

Special Issue – Call for Papers

in *Politische Vierteljahresschrift / German Political Science Quarterly*

Learning Empire: China, Imperial Practices, and the Transformation of Global Order

This special issue examines how China's rise is reshaping contemporary world politics through the emergence of new imperial practices as forms of hierarchical ordering. Moving beyond conventional approaches that frame China either as a "rising power" integrating into the existing international order or as a revisionist challenger seeking hegemonic leadership, the special issue develops the concept of **learning empire** to analyze how Chinese actors are constructing new forms of asymmetrical center–periphery relations across different policy domains.

The special issue uses empire as an empirical-analytical lens for understanding the transformation of international order in an era of intensifying geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry. Rather than focusing on formal territorial control, it conceptualizes empire as a relational logic of rule constituted through practices that generate autonomy for imperial centers while creating dependencies in peripheral spaces. Existing frameworks centered on multipolarity, hegemony, or liberal international order increasingly struggle to capture current developments such as weaponized interdependence, infrastructural competition, technological fragmentation, more flexible alliances, and interest-based bi-/multilateral partnerships, as well as the rise of competing spheres of influence. The Chinese case therefore serves not only to rethink China's global role, but also to contribute to broader debates about hierarchy, sovereignty, and the changing nature of global order in the twenty-first century.

We invite contributions that examine China's global practices through the framework of learning empire, broadly understood. The special issue thereby aims to understand China's changing international practices. Submissions may address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- China's construction of asymmetrical center–periphery relations across economic, technological, financial, infrastructural, ideational, scientific, or security domains;
- the role of Chinese policymakers, firms, financial institutions, technology companies, state agencies, and other societal actors in shaping new forms of international influence;
- processes of experimentation, adaptation, and learning in China's global engagement;

- investigations of China establishing centrality in economic structures, the creation of local intermediaries, governance through divide and rule, ideational binding, and the threat or use of force;
- the interaction between Chinese global practices and host-country agency, resistance, adaptation, or counterstrategies;
- China's role in the restructuring of global capitalism, infrastructures, supply chains, financial systems, technological standards, and geopolitical blocs;
- comparative or theoretical contributions that use the Chinese case to rethink empire, hierarchy, sovereignty, and global order beyond China alone.

The special issue is designed to speak to a broad political science audience, including scholars in International Relations, International Political Economy, Comparative Politics, Political Theory, Area Studies, Security Studies, and Political/Historical Sociology. We welcome papers that bridge subfields and connect domestic transformations within China to Chinese practices abroad.

The special issue will combine invited contributions with manuscripts selected through this open call. We especially encourage submissions from early career researchers, scholars from underrepresented backgrounds, and researchers from outside Germany. All manuscripts will undergo a double-blind peer review process.

This special issue proposal was accepted at the [Politische Vierteljahresschrift / German Political Science Quarterly](#) (5-year IF: 2.5), the flagship journal of the German Political Science Foundation (DVPW). Accepted manuscripts will be subject to the journal's standard peer review process.

Prospective authors are invited to submit an abstract of approx. 300 words, together with a short biographical note, by **15 August 2026**, with decisions being sent out in late August. The special issue contains a theoretical article that we are happy to share upon acceptance. Full manuscripts of accepted abstracts will be due by 31 December 2026. Before submission, the guest editors are happy to provide detailed feedback on advanced manuscripts.

Please send abstracts and inquiries to: LearningEmpire@protonmail.com

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

We are looking forward to your submissions!

All the best,

Johannes Petry, Goethe University Frankfurt / University of Warwick

Anna Ahlers, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science / University of Oslo

Tobias ten Brink, Constructor University, Bremen

(Guest Editors)