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Factories on the Magic Carpet: *Heimat*, Globalization, and the "Yellow Peril" in *Die Chinesen kommen* and *Losers and Winners*

Qinna Shen

With its ascent as one of the world's strongest economies, China now appears globally in a variety of representational modes. Since the turn of this century, a great number of works, both fiction and non-fiction, have been published that capture the incessant flow of goods and services between Germany and China.¹ Such transnational activity presents intriguing material, particularly for documentary filmmakers. This essay focuses on two films, a documentary, and a feature film originally meant to be a documentary. They both involve moving a German factory to China but also, through a difference of twenty years, register the different stages in China's development and the German reaction to it. In each case the transplantation of factories takes place in conjunction with the unemployment or early retirement of the factory's former employees, who become "displaced persons" in their own society. The encounter of German and Chinese workers under these circumstances anticipates narratives characterized by anxieties, conflicts, and cultural stereotypes. The little-known comedy by Manfred Stelzer entitled *Die Chinesen kommen* (The Chinese are coming, 1986) features the disassembly of a factory in a small Bavarian town by a handful of Chinese workers who will then rebuild it in China.² Stelzer interestingly labels his work a "Bavarian-Chinese *Heimatfilm*," which suggests that he intentionally places his film in the long tradition of the German *Heimat* genre. Ulrike Franke and Michael Loeken's highly acclaimed documentary *Losers and Winners: Arbeit gehört zum Leben* (Losers and winners: work is just a part of life, 2006) represents the unfolding of a similar but larger project: the dismantling of a modern coke plant at Kaiserstuhl in Dortmund by 400 Chinese workers, who will then reassemble the entire factory in China.³ Franke and Loeken do not consciously use the *Heimatfilm* as a template in envisioning their film. However, the strikingly similar topics addressed by *Die Chinesen kommen* and *Losers and Winners* yield interesting comparisons to the *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s, which is considered the genre's classic period. To what extent do these films draw on or even modify notions of *Heimat* and *Heimatfilm* in the context of accelerated globalization? How do these two films position themselves within the profoundly ambivalent relations between Germany and China, given the long history of Germany's fear of the "yellow peril?" Do they subscribe to popular prejudices against China? Do they offer any independent insight? How do they tackle complex issues such as cultural clashes, political divergence, and competition and cooperation in the global economy?

The *Heimatfilm* of the fifties typically involves a stranger who is a refugee or a resettler and who must integrate into a new society. By contrast, in these two *Heimatfilme*—*Die Chinesen kommen* and *Losers and Winners*—entire factories are moved into a new homeland and the German workers have to adjust their place in society and renegotiate their social identity. *Heimat* is commonly seen as the opposite of *Fremde*, a foreignness that the Chinese come to represent in these two films. *Heimat* "refers to everything that is not distant and foreign."⁴ It is also "a

limited terrain that affords its inhabitants respite and protection from incursions originating in the more intangible and abstract spaces beyond its boundaries.”⁵ It is usually constructed as “an uncontaminated space, a realm of innocence and immediacy.”⁶ Stelzer’s film, however, transcends the limitations that the loaded term of *Heimat* has imposed. The hyphenated adjective “Bavarian-Chinese” denotes contamination, hybridity, and (self-)alienation. In a *Heimatfilm* that thematizes Germany as part of the world economy, the homeland not only distinguishes the urban from the rural, and the national from the local, but also has to be remapped by being situated within a global space.

Film scholar Johannes von Moltke sees *Heimat* and *Fremde* not simply as binary terms but rather as mutually interdependent (*NP*, 14). For him, the *Heimatfilm* is not a conservative genre with only nostalgic, escapist, and antimodern tropes. He argues that representations of *Heimat* passively and selectively register the changes that are concomitant with modernization and that, subsequently, *Heimat* also takes on a mod-ern character (*NP*, 15). The homeland is hence no longer an enclosed space but is pervious and susceptible to external forces, be they expulsion, displacement, and modernization in the 1950s, or accelerated globalization over the last few decades. In this light, the two films this essay dis-cusses borrow from the *Heimat* genre while updating it with the figures of Germany and China as major players in global capitalism. The stance that the films take concerning *Heimat* and globalization is ambivalent. This ambivalence, according to von Moltke, is part of “the Heimat film’s generic topography,” in which representations of *Heimat* both resist and cannot help but reflect modernity (*NP*, 17). Like the *Heimatfilm* of the fifties, *Die Chinesen kommen* and *Losers and Winners* advocate a compromise between the local and the global, the West and the East.

Ants, Coolies, and the “Yellow Peril”

A century-old metaphor that expressed Western fear of China—the “yellow peril”—is again operative in *Die Chinesen kommen*. Seeing his coworkers hanging around the factory instead of joining the Chinese, the factory greaser (*Schmierer*) Schorsch, one of the last workers in the factory, mocks his fellow Germans: “Habts Angst vor der Gelben Gefahr?”⁷ The very first interview in *Losers and Winners* invokes another early Western capitalist metaphor, when the German electrician Rainer Kruska, one of the shutdown managers (*Stillstandsverwalter*) who remains behind to help disassemble their own workplace, shares his surprise at the sudden appearance of Chinese workers at the compound. In a derogatory tone, he likens the Chinese to an endless colony of ants (“die berühmte Geschichte von Ameisen, es werden immer mehr”).⁸ [See fig. 4.1.]

