

“Civilized Cities or Social Credit? Overlap & Tension Between Governance Infrastructures in China”

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Abstract

Foreign imaginaries of surveillance and informatization in China are commonly connected to notions of omnipresence, advanced technology, and coherent governance. In reality, the Chinese government’s efforts at building a digital society are permeated by confusion over the meaning of central edicts, interdepartmental and regional fragmentation, and overlap between different governance systems. This presentation interrogates the connection between two emerging governance infrastructures embedded in the Chinese Party-state’s latest informatization drive, the “National Civilized Cities Award” (NCCA) and the “Social Credit System Project” (SCSP) through a mixed methods approach.

It combines data from an analysis of a recent NCCA assessment system government work manual, project websites, and findings from thirty qualitative video interviews with residents from twenty different cities in China to demonstrate that overlap between these projects is clear in terms of 1) criteria and indices measuring project development; 2) promoted virtues and individual behaviors; and 3) data sharing between systems. Local governments charged with the design and implementation of these initiatives conflate their targets and objectives, prompting occasional reprimand from higher-level authorities. Public confusion about the meaning and purpose of both the NCCA and SCSP has meanwhile accompanied haphazard system development, demonstrating that the path towards a “digital society” in China is fraught and far from uncontested.

Biography

Education

- 2019 - 2022 **Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities and Social Inquiry**
University of Wollongong (Australia)
Titled, “‘Bottomline of Law’ Meets ‘Higher Moral Aspiration’: A Qualitative Analysis of State and Citizen Interpretations and Engagements with China’s Social Credit System Project’
- 2018 **Bachelor of International Studies (Honours) – First Class Thesis**
University of Wollongong (Australia) Titled, ‘From Non-intervention to Flag-draped Caskets: China and Peacekeeping 1971-2017’
- 2013 - 2017 **Bachelor of International Studies**
Major: Chinese Mandarin
Minors: Peace and Security Studies, Global Environment and Development Studies
University of Wollongong (Australia)
Receiving High Distinctions and Distinctions in:
- Advanced Chinese (MAND351)
 - Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (ARTS470)
 - A History of Modern China (HIST252)
- 2014 - 2016 **Bachelor of International Studies**
Shanghai International Studies University, China
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Publications

Trauth-Goik, Alexander. 2023. Review of “Living with Digital Surveillance in China: Citizens’ Narratives on Technology, Privacy, and Governance”, by Ariane Ollier-Malaterre. *Law, Technology and Humans* 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.5204/lthj.3071>

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Trauth-Goik, Alexander. 2020. “Repudiating the Fourth Industrial Revolution Discourse: A New Episteme of Technological Progress.” *World Futures* 1–24. doi: 10.1080/02604027.2020.1788357. Available: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02604027.2020.1788357>

Trauth-Goik, Alexander. 2019. “‘Constructing a Culture of Honesty and Integrity’: The Evolution of China’s Han-Centric Surveillance System.” *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* 38(4):75–81. doi: 10.1109/MTS.2019.2948444. Available: <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/8924737/>

Select Presentations and Guest Lectures

Trauth-Goik, A. 2022, ‘Black or fifty shades of Grey: The power and limits of the Social Credit Blacklist system in China’, *Griffith Asia Institute Seminar Series*, March 2022, Griffith University, Available: <https://www.listenotes.com/podcasts/griffith-in-asia/2022-alex-trauth-goik-Q-SljEheu64/>

Trauth-Goik, A. & Hutchinson, J. 2021. ‘Disruptive Technology: How Social Media Is Reshaping Identity, Relationships and Community’, April 2021, Nan Tien Institute of Higher Education. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CmHA3_8TAM

Trauth-Goik A. 2019. ‘Reconceptualising China’s ‘Social Credit System’: From ‘Social Credit’ to ‘Social Trust’?’, *Twelfth Workshop on the Social Implications of National Security*, May 2019, University of Arizona, Available: <http://www.katinamichael.com/sins19/2019/5/1/alex-trauth-goik>