

Abstract PhD project: Seeger, Miriam

Taming the rivers: A history of optimizing the Chinese landscape in the 20th and early 21st century

The project examines the relationship between mankind and the natural environment in the Chinese context of the 20th and early 21st century, using the example of multifunctional large dams. The central argument is that the historically shaped perception of nature as a productive entity useful for society has been transmitted throughout times. The selective introduction of Western technological knowledge at the beginning of the 20th century reinforced the established pattern of understanding nature that tends to be functional. During the course of the 20th century, various – often contradictory – political rhetoric has been used to legitimize the transformation of nature and construction of large dams, such as national re-strengthening, subduing nature and taming rivers or a harmonious coexistence between mankind and nature. Although different rhetoric is used in different socio-political contexts, I will show that the perception of nature as a productive landscape is recognizable as an underlying transmitted paradigm.