MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITÄT
HALLE-WITTENBERG

CALL FOR PAPERS · WORKSHOP TOWARDS A SPECIAL ISSUE

Numbers for the Nation

Workshop on Travelling Quantification in Asian National Projects

DATE	22–23 April 2027
VENUE	Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG), Berlin
ORGANIZERS	Franziska Marliese Fröhlich (MPIWG) and Wiegand Körber (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg)
DEADLINE	**7 December 2026**

Measuring instruments travel. What they measure does not.

2023: China's National Bureau of Statistics publishes the share of the population deemed "scientifically literate." The survey behind that figure was adapted from an American instrument built to measure citizens' capacity for democratic participation but was turned into a measure of the population's "quality."

2024: India's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation publishes the share of districts that have achieved the "open defecation free" target. The indicator is attached to the globally negotiated SDG target committing states to end open defecation but was turned into a measure of administrative self-certification.

Two examples, one shared feature: a measuring instrument developed elsewhere travels into another setting, is put to use in a national context, and is there adapted, translated and reconstituted.

That numbers travel and get localized is not new; the literature on the *World of Indicators* has established it. That literature is also candid about its own limits: developed largely in the West, its vocabulary and concepts are decidedly Eurocentric.

Our workshop therefore turns to Asia: instruments developed elsewhere meet states with measuring traditions of their own, with dense measuring apparatuses, competing classifications, and established ways of putting numbers to political work.

We ask:

- Which routes do measuring instruments take?
- What concepts does travelling quantification get filled with once it arrives, and what purposes is it put to?
- What gives way when measuring instruments are translated?
- Who sets the terms when instruments travel, and how much room do receiving states have to rewrite them?
- Which adaptations take place, and how are political and institutional traditions woven in?

And further: what distinctive vocabulary appears? Do concepts emerge that the existing literature does not hold?

We welcome contemporary and historical case studies from all disciplines.

Format. The workshop is designed to provide an opportunity for in-depth discussion of the contributions against the backdrop of the considerations outlined above, with the explicit aim of compiling a special issue. Accordingly, the focus is on peer discussion: 15 minutes will be set aside for a brief presentation, followed by 30 minutes of discussion.

Digital participation is possible in exceptional cases.

Submission. As a first step, please send an abstract of up to 250 words and a short bio of up to 100 words, including your institutional affiliation, to fmfroehlich@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de by **7 December 2026**. We will notify applicants of our decision by 18 December 2026. A detailed abstract of between 1,000 and 1,500 words must be submitted by **9 April 2027**. This will serve as a basis for discussion and will be circulated amongst the participants. We do not expect a full draft for the workshop.

Funding. We can cover accommodation in Berlin for contributors, and travel costs within Europe. We regret that we cannot cover intercontinental flights. We will provide details of the arrangements should your submission be accepted.

Contact. For questions, please write to fmfroehlich@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de or to wiegand.koerber@politik.uni-halle.de