

Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte



The Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG) is an internationally respected research institute of the Max Planck Society (MPG) with currently two research departments, several research groups, and a graduate school. At the MPIWG, around 150 scholars from all over the world investigate the sciences past and present, working together on a collective, collaborative, and transdisciplinary basis. The MPIWG is renowned worldwide as a hub for reflection on the role of the sciences in politics and society. It is located in southwestern Berlin, close to the campus of the Free University Berlin and other research institutions.

1 Predoctoral Scholar Position (m/f/d)

to begin on October 15, 2026.

City: Berlin; Starting date (earliest): 15/10/26; Remuneration: (TVöD-Bund) 75 percent of salary grade 13, level 1; Closing date: 31/07/26

Tasks

The position will run for 3 years, with the possibility of extension for up to 4 years in total.

We are seeking a highly motivated researcher to join the research project “Scientific Empire: Infrastructure Control and Ideational Binding in China’s International Big Science Projects” (PI: Dr. Anna L. Ahlers).

The project is part of the Research Unit “Learning Empire: Autonomy, Dependence, and China’s Emerging Imperial Practices” (FOR 5913/1) funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The Research Unit represents a large-scale effort to study China’s changing international practices under the conditions of a world order in transition and includes eight projects across leading German universities and research institutions. It supports early-career researchers with transferable academic skills, a collaborative academic network, and a doctoral workshop program. More information on the Research Unit can be found here: <https://learning-empire.com/home/>.

The project hosted at the MPIWG focuses on China’s emerging internationally oriented large-scale research infrastructures, also known as “big science” projects. We aim to map the landscape of big science in contemporary China, explore how these projects have developed and are governed, how international cooperation operates in these sites of fundamental research, and how the status of such new scientific infrastructures — namely China’s growing centrality — is perceived globally. In addition to examining policy processes and learning in this area, we will conduct case studies, for example on two to three big science projects in physics, life sciences, and outer space research, to provide nuance and contextual detail. Candidates are encouraged to design their own dissertation projects that contribute to the goals of both the project and the broader research unit.

Your responsibilities:

- Conduct innovative doctoral research focused on China, guided by social science methodology — particularly approaches from International Relations/International Political Economy and/or the Sociology of Science. This includes original research, data collection, and interpretation in alignment with the project “Scientific Empire: Infrastructure Control and Ideational Binding in China’s International Big Science Projects”
- Using a multi-method approach, including document research, interviews and fieldwork in China and other contexts, and data tools to organize, analyze, and communicate findings
- Engaging actively in the intellectual life of the Research Unit “Learning Empire”
- The successful candidate will enroll in a PhD program at a university; suitable arrangements will be discussed with, and supported by, the research group leader after appointment.

Requirements

- A M.A. degree in political science (especially International Relations or International Political Economy), sociology, China studies, or a related field. Applicants with a background in a STEM field or other training relevant to the study of large-scale research infrastructures who can demonstrate their ability to contribute to the social science analyses guiding the project will also be considered.
- Excellent knowledge of English; knowledge of Mandarin Chinese desired
- Experience conducting research related to China and using qualitative methods; willingness to conduct fieldwork and to experiment methodologically
- A strong motivation to work in a collaborative, interdisciplinary research environment

What we offer

- Remuneration is based on the German collective salary agreement for the public sector, federal level (TVöD-Bund) at 75 percent of salary grade 13, level 1, at full working hours (39 hours per week)
- Flexible working hours; the opportunity to work from home as arranged with your superior; the opportunity to work part-time
- Annual year-end bonus; subsidy for public transportation within Berlin or Germany (“Jobticket”)
- Weekly in-house yoga classes; regular information on occupational health management courses offered by our partner health insurance companies
- Access to the wide range of training courses offered by the MPG’s Planck Academy
- Close contact with all research and research-support units with the opportunity for direct, personal dialogue
- An international setting with staff and guests from more than forty countries

The Max Planck Society is an equal opportunity employer that strives to foster an inclusive workplace. As an institute of the MPG, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science supports a working community for all free from discrimination and harassment. We explicitly encourage applications from qualified individuals who belong to groups that are often underrepresented in the workplace due to age, disability, ethnicity, family

status, gender, nationality, race, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, or religion.

Please follow the links to find out more about the MPIWG's policies on gender equality and hiring practices for people with disabilities, as well as Germany's anti-discrimination laws as outlined in the General Equal Treatment Act.

Application

Please submit your application with complete documents, preferably without a photograph, through our application portal <https://recruitment.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/position/36470784>. Please include:

- A cover letter (maximum 1,500 words) outlining your motivation, qualifications and the potential themes for the PhD project
- A curriculum vitae, including proof of C1-level English language skills or the equivalent
- Copies of your academic degrees and transcripts (in a single PDF file)
- A representative article or term paper and/or your Master thesis
- Contact details of two academic referees

Applications must be received by July, 31, 2026 (23:59 CEST). Applications submitted after this deadline may be considered until the position is filled.

Please note that we can only accept electronic applications submitted through the portal.

For any questions about the position, please contact Dr. Anna L. Ahlers (office-ahlers@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de). For questions about the application process, contact Ms. Dieu Linh Bui Dao (office-ahlers@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de).

Further information on the MPIWG can be found at <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/>

More information at <https://stellenticket.de/205482/TUB/>

Offer visible until 31/07/26

