiv, DR 118/1769. The film segments seek to convey allegorical meanings through carefully designed character constellations. This distinct style of documentary filmmaking stems from the socialist realism of the 1950s, which emphasized careful plot and stage construction in order to clearly communicate intended political messages. The guiding principle was to not only depict what is, but what should be. Heimann, "Von Stahl und Menschen," 70.

- 42 In an earlier draft of the script, Nadeshda wants to go to Korea and help with reconstruction after the Korean War (1950–53). Concerned with the possible censorship that such a plot would engender, the Soviet production team eventually decided to change the destination of Nadeshda's trip. "Nadjeshda," script by S.A. Gerassimow, translated from the French. 1954. Bundesarchiv, DR/118/1772.
- 43 The first version of the script has extended scenes featuring an evil capitalist as the owner of the housing complex. "1. Teil: Frankreich, 1. Fassung, Szenarium von Henry Magnan für den Film von Yannick Bellon unter der Produktion von Joris Ivens." Bundesarchiv, DR/118/1772.
- 44 Jordan, *Unbekannter Ivens*, 141.
- 45 The spelling of Hsiu Hua's name follows that given consistently in all official promotional materials of *The Compass Rose*. "Die Windrose," DEFA-Stiftung, accessed October 31, 2020, <https://www.defa-stiftung.de/filme/filmsuche/die-windrose/>.
- 46 Aaron D. Horton, "The 'Ignorant' Other: Popular Stereotypes of North Koreans in South Korea and East Germans in Unified Germany," in *Transnational Encounters between Germany and Korea: Affinity in Culture and Politics since the 1880s*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho and Lee M. Roberts (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 199.
- 47 "Ich will Sie auf eine Reise durch andere Länder begleiten, um unsere Reise ohne Gepäck ein wenig erleichtern. Wir werden Szenen aus der Wirklichkeit fremder Länder sehen, kurze Episoden aus dem Leben von heute." All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.
- 48 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalistic Struggles," in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 239.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 "Diese fünf Frauen unterscheiden sich eine von der Anderen . . . Aber sie gehen zu einem großen Ziel: ihre Herzen und Hirne weisen die Wegrichtung in die Zukunft, so wie die Windrose allen Seefahrern, Piloten und Forschern, allen Suchenden den Weg zeigt, der zu guten Zielen führt."
- 51 Jordan, *Unbekannter Ivens*, 118.
- 52 Quinn Slobodian, "Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 25–26.
- 53 Ibid., 27.
- 54 Ibid., 33.
- 55 Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv DR/118/1772.
- 56 "Von einer Synchronisation der fremdsprachigen Episoden sei Abstand genommen worden, um durch den Erhalt der nationalen Eigenarten der fünf Episoden den weltumspannenden Charakter der Aktionen zu verstärken." Jordan, *Unbekannter Ivens*, 152.

- 57 “Das Szenarium von Teil ‘China.’” Bundesarchiv, DR/118/1772.
- 58 Nataša Đurovičová, “Vector, Flow, Zone: Towards a History of Cinematic *Translatio*,” in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Nataša Đurovičová and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 95.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 60 Kiesling and von Kügelgen, “Kleines Chinalexikon,” in *China*.
- 61 “小家伙, 来得正是时候啊!”
- 62 “Bei uns in Volkschina haben wir Bauern Genossenschaften gegründet. Wir teilen alles: das Saatgut, die Sorgen, die Arbeit, die Ernte.”
- 63 Đurovičová, “Vector, Flow, Zone,” 91.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 “Ich hoffe, sie wird nicht gewählt. Das ist keine Beschäftigung für Frauen. Kinder, das ja. . . . Du solltest dich nicht daran beteiligen Es ist zu viel Verantwortung für eine Frau.”
- 66 Christoph Wahl, “Discovering a Genre: The Polyglot Film,” *CinemaScope* 1 (2005), accessed December 1, 2020, www.cinemascope.it.
- 67 Đurovičová, “Vector, Flow, Zone,” 100.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 95.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 Lisa French, “Women in the Director’s Chair: The ‘Female Gaze’ in Documentary Film,” in *Female Authorship and the Documentary Image: Theory, Practice and Aesthetics*, ed. Boel Ulfsdotter and Anna Backman Rogers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 17–18.
- 71 The directors of the Brazilian, French, Italian, and Russian segments were Alex Viany, Yannick Bellon, Gillo Pontocorvo and Sergei Gerasimow, who also directed *Sun over China*.
- 72 In Mandarin the mother says: “我给你拿点儿吃的吧。” [I’ll go get you some food.]
- 73 Although Communist governments worked to bring women of all social backgrounds into waged labor, prevalent societal perception of gender roles and traditional family values still prevented the full realization of this goal, both in the GDR and in China. The states were also not entirely successful in winning men over to do what was traditionally viewed as women’s work. See Donna Harsch, “Communism and Women,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 492–5.
- 74 “Meine Tochter, worauf bestehst du? Wenn ihr Mann sie nur zur Vernunft bringen könnte! . . . Ja, du weißt, es wird niemand schaffen Meine arme Tochter hat kein Glück. Ihr Mann unterstützt sie.”
- 75 “Letter from Joris Ivens to Comrade Wu Kuo-ying, Chinese Central Newsreel and Documentary Films’ Studio, Peking, China.” December 12, 1955. Bundesarchiv, DR/118/1769.
- 76 Randall Halle presents a similar view in his discussion of contemporary European-Asian film co-productions. See Randall Halle, “East-West Globality and the European Mode of Film Production,” in *Imagining Germany Imagining Asia: Essays in Asian-German Studies*, ed. Veronika Fuechtner and Mary Rhiel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), 17–33.

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