



China Keywords / 中国关键词

Call for Papers: Annual Conference, March 21–22, 2025

The 2025 annual conference of the Telos-Paul Piccone Institute will culminate the first year of a five-year program—the Telos China Initiative—that has aimed to set Telos on a distinct intellectual course.

The Telos circle falls outside many conventional intellectual categories. During the Cold War, this quality enabled us to form a bridge between Eastern Europe and the Anglosphere. We fostered work by Soviet-bloc intellectuals, helping Western readers understand the ideological dynamics at play behind the Iron Curtain; we supported a wide variety of dissidents in their opposition to bureaucratic centralization, as we have likewise for opponents of bureaucratic governance in the West; and we brokered an encounter between Marxism and phenomenology that was vital for critical thinkers in the Soviet and the liberal democratic world.

We believe that the future of the TPPI now lies in a parallel reciprocal engagement with China, to which we have given steadily increasing focus for the past ten years in our annual conferences. These meetings have laid the basis for seven special issues of the journal *Telos*, as well as numerous individual articles in the field. With the Telos China Initiative, we seek to become a key bridge for a mutually regarding, critical discussion of social and political theory between China and the West, well beyond the circles of East Asia specialists.

Our 2025 conference will cap the first year of this initiative, during which we launched our webinar series “China Keywords.” Taking broad inspiration from Raymond Williams’s *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), each webinar critically explores a single concept essential for understanding contemporary Chinese social and political theory, illuminating these concepts with an eye toward non-specialists in the West, while also addressing deep contestations of interest to experts in the field. Concepts include *tianxia* (天下), *wangdao* (王道), wealth and power (富强), the party-state, Leninism, socialism with Chinese characteristics (中国特色社会主义), Cultural Self-Confidence (文化自信), New Confucianism (新儒家), Mr. Democracy (德先生), Reform and Opening-Up (改革开放), *River Elegy* (河殤), sinocentrism (中国中心主义) and neo-imperialism (新帝國主義), the China Model (中国模式), Community of Common Destiny (人类命运共同体), and the New Era (新时代). Our conference takes the name of this webinar series and seeks to build on its themes. We expect the conference to result in a special issue of *Telos*.

We seek proposals for individual papers and full panels focused on, or that take as their starting point, a single keyword important for critically understanding the political-theoretical dynamics of contemporary China, which include its ideologies of global order and Chinese mission. For further examples, see the non-exclusive, developing list on our website. Papers or panels that illuminate the possibilities for critical theoretical dialogue between China and the West are most welcome, as are those from specialists that focus on intellectual debates within China. Likewise, contributions are welcome from specialists in Western theoretical traditions who seek to make a bridge to Chinese discursive communities—for instance, through the work of Carl Schmitt or the tradition of Critical Theory, with which the Telos circle has long been interested—as are papers that, fitting with the traditions of our circle, oppose any authority, East or West, that limits the possibility of individual emancipation within the telos of politics and of humankind.

Our conference will take place in New York on March 21–22, 2025. TPPI is not able to provide travel funds, nor will there be an option to present via Zoom. Proposals and presentation drafts will be reviewed and accepted on a rolling basis. Proposals are due by **September 1**; drafts of presentations are due by **November 15**, with feedback provided by the organizers to ensure an excellent conference event. For details and guidelines, see telosinstitute.net/china-initiative. Email inquiries to chinaconference2025@telosinstitute.net.