The comparison of Chinese people to insects in fact harks back to the yellow perilist discourse of nineteenth-century America and captures the fear of white workers at that time. The toiling and slaving “coolies,” a synecdoche that “in turn became a metaphor for all Chinese people and indeed for Asiatic history in general,” did not receive sympathy; on the contrary, with their ability to work for lower wages and longer hours, the coolies were perceived as a threat to the American labor force.⁹ As Asian studies scholar Eric Hayot describes, the “coolie’s body” is subsumed under the “machine body” and the Chinese coolies were compared to insects. Hayot discusses images of the Chinese in early twentieth-century US labor struggles, which show an “endless stream of tiny Chinese workers” overpowering white labor:

The threatened triumph of the coolie promised a victory of quantity over quality, of consistent small efforts over heroic large ones, of the faceless horde over the individual, and of mass production over unalienated, organic labor. This is why the Chinese were so

often compared to insects, and why “the white laborer who would compete with them . . . must, like them, abdicate his individuality.” (HM, 142)

Ants are not known to be strong, but they are reputed to be numerous, stoic, and persistent, and to show strength only when working in a group. The same assertion was made, according to Hayot, by Henry George, who wrote in the *New York Tribune* in 1869, that “[the Chinese workers] take less earth at a spadeful than an Irishman. But in a day’s work take up more spadefuls” (HM, 142). As Hayot analyzes, “It is George’s second sentence that reveals the threat endurance posed to European labor. In a new economy defined by mass production, individual strength was giving way to the ability to suffer light burdens repetitively” (HM, 142). Likewise in *Die Chinesen kommen*, when the Chinese purchase of the Bavarian factory becomes the gossip of the town, a Mrs. Gerber, while shopping in the local grocery store, comments that the Chinese, small in stature and very content, can work all day with only a handful of rice and a few vegetables as reward: “Ja, der Chines is ja sehr kleinwüch-sig von Natur. Und sehr genügsam! . . . Für eine Handvoll Reis und ein bisserl Gmüs arbeitet der den ganzen Tag” (CL, 30). In *Losers and Winners*, the Chinese workforce is shown in a way that erases individual-ity and asserts a collective identity. The film shows them living together in a *Wohncontainerdorf*, receiving equal portions of rice and meat, eating together while watching TV, rinsing their bowls, and then rushing back to work. The German workers, for whom the comfort of coffee breaks or meal times is inviolable, see such behavior, though commonplace in China, as unsettlingly alien.

The Cold War and Contemporary German Representations of China

The Cold War mentality is ingrained in some of the townspeople in *Die Chinesen kommen*, which was made in 1986, before the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification. The deputy mayor is reluctant to give the Chinese an official reception at the train station, especially after a warning from Schorsch about the repercussions that greeting communists might have: “Ah! Für die Chinesn! Das ist mutig, mei Lieber! Das kann Stimmen kosten! Kommunistn begrüßn!” (CL, 45). The deputy mayor also refuses to read the scripted welcome speech in which he is supposed to say: “Wie auf einem fliegenden Teppich sollen die Vonderthannschen Werke ins Reich der Mitte gezaubert, aufs Neue erblühen” (CL, 50). The Arabian-Night metaphor of flying the factory on a magic carpet from Europe to the Middle Kingdom, where it would blossom again, sounds too supportive and mawkishly sentimental. He defends his reluctance by pointing to the incompatibility of their different political alignment: “Ich bin Vertreter einer christlich orientierten Partei und soll hier Kommunisten willkommen heißen” (CL, 50). Speaking the Cold War language, the mayor equates the Chinese with communists, thus conflating national identity with state identity. Cold War rhetoric still dominates Western perceptions of China in the mid-1980s, although the country changed its course from political radicalism to economic development, as signaled by Deng Xiaoping’s Reform and Open Door Policy (*gaige kai-fang*), after the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

A more recent example, *Losers and Winners* reflects a contemporary German view of a China that can no longer be reduced to a simplistic equation of China and communism. While the Chinese acquisition of German plants that inspired *Die Chinesen kommen* took place in the early stages of China’s industrial modernization and Westernization, *Losers and Winners* captures a transnational economic operation in 2003. During the interval of almost twenty years, China underwent drastic changes, punctuated by the Tiananmen protests, the 1992 introduction of the market economy, and China’s subsequent rise as an economic powerhouse. China’s hard-won entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 demonstrated that the Chinese government

embraced globalization as the key to the country's modernization. With China emerging as a major agent in globalization, news reports on China's economic boom and its thriving trade with Germany have become commonplace in contemporary German media.¹⁰ As a consequence of the recent financial crisis in the West, Germany strengthened its business ties with the Middle Kingdom in an effort to expedite economic recovery. However, like other Western nations, Germany competes for China's lucrative market while at the same time alienating its political elite by censuring its human-rights policies.¹¹ The economic interdependence between the two countries is countered by a discourse of political divergence. In fact, business headlines are likewise divided between welcoming China's purchase of German goods and expressing alarm at the threat that the Chinese economy allegedly presents for Germany.¹² Ambivalent feelings about China as helpful partner or harmful foe characterize contemporary German media perceptions of China. The media constantly debate whether or not China will become the next superpower.¹³ This portrayal of China as an ambitious capitalist late-comer rather than the communist "other" represents a shift in the West's portrayal of China. However, the "yellow peril" metaphor remains evocative of current anxieties around labor and globalization.

The Deal and the Involuntary Encounter

Die Chinesen kommen starts off with a strong suggestion of the home-land being encroached on by the "yellow peril." The opening pan shot of the alpine landscape provides the backdrop for the Bavarian town where the dismantlement will take place. A narrator introduces the imminent demise of the "Von der Tann'schen," a local factory that has been the single industrial employer in this small town for decades. [See fig. 4.2.]

The Alps, together with *Auerhahn*, *Neuschwanstein*, *Trachten*, *Gamsbart*, and *Schuhplattler*, all of which are featured in *Die Chinesen kommen*, evoke the *Heimatfilm*. The characters in the film also speak in the Bavarian dialect. However, unlike some earlier *Heimat* films, which rely excessively on nature scenes such as the Lüneburg Heath or the Black Forest, in this narrative landscape is marginal to the dominant discussion of cultural clashes and gradual rapprochement.

