5 THINGS WE MISUNDERSTOOD ABOUT CHINA'S SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM

1 The Social Credit System is not really a system.

At least not if by system you mean a single, integrated entity. Right now, the SCS consists of a multitude of initiatives that have either private or governmental origins and are only loosely connected. It's likely that these systems become more integrated over time – but it's unclear if they will ever converge into one system that generates one score for each citizen.

More: Interview with Rogier Creemers, Asia Society Switzerland. https://asiasociety.org/switzerland/social-credit-system-part-iii
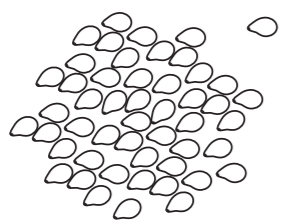
2 The most widespread system is actually run by a company.

Many press reports about the SCS describe Sesame Credit, which is run by Alibaba. The company uses the scheme to assess creditworthiness of participants in its e-commerce marketplace and to reward loyal customers. Using it is voluntary, but very widespread: Many Chinese list their Sesame scores on their dating profiles.

More: Manya Koetse: Open Sesame: Social Credit in China as Gate to Punitive Measures and Personal Perks. https://www.whatsonweibo.com/open-sesame-social-credit-in-china-as-gate-to-punitive-measures-and-personal-perks/

You may have read about China's Social Credit System (SCS): A sweeping plan to introduce until 2020 a system creating an elaborate «citizen score», using big data, fancy algorithms, and all kinds of surveillance. It's often compared to either Orwell's «1984» or the Black Mirror episode «Nosedive». But are the portrayals accurate?

Here are the key five things we at Asia Society Switzerland misunderstood before taking a closer look.

More at: **asiasociety.org/socialcredit**

3 There's very little high-tech in the SCS.

The blueprint for the SCS, the 2014 *Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System*, does not contain references to big data analytics nor does it identify quantitative scoring as an evaluation method. The government-run schemes that currently exist are essentially «blacklists» for people who have broken the law or have failed to follow court orders. They are binary and mostly compiled manually. The sanctions differ by blacklist, but can be far ranging.

More: Rogier Creemers: China's Social Credit System: An Evolving Practice of Control. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3175792
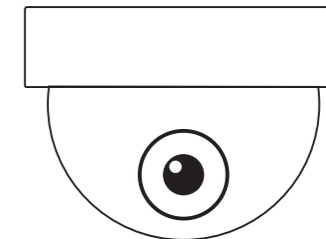
5 Most surveillance systems aren't connected yet to the SCS.

The Social Credit System is only a small aspect of the Chinese surveillance apparatus, which includes increasingly sophisticated CCTV cameras, surveillance through mobile devices, number plate recognition and facial recognition tools. Those instruments are not (yet) interconnected with government-run blacklists. That doesn't mean the blacklists are not problematic: They rely on public shaming and employ disproportional sanctions.

More: Rogier Creemers: China's Social Credit System: An Evolving Practice of Control. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3175792

4 Many Chinese citizens have a positive attitude towards the SCS.

The lack of trust within Chinese society, especially towards domestic companies, has been called a «moral crisis». A recent study found a high degree of approval for the SCS among Chinese citizens. Such systems are largely seen as generating benefits and promoting honest dealings rather than violating privacy. Additionally, a large part of the Chinese population simply has not come across the government-run schemes.

More: Marcus Hernig: Errichtet China eine Big-Data-Diktatur? Nein. https://www.republik.ch/2018/10/04/errichtet-china-die-erste-big-data-diktatur-des-21-jahrhunderts-nein and Genia Kostka: China's Social Credit Systems and Public Opinion: Explaining High Levels of Approval. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3215138