

Pressemitteilung

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Executive Director Dagmar Schäfer Awarded Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize 2020

Professor Dagmar Schäfer, Executive Director at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, is to receive the Leibniz Prize 2020. The most prestigious research award in Germany is given by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation, DFG) to “exceptional scientists and academics for their outstanding achievements in the field of research.”

Prof. Dr. Schäfer is one of ten prize winners chosen by the selection committee at the DFG, from a total of 114 nominees. She receives 2.5 million euros to be used for her research work over a period of seven years, according to her own ideas. The Leibniz Prize award ceremony will take place in Berlin on March 16, 2020.

“I am most honored to have been awarded the Leibniz Prize. Knowledge is one of the most important, but also most biased, sources to humans in history as well as in contemporary life,” says Prof. Dr. Schäfer. “We should be able to dedicate attention to the past and its changes, and not take for granted what and how we think today. As an interdisciplinary field, the history of science and technology requires the methodologies of many disciplines for the study of people, materials, and ideas. The Leibniz Prize will enable me to further promote a transregional agenda in the history of science and to open up questions of knowledge, its resources, histories, and uses past and present, as well as bringing this research further into public view.”

The DFG selection committee chose Prof. Dr. Schäfer for the Leibniz Prize “for her pioneering contributions to a comprehensive, global, and comparative history of technology and science. Her work on China has shed new light on the alleged stagnation of local knowledge development and has opened up new perspectives on global history since the period known from a European perspective as the ‘early modern era.’ Of particular importance are two works on state, economics, science, and technology in China during the Ming Dynasty. With ‘Des Kaisers seidene Kleider. Staatliche Seidenmanufakturen in der Ming-Zeit (1368–1644),’ published in 1998, Schäfer laid the foundations for an approach in which forms of knowledge and action are examined in their historical and cultural context as well as in everyday practices. The book ‘The Crafting of the 10,000 Things: Knowledge and Technology in Seventeenth-Century China’ (2011) opened up this perspective. The study was also fundamental to global history by bringing Chinese and European developments into a more balanced relationship in the seventeenth century. Schäfer thus developed new, broadly cultural-scientific approaches and thus opened up comparative perspectives on a comprehensive global history.”

Prof. Dr. Schäfer studied Sinology, Japanology and Political Science, receiving her PhD and Habilitation from Universität Würzburg. After leading an Independent Research Group at the MPIWG on the history of science and technology in China in 2011, she returned to the MPIWG in 2013 as Director of Department III, “Artifacts, Action, Knowledge.” In addition to her position at the MPIWG, Schäfer is Honorary Professor at the Technische Universität Berlin and Freie Universität Berlin. Her current research focuses upon the historical dynamics of concept formation, situations, and experiences of action through which actors have explored, handled, and explained their physical, social, and individual worlds.

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