A seasoned documentarist, Stelzer originally intended to make a documentary of the disassembly of a Bavarian factory after he learned of the news on TV. However, by the time he had gathered together the funds, the factory was already gone. Nonetheless, Stelzer then decided to make a feature film about this topic with a script that Ulrich Enzensberger and he coauthored. Unbeknownst to viewers, in a factory in the Ruhr region instead of in Bavaria.¹⁴ This background information supports the idea that *Heimat*, when pitted against China in an era of accelerated globalization, is hardly provincial or regional but is rather to be equated with Germany at large.

Animosity, tension, cultural stereotypes, and the language barrier are expected components of narratives that chronicle economic transactions between two nations. Hansi Pfnürr, a union member and one of the four remaining workers who are overseeing the disassembly, hopes that the plant may be sold to a German buyer so as to keep jobs in the country. However, the factory owner—Von der Tann Junior—seems only concerned about his own interests. Hansi then tries to dissuade the Chinese from buying the factory by appealing to the working-class solidarity both groups supposedly share. This plea is not even understood because of the lack of an interpreter at the time. When Hansi's last-ditch attempt to plead with Von der Tann Senior fails, the town must accept the fact that "the Chinese are coming."

The initial class conflict between the German workers and their boss takes some heat off the Chinese, who would not have bought the factory had it not gone bankrupt. However, this fact does not help reduce the towns-people's resentment toward the Chinese. They blame them for losing their jobs and a piece of *Heimat*. Hostility toward them is most obvious in the locals' reluctance to welcome them at the train station. Mr. Raith, who is a *Heimat* poet (*Heimatdichter*) and a Sinophile in the film, tries to organize a small welcome ceremony. For him, a reception would be "eine völlig unpoli-tische Kulturbegegnung." He encourages, for example, the butcher to deco-rate his display window with table-tennis balls; however the butcher refuses by arguing that the Chinese will not visit his shop anyway, because they eat dog meat. The deputy mayor fears political consequences should he welcome the unpopular guests, who, to make matters worse, are the political "other." What Hansi really wants to write on the banner that he tries to make for the resented welcome event is "Bavaria to the Bavarians!": "Mir brauchen a Parole, an Spruch. Aber auf China past ja nix. Ich kann ja nicht schreiben 'Bayern den Bayern'" (CL, 36). On the day of the Chinese workers' arrival, Raith makes sure that a boy paints the small flags all red; he also sets up a large red banner that reads "Vorwärts beim Aufbau der bolschevistischen Partei! Hoch China!" The anachronistic usage of the "Bolshevistic Party" to refer to the Chinese Communist Party, the CCP, contributes to the comic effect of the film. The welcoming event turns out to be a missed encounter in a metaphorical as well as in a literal sense. When the train arrives, the band starts to play and the *Schuhplattler* dance also begins. As soon as they see no Chinese disembarking, the small crowd disperses instantly. After the train pulls out of the station, the viewer sees a group of Chinese standing on the other side of the rail track. The Chinese workers' lack of orientation in a foreign world has caused them to get off on the wrong side. [See fig. 4.3.]

The documentary *Losers and Winners*, also an industrial transition film, captures the largest disassembly in the Ruhr region, the *Heimat* of the directors Franke and Loeken; Franke was born and grew up in Dortmund, and Loeken comes from a town close to the Ruhr Valley. The removal of the Kaiserstuhl plant thus appeared as a "lucky coincidence" for the filmmaking couple (FL). The film starts with a text that explains the prehistory to the film: Built as the world's technologically most advanced coking plant in 1992 at a cost of €650 million, Dortmund's factory was shut down after 8 years of operation because it would be cheaper to import coke than to process it in Germany. The disquieting sound track accompanying this statement emphasizes the seriousness of the situation. After the production at the Kaiserstuhl plant ceased, Deutsche Steinkohle (DSK) sold it to the highest bidder, Chinese investor Luan Wei, in 2003. The Chinese state company, YanKuang, then purchased it for Jinin, the capital city of Shandong. In the fall of 2003, soon after the deal was closed, about 400 Chinese workers arrived in Dortmund to dismantle the plant.

In the first sequence of the film, the German electrician Rainer Kruska comes to work. His arrival is intercut with scenes of Chinese workers who have already been working since seven in the morning. In this cross-cutting opening, the film seems to posit its central opposition between a conventional notion of Chinese workers as "ants" or "coolies" (who are filmed in a long shot that renders them faceless and negates their individuality) and the highly individualized German worker. [See fig. 4.4.]

However, the documentary later subverts such a portrayal when it films Chinese workers in close-ups and gives voice to a few individuals with whom the audience becomes very familiar by the end of the film. In the next sequence, the project's assistant director from Deutsche Steinkohle (DSK), Gerd Seibel, and another electrician walk onto a high-rise balcony; they

overlook a Chinese worker on the ground who is painting Chinese characters onto a wall so as to identify the different buildings for the Chinese workers, thereby claiming the territory by inscribing and naming it. [See fig. 4.5.]

Kruska later expresses skepticism about reassembling the parts in China, because, according to him, the Chinese do not have the necessary experience or knowledge to “resurrect” the plant. A Chinese engineer, however, proudly lists in the film his company’s history of dismantling German factories (including Zündapp, the Munich motorcycle company in 1985,¹⁵ and a refrigerator factory of AEG in Kassel in 1987), underscoring their ability to complete the project. He turned out to be correct, since the coke factory was already running in China in 2006. In 2003, the Chinese reassembled the factory without on-site assistance from a German expert.

The Disassembly

In *Losers and Winners* the rationale behind the acquisition is explained by the project manager and party secretary, Mo Lishi: “Currently, the height of Chinese furnaces is 6 meters, and that of the German ones is 7.63m. This purchase will modernize coke production in China and push it forward by 20 to 30 years. This technology is then going to be disseminated to other regions of China.”¹⁶ The historic event of transplanting a German coke factory exemplifies the kind of goods that China imports from the West: “The fastest growing imports are of machinery and transportation equipment, particularly those embodying higher level of technologies than China can produce domestically.”¹⁷ The plant relocation is concurrent with media reports about China’s hunger for raw materials: “Die Tatsache, dass es auf dem Hintergrund der Debatte um die Rohstoffversorgung stattfindet, kommt unserem Film selbstverständlich entgegen” (*FL*). In hindsight, China made a lucrative and strategic move, because, as the film’s final screen text states, the coke price rose from \$50 to \$500 per ton after the transfer to China. In the film, Rainer Kruska foresees that coke will be coming from China in the future. In retrospect, the sale turned out to be a mistake for the Germans.¹⁸ The suggestion that China wins out in this international deal seems to resonate with the image of globalizing China as the “yellow peril.”

