

*Building a High-Trust Society: Lineage, Logic, and Limitations of China's Social Credit System**

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Abstract

China's social credit system (SCS) is fundamentally a trust-building project. Right from its inception, it has been conceived of as a comprehensive solution to the crisis of trust in China. Its evolution over the past two decades should be characterized as incremental implementation of the original plan laid down in the early 2000s rather than as mission creep from commercial credit management to sociopolitical governance. The SCS's expansive scope and diverse measures are intended to nurture various kinds of trust in multiple ways. While administrative honesty and judicial credibility aim to increase institutional trust, commercial honesty and societal honesty purport to enlarge the radius of interpersonal trust in both business and non-business contexts. The soft measures of education and propaganda are adopted to inculcate moralistic trust, whereas the hard measures of blacklisting and joint sanctions seek to enhance strategic trust. However, the SCS has a number of limitations in both design and execution that may seriously undermine the prospects of building a high-trust society.

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