

Workshop Title: Neither here nor there, In-between and Liminal: Illiberal Democracies in Europe and their rapprochement with China

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The concept of liminality is first utilized by anthropologist Van Gennep to describe people in a social transition as being on the threshold without a clearly defined status or in a state of ambiguity. From a structuralist perspective, Turner dwelled on how structure and liminality interact and provided the attributes and characteristics of people performing liminality. Turner defines ambiguity and indeterminacy as attributes of liminal entities that lead to both “Eluding and slipping through the network of classifications” and being “neither here nor there”. Turner outlined society as a structure of positions and regarded liminality as an inter-structural situation as well. However, as the inter-structural nature of liminals undermines social categorization, it is perceived as being against the social structure or regarded as having anti-structural attributes. Therefore, liminals are regarded as “dangerous, inauspicious, or polluting.”

Turner’s contribution carried to the other disciplines and the scope of the liminal subject extended from single individuals and social groups to states and civilizations as subjects passing through liminality. Moreover, dimensions of liminality as spatial liminality manifesting in the borders of nations or countries in-between two continents and temporal liminality including moments, periods, or epochs such as revolutions, wars, and modernity instrumentalized as powerful tools of analysis by international relations studies.

Although spatial liminality of the countries such as Turkey, Romania and Baltics are much discussed examples of liminality in IR, temporal liminality focusing on how social structure of international relations creates liminal spaces and categories of identities such as Western/non-Western, developed/underdeveloped and liberal/illiberal is very under-studied part of it within the discipline.

This workshop calls for scholars to study the new aspect of liminality (temporal) focusing on China. Although there are abundant discussions about how China undermines the liberal world order what is missing in these debates is that China’s international discourses and practices targeting mostly liminals or liminal spaces are clear signs of how liminality draws the boundaries of the new world order. The focus of the workshop is not on full-fledged categorizations but on how liminality draws the boundaries of the new world order. The workshop, therefore, calls for papers focusing on various cases of illiberal in-between countries, being on the threshold, and their rapprochement with China, such as Turkey, Western Balkan countries, Hungary, and Poland.

The workshop deals with the following fundamental questions:

- How does China, as a liminal of present social structure with its political authoritarianism and state capitalism, transform liminal subject positions, which are constituted by universalistic liberal discourse such as being developing, democratizing and illiberal?
- How do liminal illiberal countries in Europe use their liminalities as an asset to achieve real consequences in foreign policy through cooperation with China?
- How China’s discursive attempts to challenge the dominance of the Western-centric social structure put into practice through its infrastructure investment cooperation with developing countries via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?