The film bases its development in a narrative of competition, of winners and losers, and locates its main conflict between the Chinese and the German workers. As Franke remarks, “Für die einen ist der Abbau ein Schritt in die Zukunft, während die anderen etwas verlieren, von dem sie immer glaubten, es sei ihre Zukunft. Natürlich sind unter die-sen Bedingungen der Freiraum und die Bereitschaft für ein gegenseitiges Kennenlernen und Aufeinanderzugehen sehr begrenzt” (*FL*). In addition, the disparity between *Heimat* and *Fremde* and the resulting sense of different national and ethnic belonging overshadows their common socio-economic identity as workers. Consequently, the two films highlight disagreements and conflicts between the German and the Chinese workers. In *Die Chinesen kommen* Hansi is exasperated at the speed and the seemingly chaotic manner with which the Chinese take apart the machines, especially when he sees a worker cut cables without having turned off the electricity. The film constructs stereotypical images of a German love for *Ordnung*, for instance when Mr. Dachs insists that Chinese workers place the oilcan at the same spot as he used to. When a Chinese employee, Mr. Zhu, also takes his break at the Germans’ *Brotzeiteck*, it is the last straw for Mr. Dachs: “Das geht fei nicht, dass die da jetzt schon bei uns herin-sitzn! I mecht mei Ruah” (*CL*, 80). Likewise in *Losers and Winners*, not only the Chinese management but also the workers themselves are ignorant of, or insensitive to, safety protocols, which irritates the Germans, for whom regulations are sacred. An uncertified Chinese electrician rigs a light switch so that, as the female interpreter points out, the

light can be turned off at night; at another point, Chinese workers cobble together a makeshift ladder that the assistant director Gerd Seibel then throws away. The two films present German arrogance toward the Chinese, which, however, erodes as the factory gradually disappears in front of their eyes.

Despite representing the anxieties of the Germans, both films maintain their reasonable distance from the German workers and do not ratify the German's fear of the "yellow peril," nor do they defend the concept of the homeland. The Chinese are portrayed as hard-working, peaceful, unassuming, and friendly. The Germans, on the other hand, do not receive an outright positive portrayal. Schorsch in *Die Chinesen kommen* is humorously cast as a dubious character who steals Machine 509 so as to retain a piece of the plant (*Heimat*). The motif of the theft is genre-based; it exists in the *Heimatfilm* classics such as *Grün ist die Heide* (The heath is green, 1951) by Hans Deppe and *Am Brunnen vor dem Tore* (At the well outside the gate, 1952) by Hans Wolff. The "thefts" here are presented as motivated by an emotional tie to the past and thus understandable. As Heide Fehrenbach writes about the *Heimatfilm*: "These films were good-natured in their treatment of flawed characters, all of whom were likable because they were fundamentally good at heart. . . . Thus, viewers would find no condemnation here" (162). These "thieves" always make "a last redeeming move" (157). In the case of Schorsch, he, with an ironic twist, must leave his *Heimat* temporarily to be the foreign expert helping with the reassembly process in China.

In *Die Chinesen kommen* the two sides of the cultural divide gradually meet. After some initial tension, the disassembly goes rather smoothly accompanied by merriment, friendship, and even romance, in spite of the film's menacing title, reminiscent of the 1966 American comedy *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming*. Rose, who up until then is Hansi's girlfriend, is instantly attracted to the Chinese cook Tschiang (played by the non-Chinese actor Bembe Bowakow) and actively seeks a rendezvous with him.¹⁹ In the original script Rose's relationship with Tschiang causes a scandal in town (*CL*, 128). In the film the relationship is presented as obviously not viable, superficial, and harmless. Moreover, in line with conventional portrayals of Asian male sexuality, the Chinese men in the film are depicted as sexually non-aggressive. When Rose appears for their first date, Tschiang shyly runs away. [See fig. 4.6.]

It is Rose who takes off her jacket and lays it on Tschiang's shoulder when they take a walk in a foggy chilly morning, noting he is cold. [See fig. 4.7.] When they are about to have their first kiss, Tschiang is visibly timid vis-à-vis the more inviting Rose. The portrayal of Tschiang as effeminate resonates with orientalist's depictions of Chinese men as lacking in masculinity.²⁰ The stranger in the classical *Heimatfilm* used to get the local girl in the end, thus guaranteeing a happy ending (*NP*, 177). However, this is not the case if the stranger is Chinese, especially when he is depicted as unmanly and linguistically mute. Rose's relationship with Hansi has never really been shaken by Tschiang's appearance. Hansi chances upon the two when they are about to have their first kiss. [See fig. 4.8.]

Though shocked and distraught, Hansi interprets it as Rose's attraction to the exotic, the unknown, and the impenetrable. As film scholar Anton Kaes points out, *Heimat* "stands for the possibility of secure human relations."²¹ *Die Chinesen kommen* at first portrays the arrival of the Chinese as potential threat to normative sexual relationships in Bavaria. However, the conventional sexual relation is restored and embraced at the end. As von Moltke observes, referring to *Heimat*'s susceptibility to outside influences, "the ideological value of *Heimat*, its morality, remains intact and serves to mask the very transition that it facilitates" (*NP*, 151). In

the *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s, the female protagonist is often “a driving force of modernization”: “she recognizes and accepts the signs of the times much faster than the men.”²² In the same vein, Fehrenbach also views women in the *Heimatfilm* as “midwives to the future” (159). However, Rose can only be partially identified with the progressive force that facilitates cultural interaction and racial integration as she has more love for the *Heimat* than she seems to be aware of.

