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Trust is good, control is better: technopolitical visions and realities in China's social credit system

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Propositions

1. The social credit system is a masterclass in neo-authoritarian, high-modern governance: where algorithms, data, and moral judgement meet to redefine the meaning of 'trust' and remind us Big Brother doesn't just watch—he ranks.
2. East is East and West is West; but the twain are forever meeting. The study of the social credit system perfectly illustrates the ahistorical folly of trying to divorce China from a global story of governance and technology-making.
3. The social credit system is the ultimate stress test for China's central-local dynamics, showcasing that even in a data-driven world, governance is more jazz improv than symphony.
4. In governance technology, features and bugs are often indistinguishable, as unintended consequences become integral to systems that prioritise adaptation over perfection.
5. Hydromodification often breeds system collapse. In recent years, the Chinese government has attempted to damn-off elements of its 'braided river' of experimentation and adaptation, with potentially significant implications for the complex ecosystem of actors it has historically relied on.
6. With fieldwork restricted and digital spaces vanishing, China studies is entering its "MacGyver" phase, demanding creative tools, duct tape, and sheer determination to source and analyse data from a distance.
7. Rhinoceros sausage is an acquired taste, but a necessary one to truly understand the direction of travel in Chinese policy-making and governance.
8. Censorship and other forms of information restriction often resemble a game of "whack-a-mole". The ethics of academic participation in this digital contest remain, however, under-developed.
9. Western coverage of China's social credit is far more 'Black Mirror' than the system itself.
10. There is an ethical and practical role for generative AI in academic output; we just haven't found it yet.