

## Practising Climate Leadership In-Between Global Ambitions and Domestic Contestation: China and Beyond

### Convenors

- **Chen XIANG**, [chen.xiang@sjtu.edu.cn](mailto:chen.xiang@sjtu.edu.cn)
- **Yifei SHAO**, [hiyys7shao@outlook.com](mailto:hiyys7shao@outlook.com)

Climate leadership is increasingly asserted through net-zero pledges, summit diplomacy, climate clubs, and strategic signalling. Yet leadership is not simply declared at the global level – it is practised, negotiated, and contested through domestic politics, governance capacity, and the frictions of implementation.

China provides a particularly revealing entry point into these dynamics. Over the past decade, it has moved from the margins of global climate leadership narratives to a central position, combining high-profile international engagement with ambitious domestic commitments such as carbon neutrality by 2060. These ambitions are supported by extensive technocratic efforts – modelling pathways, restructuring energy systems, expanding carbon markets – yet they unfold amid uneven local implementation, political trade-offs, and social contestation. At the same time, similar tensions between global ambition and domestic constraint are evident across advanced industrial economies and the Global South alike.

This workshop invites paper proposals that conceptualise climate leadership as something enacted and contested: forged through negotiations, expertise, infrastructures, and political struggle across institutional arenas and social settings. We focus on “in-between” dynamics where global ambitions meet domestic politics, and where knowledge practices and lived experience shape what climate leadership can (and cannot) achieve. Empirically, we welcome contributions engaging with (but not limited to) China, the EU, other major emitters, and comparative work across the Global South. Methodologically, we aim to build dialogue between practice-oriented approaches in IR (e.g., ethnography, participant observation at climate summits, discourse and visual methods) and quantitative, experimental, and policy-design approaches (e.g., modelling, carbon markets, survey research, and public opinion).

We particularly welcome papers examining how leadership is practised across governance sites—negotiations, conferences, transnational standard-setting—and how domestic contestation (elections, nationalism, protest, litigation, polarisation, and legitimisation struggles) enables, constrains, reconciles, or redirects leadership claims. We also invite contributions connecting climate leadership to climate security and geopolitical political economy, including strategic competition and selective cooperation, energy security, critical minerals and supply chains, and border measures and sanctions. Finally, we encourage submissions that broaden leadership beyond mitigation to include adaptation, resilience, climate risk governance, climate finance, and loss and damage, as well as studies of governance instruments, knowledge infrastructures, and the distributional politics they generate. We welcome single-case and comparative designs, as well as conceptual and methodological contributions across IR, comparative politics, political economy, and environmental governance.