Die Chinesen kommen features a father-daughter relation between Schorsch and Rose as well as a love triangle, elements typical of *Heimat* films. The genre of comedy compels the film to avoid a pessimistic outlook and adopt a conciliatory narrative arc that moves from acute conflict between the two national groups to attempted coexistence and acceptance. German and Chinese workers are shown to exchange presents, go on excursions, and have dinners together. Mr. Dachs eventually likes Mr. Zhu to join him during coffee breaks, because Zhu has cured his recalcitrant back pain with acupuncture. The deputy mayor even invites the Chinese delegate to visit his estate. The two sides find more common ground than they had previously assumed. Mr. Dachs points out that both peoples are hardworking: “Wenn die Chinesen Ameisen sind, sind die Bayern Bienen” (CL, 131). The shared attachment to land draws them even closer. The Chinese could not agree more with what the deputy mayor says about agriculture: “Ich als Landwirt sage: hat der Bauer Geld, hat es die ganze Welt” (CL, 96). The Chinese interpreter is quick to point out that Mr. Wang, the group leader, is himself from a peas-ant family. As Hans Brenner, who plays the greaser Schorsch, says in an interview:

Die Begegnung eines Bayern mit dem chinesischen Kulturkreis bringt einige Überraschungen mit sich. Erstens, daß sie nicht so gelb sind, wie man meint. Zweitens, daß sie auch nicht so gleich ausschauen, wie das der Volksmund kundtut, und drittens haben die Chinesen, und das haben sie mit den Bayern gemein, einen tiefen Hang zum Volkstümlichen.²³

Jörg Hube, in the role of Hansi, also observes commonalities between the two ethnicities: “Der Chinese—das sind Schlüsse, die ich ziehe aus dem Zusammensein während der Dreharbeiten mit den Chinesen aus der Volksrepublik—ist ein lebenslustiger, sehr spielerischer Mensch, und damit hat er sehr viel gemeinsam mit dem Altbayern, der im Grunde auch ein theatralisches Element in sich trägt.”²⁴

These kinds of friendly interactions are absent in the documentary *Losers and Winners*, which suggests that this structuring conflict can be resolved only in fiction. *Losers and Winners* realistically depicts the parallel lives of German and Chinese workers, where personal contact and cultural exchange is nonexistent. In *Die Chinesen kommen*, the East-West encounter offers an opportunity for cultural performance so that viewers see the Chinese workers practice tai chi, sing a Chinese tune, play Chinese chess, and even learn the German language. In the documentary, performance yields to daily routines that nonetheless reveal different national characteristics. Thus whereas stereotyping in *Die Chinesen kommen* is more constructed and staged, it is observed and framed in *Losers and Winners*. Whereas actual workers carry out the disassembly in the documentary film, Stelzer casts Chinese scholars and students as workers, because real workers in Germany in the 1980s were primarily cooks, who did not have time for a film.²⁵

China as a Capitalist/Communist Hybrid

As a documentary, *Losers and Winners* does not create dramatic subplots such as theft and interracial romance, more typical of the fiction genre. However, the documentary shapes images and narratives of the experience of the people directly involved. It shows how

international deals are made at the expense of the workers' welfare: German workers are laid off or forced into early retirement, and Chinese workers have to work twelve-hour shifts and be away from their families for a year and a half. The film gives German workers an opportunity to voice their insecurity and anxiety. Rainer Kruska, for example, expresses his emotional attachment to the workplace and the importance of work for his social identity: "Tut doch Weh. Arbeit gehört zum Leben." However, the film's portrayal of the hierarchical Chinese working culture in a capitalist communist China does not suggest that the Chinese workers are winners, either.

The documentary depicts China in transition and its current hybrid nature with a communist political system and a capitalist economy. Mo Lishi, the work unit's Communist Party secretary as well as project manager, embodies the interlocking relationship between the Chinese government and capitalism.²⁶ His state company uses incentive and discipline to motivate its workers and encourage selfless sacrifice. Every month, seven exemplary workers are honored by being given a big red bow to wear and having their pictures displayed on the canteen wall. According to director Loeken, this ritual, laden with communist symbols, was not staged artificially for the film and is still in practice in state companies in China.²⁷ These sequences in the film illustrate the Communist part of China's hybrid system, and shows that these practices are still current. [See fig. 4.9.]

In general, the pressure that the Chinese management exerts on workers subjects them to extreme stress.²⁸ An elderly worker's bold complaint reveals much about the physical, emotional, and psychological hardships that these workers endure. The long shift causes him to dream half of the night about dismantling the factory. This worker also tells of an incident that makes Mo a less sympathetic figure. Mo had seen him finish work fifteen minutes early, which seemed justifiable enough under the circumstances. Nevertheless, he told the worker that €50 would be deducted from his monthly wage of €400. (The entire payment was withheld until the end of the work trip in Germany.) This incident displays a lack of empathy on the part of the Party Secretary. The viewer hardly sees Mo do any actual dismantling work; rather, he shows off his lyrical abilities in composing verses. The film also presents him as irredeemably entrenched in early capitalist thinking, pursuing maximum profit.²⁹ Even after an accident in which a worker is fatally wounded, Mo blatantly shows his dis-regard for employee safety. He boastfully reminisces about his experience in mining 800 meters beneath the earth with some pipes not just drip-ping but gushing oil. Mo dismisses concerns over such unsafe conditions: "Otherwise how do we achieve success? Where do we have money to buy out this German company?" He obviously prioritizes economic growth over other social ideals and values. He even quotes Mao Tse Tung's dictum that sacrifice is inevitable in social struggle. The communist revolution is rhetorically and habitually invoked by the party secretary as well as by workers.³⁰ For example, when Mo drives back from the Benz dealership, the music in his car is playing a romanticized version of an old-time song about Chairman Mao coming to the commune, exemplifying comparatist critic Kang Liu's observation: "The specter of Mao looms large. . . . But Mao seems to serve largely as an enfeebled, remote icon of nostalgia and romantic rebellion deprived of its revolutionary core."³¹ The documentary captures the surprising confluence of authoritarian communist ideology with an aggressive capitalist rhetoric. The Chinese capitalist boom is promoted by a Maoist-era discourse that glorifies a notion of sacrifice made by extremely industrious and resilient Chinese workers. The film thus exposes the official position of the Chinese government as legitimating rhetoric.

