



## Two Volkswagen Foundation-funded PhD Scholarships:

### China's Science Silk Road and the New Geopolitics of Knowledge Production

Université Laval – Department of Political Science

**Closing date: November 14, 2025**

As part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has launched the "Science Silk Road" program, aimed at investing in science, technology and innovation in countries along this newly envisioned Silk Road. Observers suggest that the emerging Science Silk Road may be exporting a distinct form of "Chinese science", potentially giving rise to specific ways of doing science and alternative structures of the global science system. However, little is currently known about whether, and how, the Science Silk Road influences research practices and scientific knowledge production in BRI countries and globally.

We invite applications for two full-time, 4-year PhD scholarships for an international research project critically examining the multi-level impacts of China's expanding scientific cooperation, with a particular focus on **environmental** and **space issues**, starting **September 2026**. These scholarships are open to candidates of any nationality. They cover full tuition fees and a competitive stipend, with an estimated total value of C\$40,000 per year, subject to satisfactory progress. There are also additional funds for research and travel expenses, as well as dedicated workspace.

Funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, this project is a partnership between [Université Laval](#) in Quebec City and the [Max Planck Institute for the History of Science](#) (MPIWG) in Berlin. It aims to conduct one of the first in-depth analyses of the Science Silk Road, exploring its components, impacts on scientific knowledge production in BRI countries, and implications for established science powers and international science alliances. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from international relations, sociology of science, science and technology studies (STS), anthropology and geography, the project will contribute to theoretical and policy debates at the intersection of science policy and geopolitics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Successful candidates will be co-supervised by [Prof. Hang Zhou](#) and [Prof. Jean-Frédéric Morin](#) at Université Laval, alongside mentorship from [Prof. Han Cheng](#) and [Prof. Anna Lisa Ahlers](#) at MPIWG. A graduate advisory committee will be formed to guide the development of a plan of work, including coursework and dissertation research. Students will be expected to work independently, but also work in a team, carving out their individual contribution within the larger research project.

At Laval, students will be based at the [Department of Political Science](#), with affiliation to the [Graduate School of International Studies](#) and the [Interdisciplinary Centre for Research on Global Governance](#). They will have opportunities to spend time at MPIWG's [Lise Meitner Research Group "China in the Global System of Science"](#) in Berlin, and attend the University of Oslo's [PhD course "China and the Future of Geopolitics"](#) in Oslo. Funding for fieldwork, training, and attending conferences will also be provided.

### Eligibility & Overview

Candidates should hold, or expect to attain by the end of the 2025-26 academic year, a Master's degree with Merit or Distinction in political science, international relations, sociology, anthropology, geography, or related disciplines. Candidates should have a strong interest in science diplomacy, science policy, STS, science and society, science for development, global governance of science, or international scientific cooperation. Knowledge of the BRI and Global China Studies is beneficial but not mandatory.

Candidates may choose to focus on either a global or regional level. A global focus requires proficiency in mixed methods such as case studies, interviews, surveys, or data analysis. A regional focus should demonstrate a strong background in qualitative research, with a preference for experience in ethnographic fieldwork in Africa or Latin America. Candidates must be fluent in English or French, both oral and written, with a good understanding of the other.

**Application process:** Interested applicants should email Prof. Han Cheng at [hacheng@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de](mailto:hacheng@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de), attaching the following documents:

- Academic CV.
- Cover Letter (1 page), outlining your motivations to enroll in a PhD program and how your past experiences and training have prepared you to conduct a PhD thesis.
- Copy of academic transcripts, including a list of courses.
- Research proposal (3 pages), including research questions, theoretical framework, methodology, and references.

At a later stage, a formal application will be required through Université Laval. For more information on the PhD program and application process, please visit: <https://www.ulaval.ca/etudes/programmes/doctorat-en-science-politique#section-admissibilite>.

