

Press Release

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New Research Group to Focus on China in the Global System of Science

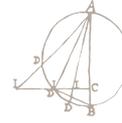
The People's Republic of China (PRC) has made an unprecedented rise in the global system of science over the past two decades. What roles do its authoritarian political regime and societal values play for science in contemporary Chinese society and internationally? The new interdisciplinary Lise Meitner Research Group "China in the Global System of Science" at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG) will bring such questions into focus. The group is led by Dr. Anna L. Ahlers, who has published widely on the political system of the PR China. She spent the previous five years as an Associate Professor in Modern Chinese Society and Politics at the University of Oslo, Norway.

The Chinese political leadership has called for a massive increase in contributions to science since the turn of the 21st century, formulating clearly and with increasing intensity its ambition to make China a leading scientific power. The country is now the world's largest producer of scientific articles, pours a staggering amount of money into funding research domestically and internationally, and increasingly makes world news due to its groundbreaking and sometimes controversial findings and methods.

"You only need to think of the recent beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic to sense the complexity of the relationship between science and politics in China today," says Ahlers. "While public information was politically suppressed, researchers communicated with their peers and shared valuable data through established worldwide scientific channels."

The interdisciplinary group will take a close and comprehensive look at such developments between politics and science in China. "We look to explore the many facets of China's stunning ascent in the system of science in recent decades, both qualitatively and quantitatively, at national and local levels, and in its global dimensions," Ahlers adds. The Research Group is part of the prestigious [Lise Meitner Excellence Program](#), which funds exceptionally qualified female researchers to independently develop a research program over five years.

The group's researchers will investigate perspectives on science in society and contemporary science policy in China. They will look at steering and agency in Chinese science and in international cooperation, and how societal values and ethical principles interact with scientific standards and practices. "Colleagues at the MPIWG are brilliant interlocutors when we want to add a more historical and comparative dimension to our findings," says Ahlers. "To look closely into the different aspects of our topic, we will take a much more interdisciplinary approach than would usually be possible in the disciplines of China Studies, or sociology of science, alone."



Biography: Dr. Anna L. Ahlers

Dr. Anna L. Ahlers holds a PhD in China Studies from the University of Tübingen. Before joining the MPIWG in January 2020, she was a tenured Associate Professor of Modern Chinese Society and Politics at the University of Oslo, Norway. She has also worked at the University of Bonn (FIW), Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), Academia Sinica (RoChina), and the University of Chicago where she was a Wigeland Visiting Professor in 2018/19. She is a member of the Junge Akademie (BBAW and Leopoldina) and will be a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 2020/21.

Selected Publications

- Ahlers, Anna L., Damien Krichewsky, Evelyn Moser, and Rudolf Stichweh. Forthcoming. *Democratic and Authoritarian Political Systems in 21st Century World Society. Vol. I.: Differentiation, Inclusion, Responsiveness*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Ahlers, Anna L., Mette Halskov Hansen, and Rune Svarverud. Forthcoming. *The Great Smog of China: A Short History of Air Pollution*. Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies.
- Ahlers, Anna L. 2014. *Rural Policy Implementation in Contemporary China: New Socialist Countryside*. London: Routledge. 2nd print, paperback 2017.
- Ahlers, Anna L. and Shen Yongdong. “Breathe Easy? Local Nuances of Authoritarian Environmentalism in China’s Battle Against Air Pollution.” *The China Quarterly* 234 (2018): 299–319.
- Ahlers, Anna L. and Gunter Schubert. “Effective Policy Implementation in China’s Local State.” *Modern China* 41, no. 4 (2015): 372–405.

Links

- Research Group: www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/research/departments/lise-meitner-research-group
- Profile, Dr. Anna L. Ahlers: www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/users/alahlers
- Feature article: www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/feature-story/china-global-system-science
- Lise Meitner Excellence Program: www.mpg.de/lise-meitner-excellence-program
- Subscribe to MPIWG Newsletter: www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/newsletter

About the MPIWG

Founded in 1994, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG) in Berlin, Germany, is one of the more than 80 research institutes administered by the Max Planck Society. It is dedicated to the study of the history of science and aims to understand scientific thinking and practice as historical phenomena, with projects spanning globally and across all eras of human history.

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