On the other hand, the film also connects the work morale of some workers with nationalist and patriotic sentiment. One of the young employees views his work abroad as a national mission of sorts: "I work hard and I like my job. It is an honor that my company sent me here, and I will do this job well." Another worker regards a strong nation as prerequisite for confident self-identity: "A Chinese used to pretend to be Japanese, because he was ashamed of being Chinese; now the Motherland is stronger, he is proud to be Chinese and he would not lie about his nationality." This young worker's remark reflects a new national pride deriving from China's sovereignty and its surpassing of its former colonizers. In *Losers and Winners*, the Chinese are no longer seen only as communists. Instead they are competitors, working ambitiously for an economy that tries to rival the West. The humble tone, still salient in *Die Chinesen kommen*, is gone. The documentary demonstrates the confidence, pride, and hope for the future, which stands in contrast to the Germans' feelings of loss, nostalgia, and insecurity. As author Moritz Holfelder comments about *Losers and Winners*: "Desillusionierte Deutsche treffen auf hoch motivierte Chinesen. Das ist deutsche Gründlichkeit kontra fernöstliche Improvisation, Individualität kontra Loyalität, Vergangenheit kontra Zukunft."³² However, although the film might suggest on the surface that the Chinese are the winners in this international deal, the strenuous and often unsafe working conditions of the Chinese workers as depicted in the film project China not as a true winner, at least not as far as the workers are concerned. When asked who the filmmakers intended to be the losers and winners, Michael Loeken answered that the Chinese workers are forced to blindly chase a vision of a better future under brutal conditions, whereas the German workers face identity loss and psychological problems and are robbed of their sense of *Heimat* (FL). By suggesting that the workers are all losers and that the capitalists are the ones who profit through such a global deal, the film implicitly positions itself as anti-capitalist and critical of globalization.

***Heimat* and Globalization**

The stance that *Die Chinesen kommen* takes concerning *Heimat* and globalization is ambivalent. The nostalgic and conservative tone is particularly strong at the beginning. Evoking the *Heimatfilm*, it includes typical Bavarian features such as the Alps, Bavarian costumes, and the local dialect; the deputy mayor is seen herding his sheep; Schorsch's secret factory is located on an idyllic stream next to a run-down mill. As in the *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s, the sense of loss and nostalgia dominates the mood of the German working class in the film, a class that, Hansi laments, is dying out apparently because there is no work for them: "Aber was passiert denn mit einem, wenn man ihn nimmer braucht? . . . Wisst ihr, manchmal glaub ich, die Arbeiterklasse stirbt aus. Es handelt sich bei uns um Restexemplare. Mir san so etwas wie Panda-Bären" (CL, 7). Hansi identifies the German working class with pandas, an endangered species native to the southwestern region of China, to express his belief that the very existence of German workers is at stake. The Bavarian town loses its only factory and is deindustrialized for the time being, which signals the defects of modernization and globalization.

Although the Bavarian hometown seems to be a victim of globalization, *Heimat* also witnesses progress when it is forced to undergo social and psychological modernization through its encounters with the Chinese. Initially, *Heimat* is a claustrophobic place that the protagonists want to escape. At the beginning of the film, Rose yearns to go to Rimini in Italy and lie on the beach licking a large ice cream. Ritzer, another worker and a rock'n roll fan, only cares about when he can go to Texas. Hansi deliberates on whether to go to China as *Aufbauhelfer*, although

in the end he categorically rejects the trip and instead volunteers Schorsch. The arrival of Chinese workers opens doors for the provincial town and brings the exotic close to home. In the process of gradual acceptance of “the other,” the small town leaves many prejudices behind. The relationship between the Bavarians and the Chinese evolves for the better. Unlike the documentary *Losers and Winners*, the feature film *Die Chinesen kommen* portrays two sides of the cultural divide as well as opportunities for reconciliation and cooperation. Right at the beginning Mr. Raith sees the loss as temporary for the town: “Im Chaos liegt die Chance zum Neubeginn” (CL, 24), indicating that globalization provides new opportunities for Germany.

In *Losers and Winners*, Franke and Loeken declare that they have no opinion on globalization: “Uns ging es nie darum, mit unserem Film Begriffe wie ‘Globalisierung’ oder ‘Arbeitskultur’ zu bebildern oder gar zu erklären. Vielmehr standen die Menschen im Fokus, die uns ihre Geschichten erzählt und damit ein plastisches Bild vermittelt haben, welche gravierende, gesellschaftliche Veränderungen gegenwärtig stattfinden” (FL). However, the subject of the film inevitably presents a commentary on these processes. In the title, “losers” precedes “winners,” indicating that, at least in this case, there are more losers than winners in global capitalism.

The assertion of German industrial superiority and the depiction, at the same time, of the country’s loss of status constitute major narrative thrusts of these two films. The films emphasize the fact that Germany possesses more advanced technology and facilities desirable to the aspiring Chinese. In *Die Chinesen kommen* German superiority is shown in the fact that Schorsch goes to China as a foreign expert to ensure a successful reassembly. Hansi’s relationship to Rose perseveres and has only been temporarily threatened by an interracial one, which the film presents as clumsy friendship out of naive curiosity rather than erotic attraction. In *Losers and Winners*, the Chinese come to Germany as guest workers of a kind, though under contract with the Chinese state company. The German workers are amazed at the extent to which the Chinese are willing to work. As the project’s assistant director from Deutsche Steinkohle (DSK) Gerd Seibel puts it, no German worker would put up with the grueling conditions of the dismantling that the Chinese workers have endured. The same rhetoric is used to describe the nineteenth-century Chinese “coolies” and the twentieth-century guest workers. The implicit superiority of the Germans indicates the films’ conservative side, which is characteristic of the *Heimatfilm*. However, the loss of jobs and the frustration of the German workers offset the pride they used to take in their workplace.

