

CALL FOR PAPERS

Performing Postsocialism: Cultures of Performance-Making in Twenty-First-Century China

DATE: 9-10 April 2026

VENUE: University of Vienna (Jura Soyfer-Saal, Hofburg)

Organized as part of a research project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), this symposium invites proposals that address the relationship between performance and postsocialism in twenty-first-century China. Since its initial formulations in the late 1980s and 1990s, the notion of postsocialism has captured the ideological ambiguities and cultural contradictions brought about by China's late-twentieth-century transition to a socialist market economy and integration into the global capitalist system in the new millennium. Postsocialism denotes a fluid condition of socioeconomic unevenness and temporal dissonance that mirrors the stratification of traditional values with historical experiences of revolution and reform, and the persistence of socialist-era practices and institutions alongside the affirmation of new societal dynamics and cultural formations. The tension and interplay between past legacies and futural aspirations continues to shape the postmillennial sociocultural landscape, reflecting the ongoing relevance of the postsocialist framework for the analysis of contemporary China.

The postsocialist turn has informed scholarly debates in several fields, ranging from literature and intellectual history to media and visual cultures. However, research on the impact of postsocialist transformation on the theory and practice of performance and on the reconfiguration of performance ecologies, aesthetics, and epistemologies since the turn of the twenty-first century has been limited.

The symposium adopts the notion of “performing postsocialism” as an overarching conceptual framework that encompasses both performance practices emerging from the sociopolitical and cultural context of postmillennial Chinese postsocialism and the performative aspects of postsocialist sociopolitical and cultural praxis.

First, the investigation of Performing Postsocialism involves the analysis of artistic performances (e.g. theatre, dance, performance art, video, installation, digital and new media art) that reflect the postsocialist zeitgeist by interrogating the social, cultural, and political reverberations of Chinese postsocialism through aesthetic forms of embodiment and representation. While the project focuses primarily on independent practices carried out outside or alongside state institutions and infrastructures, as well as articulations of civil society activism through the arts, the symposium also encourages submissions that engage with state-sponsored productions, official exhibitions, mainstream circuits, and commercial spaces.

Secondly, Performing Postsocialism broadens the scope of inquiry to consider social, cultural, and political processes beyond the artistic realm that can be situated within and examined from a performance perspective. These may include popular culture and media phenomena, mega-events and mass spectacles, practices of leisure, strategies of everyday

resistance, expressions of protest, forms of performative social behaviour, political rituals, and the ideological performances of state governance, among others.

Bridging methods from various disciplines, the symposium proposes to approach postmillennial performance through an expanded definition of “cultures of performance-making” in order to reflect on the multiple meanings and manifestations of this dual framework. On the one hand, this approach emphasizes the *making of* performance in terms of the materialities, technologies, industries, physical labour, and affective economies involved in its production and circulation. On the other hand, it aims to capture a broader phenomenological spectrum of actions, activities, experiences, and events that can be *made into* performance by scrutinizing the postsocialist condition and its sociocultural resonances through a performative lens.

We therefore invite original contributions that broadly reflect on these themes by considering the following questions:

- How do China’s postmillennial cultures of performance-making engage with the discourse of Chinese postsocialism?
- What subjects, themes, aesthetics, and technologies define the embodiment and representation of the postsocialist condition in China’s postmillennial performance?
- How have China’s postmillennial performance ecologies evolved in response to shifting cultural and political norms, especially in the transition to the Xi Jinping era since 2013?
- How can the study of performance cultures — and of postsocialist cultures through a performance lens — deepen our understanding of postmillennial China?

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

Proposals should be submitted to perfchina.eas@univie.ac.at by 15 May 2025.

Submissions should include (in one single file):

- the author’s name, affiliation and email address;
- the title of the proposed paper;
- an abstract of 350-500 words;
- a short biography of up to 100 words.

Selected papers will be published in a peer-reviewed edited volume.

SCHEDULE

15 May 2025: Proposals due.

30 June 2025: Invitations sent to selected participants.
Please note that we are unable to provide feedback on unsuccessful proposals.

20 March 2026: Full papers due (6,000-8,000 words including footnotes).

9-10 April 2026: Symposium at the University of Vienna.

FUNDING

Participants will be provided hotel accommodation in Vienna for 3 nights, reimbursement of travel expenses up to 500 EUR for travel from Europe and up to 1200 EUR for travel from outside Europe. Please note that this funding is subject to the submission of a full paper by the date indicated above.

ORGANISERS

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Rossella Ferrari (Principal Investigator)
Fabrizio Massini (Co-Investigator)
Li Yizhuo (Co-Investigator)
Song Xinyi (Project Administrator)

Department of East Asian Studies
University of Vienna
Vienna, Austria

CONTACT

Song Xinyi: xinyi.song@univie.ac.at
Rossella Ferrari: rossella.ferrari@univie.ac.at