While earlier *Heimatfilms* feature deported ethnic Germans, emigrants, and exiles, the German protagonists of these two later films are workers who have (temporarily) lost their jobs because of globalization, which resembles an economic war for these workers. Like the refugees and resettlers after the Second World War, they are “displaced” and have to reintegrate into society. Whereas classical *Heimat* films used to take place in rural areas, these films shift to industrial sites to confront the process of Germany’s modernization and globalization. The industrial and technological strength of the German economy is what attracts Chinese investors and occasions the translocation of *Heimatfilm* from the rural to the urban. These two films take up the task of rendering global capitalism concrete and visual and showing its immediate impact on people. They are more interested in the people involved than in the technical details of the disassembly. Like previous *Heimat* films, they are not escapist but are timely products that address Germany in the context of globalization.

Notes

1. In the heartrending as well as uplifting autobiography *Mein Leben unter zwei Himmeln: Eine Lebensgeschichte zwischen Shanghai und Hamburg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), first published by Scherz in 2001, the Sinology professor at the University of Hamburg, Yu-Chien Kuan, tells of his uprooted life in China during the Japanese invasion, his victimization during the Cultural Revolution, his escape to Egypt, and his new home in Germany. In Petra Häring-Kuan's novel *Chinesisch für Anfänger* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2007), a German woman, Nina, comes to Shanghai after her boy-friend abandons her for another woman, and Shanghai becomes the place of consolation, new love, and unlimited opportunities. Yu-Chien Kuan and Petra Häring-Kuan's *Der China-Knigge: Eine Gebrauchsanweisung für das Reich der Mitte* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2006) and *Die Langnasen: Was die Chinesen über uns Deutsche denken*, with a foreword by Helmut Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2009) share the authors' profound knowledge and cogent observation of the two cultures. Their works have become valuable handbooks for people travelling between the two countries. Another Berlin-based Chinese minor-ity writer in Germany, Luo Lingyuan, has published a few novels and non-fiction works in German. Her *Nachtschwimmen im Rhein*, translated from the Chinese by Axel Kassing (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008) is a collection of love stories, mostly about young Chinese women, who aspire to pursue their dreams and happiness in Germany; as they attempt to adjust to and integrate into a foreign and often "cold" country, their stories are rife with eroticism and violence, perseverance and hope. Her novel *Wie eine Chinesin schwanger wird* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009) narrates the trip that a Chinese woman photographer and her German boyfriend make to China. The politically charged issues surrounding Tibet's and Taiwan's independence inevitably politicize artistic productions such as Werner Herzog's documentary of Buddhist pilgrimages in *Rad der Zeit*, in cooperation with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (Arthaus, Germany, 2003), and Monika Treut's lesbian love story *Ghosted* (Hyena Films, Germany, 2009).
2. Manfred Stelzer, dir., *Die Chinesen kommen* (Süddeutscher Rundfunk; Journal-Film Klaus Volkenborn KG, Germany, 1986).
3. Ulrike Franke and Michael Loeken, dirs. *Losers and Winners: Arbeit gehört zum Leben* (Filmproduktion LoekenFranke Köln, Germany, 2006).
4. Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 165.
5. Johannes von Moltke, *No Place like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11. Further references to this work are given in the text using the abbreviation *NP* and the page number.
6. Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 74.
7. Quoted from the film script "Die chinesische Lösung," 66. The characters speak with a strong Bavarian accent, which makes transcription impossible for me. Luckily I found the film script by Ulrich Enzensberger and Manfred Stelzer in Deutsche Kinemathek's Schriftgut in Berlin. There are two different versions of the script, titled "Die chinesische Lösung" and "Ein seltener Besuch" respectively. Both versions are different from the actual film. I quote from "Die chinesische Lösung," but I use only lines that are indeed spoken in the film, with possible variations. Further references to this script are given in the text using the abbreviation *CL* and the page number.

8. In an interview Michael Loeken, one of the filmmakers, reveals: “Wir haben aber auch ihre Ressentiments gegenüber den Chinesen kennen gelernt, und so manches Mal war es uns peinlich, wie sie über die Chinesen gesprochen haben.” (See the interview with Ulrike Franke and Michael Loeken on the film’s official website. The interview is available both in German and English; <http://www.losers-and-winners.net/>. Further references to this interview are given in the text using the abbreviation *FL*.)
9. Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 140. Further references to this work are given in the text using the abbreviation *HM* and the page number.
10. “China ist neuer Exportweltmeister” (*Spiegel Online*, 9 Feb. 2010), “China ist wichtigster Lieferant Deutschlands” (*Spiegel Online*, 9 Aug. 2010), “China verdrängt Japan als zweitgrößte Wirtschaftsmacht” (*Spiegel Online*, 16 Aug. 2010), “Deutschland profitiert von Chinas Aufschwung” (*Die Welt*, 5 Sept. 2010), “China übernimmt. Peking kauft Firmen und Infrastruktur in aller Welt. Jetzt öffnet sich Europa” (*Zeit Online*, 16 Jul. 2010).
11. A few news titles exemplify this trend: “Die Rückkehr der Moral: Angela Merkel empfing den Dalai Lama—zum Ärger der Chinesen und zur Freude der deutschen Medien. Denn der Schröder’sche Schmus-Pragmatismus ist vorbei.” Adrian Pohr, *Zeit Online*, 24 Sept. 2007, “Tibet Krise: Merkel und Steinmeier bleiben Olympia-Eröffnung fern” (*Spiegel Online*, 28 Mar. 2008), “Westerwelle fordert mehr Menschenrechte in China” (*Spiegel Online*, 15 Jan. 2010).
12. “Handelsbilanz: China löst Deutschland als Exportweltmeister ab” (*Stern*, 9 Feb. 2010); “Wie abhängig die deutsche Wirtschaft von China ist” (*Handelsblatt*, 23 Feb. 2010); “Deutsche Wirtschaft schlägt Alarm!: Chinesen kaufen uns die Rohstoffe weg” (*Bild*, 12 Oct. 2010).
13. For example, an article in *Time* states: “In this century the relative power of the U.S. is going to decline, and that of China is going to rise. That cake was baked long ago.” (See “China Takes on the World,” *Time*, 11 Jan. 2007).
14. See “Delta präsentiert ‘Die Chinesen kommen’” (Schriftgutarchiv at Deutsche Kinemathek) as well as the following reviews of the film: Rosemarie Bus’s “Chinesen in Bayern” in the *Westfälische Rundschau—Dortmund* (18 Feb. 1987); Michael Althen’s review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung—München* “Die Chinesen waren schneller: Manfred Stelzers Film über die gelbe Gefahr in Bayern” (no dates found on the newspaper clip); Arnold Hohmann’s review “Wenn Kulturkreise zusammenstoßen” in the *Westfälische Rundschau—Dortmund* (4 Jun. 1987); “Gut Freund mit Schlitzaugen: Der Film ‘Die Chinesen kommen’ by miw in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* (13 Mar. 1987); Peter W. Engelmeier’s review “Heimatkomödie: Bayern küßt China” in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* (1 Mar. 1987). I want to thank the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv for providing me with the newspaper clips pertaining to Stelzer’s film.
15. Although Stelzer does not mention this explicitly, the removal of Zündapp from Munich to Tianjin, China, was very likely the documentary that he did not manage to make.
16. All translations from the Chinese are mine.
17. Nicholas Lardy, *China in the World Economy* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1994), 108.
18. “Wie sich im Nachhinein herausstellte, waren die wirtschaftlichen Prognosen aus deutscher Sicht falsch und der Verkauf der Kokerei ein großer Fehler: Inzwischen

herrscht auf dem Weltmarkt ein enormer Mehrbedarf an Koks, nicht zuletzt durch die boomende Wirtschaft in China selbst.” Moritz Holfelder, “Bittere Pointe der Globalisierung: Film dokumentiert Abbau einer Kokerei in Dortmund” (Deutschlandradio Kultur, 3 Dec. 2007), <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/603803/>.

19. For the character of Tschiang, Stelzer uses the non-Chinese actor Bembe Bowakow, who actually speaks his mother tongue in the film, a fact that is, how-ever, not obvious to a German audience. What the director reveals is that he had a relatively easy time locating actors and actresses for the German roles; but that was not the case for the Chinese roles, since most Chinese in Germany were cooks and did not have time for film-making. He finally cast Chinese students and scientists as factory workers in the film. See “Delta präsentiert ‘Die Chinesen kommen.’”
20. See, for example, Gary L. Atkins, “My Man Fridae: Re-Producing Asian Masculinity,” *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 4, no. 1, article 31 (2005): 67–100.
21. Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, 165.
22. Georg Seeßlen, “Der Heimatfilm: Zur Mythologie eines Genres,” In *Der Sprung im Spiegel: Filmisches Wahrnehmen zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Christa Blümlinger (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1990), 353.
23. “Delta präsentiert ‘Die Chinesen kommen.’”
24. “Delta präsentiert ‘Die Chinesen kommen.’”
25. Rosemarie Bus’s “Chinesen in Bayern,” in the *Westfälische Rundschau—Dortmund*, 18 Feb. 1987.
26. Kang Liu, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004). The hybrid nature of China with its seemingly incompatible capitalist economy and communist one-party system has created a legitimation crisis for the CCP. As Kang Liu puts it, “Although ideological state apparatuses today still have to insist on some sort of socialist position solely for their legitimation, the assertion of the principles and advantages of socialism vis-à-vis capitalism in the age of globalization has become largely vacuous and irrelevant” (14). In the wake of China’s unprecedented and ambiguous embrace of both socialism and capitalism, Liu argues that Mao’s legacy has faded, with only a hollow shell remaining with which the ruling party can still defend its autocratic regime. Liu writes, “Mao’s revolutionary ideological hegemony has been deradicalized, and its meaning and content have been made hollow, but its discursive formations and rhetoric still provide the legitimation for the post-Deng regime. The legitimating discourse is simply incommensurable with the economic policies, because the discourse is predicated on Maoist ideologies of revolution, mass democracy, and egalitarianism, which are diametrically opposed to the endless accumulation of capital as the utmost aim of capitalism. Consequently, the ideological and legitimation crisis has haunted China since the beginning of the reform” (5).
27. Based on the author’s email communication with director Michael Loeken.
28. Interestingly, in one of the media pictures Mo is seen hugging this older worker, suggesting a human and less pretentious interaction between the party secretary and the rank and file; http://www.chicagodocfestival.org/07_losers%20winners.htm.
29. As Knut Elstermann writes, “China gehört die Zukunft, um den Preis frühkapi-talistischer Methoden.” Elstermann, “Was machen die Chinesen im Ruhrgebiet?— Eine Tragikomödie der Globalisierung: *Losers & Winners*,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 13 Apr. 2007).

30. As Kang Liu remarks, “the revolutionary legacy is deeply ingrained in the everyday life of China’s populace and is still active today” (*Globalization and Cultural Trends*, 16).
31. Liu, *Globalization and Cultural Trends*, 13.
32. Moritz Holfelder, “Bittere Pointe der Globalisierung: Film dokumentiert Abbau einer Kokerei in Dortmund.” Deutschlandradio Kultur, 3 Dec. 2007, <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/fazit/603803/>.