BACKGROUND

- Beginning of July→ Working group promoting infrastructure and development in the Greater Bay Area has proposed a three year plan (2018-2020)
  - One of the goal—the implementation of the Social Credit System in both Hong Kong and Macau (People’s Government of Guangdong Province, 2019)
- Induced various reactions—anger, fear and dissent
- Immense public discussions on the system’s controversiality.
- Both the Hong Kong Government and the National Development and Reform Commission reassured that the SCS will not be implemented in Hong Kong (Apple Daily, 2019; RTHK, 2019),
- The Credit China official website (creditchina.gov.cn) has removed Hong Kong
- Heated public discussion continue, especially with the appearance of several installations of smart lampost in Hong Kong which are suspected to be surveillance tools.

OVERVIEW OF SCS

The Social Credit System—social management programme launched by the CCP, which aims to stimulate “sincerity” and “trustworthiness” in society (State Council, 2014).

- Plans to launch the comprehensive system nationwide by 2020,
  - Pilot plans established in different provinces of China starting from 2014
- By July 2018, more than 40 municipal and provincial governments have launched SCS pilot
  - Create “blacklists” and “redlists” for individuals and organisations based on the trustworthiness of their behaviors (Kotska, 2019)

Mechanism: Reward-and-punishment system
- Citizens rated based on their daily behaviors
  - Purchase behavior, posts on social media, financial records, etc.
- Scores decide whether they would receive sanctions or rewards
  - Sanctions: Limited access to transportation and financial services
  - Rewards: Tax reduction or priorities and privileges in governmental services

- While the Central People’s Government claimed the sole aim of the system to be raising sincerity and trustworthiness
  - Many argued that it would be used as a tool for authoritarian resilience in social management (Kostka, 2019)
  - Expand and uphold government power
- Restrictions that the SCS have imposed on blacklisted individuals are often considered as exploitation and infringement of freedoms and rights.

SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM IN HK—POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

01 PANOPTICON

- Pan(all)-opticon(observing)
- Based on a prison architecture invented by the Bentham Brothers
- A circular prison in which prisoners are placed separately at the periphery and constantly visible whereas wardens are invisible, which creates a constant liability to supervision
- "The major effect... is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 2012 p.195)

02 SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY

A surveillance society is a society which is organised and structured using surveillance-based techniques

On behalf of governments, one’s movements and activities are recorded by technologies (Wood, et al., 2006)
One’s information is then used as a basis for decisions which affect one’s life chances (e.g. entitlement and access to benefits, work; movement through public and private spaces)

Key characteristics: use of numerous & new technology, data flow, convergence of system & data ; social sorting (of risky populations) ; technological lock-in and failure (over-dependence)

03 SCS AS A STATE SURVEILLANCE INFRASTRUCTURE ?

- “Panoptic model” to a “Panspectric model” because “information is now actively generated by multiple sensors” scattered across the lives of its subjects" (Creemers, 2017, p. 96)
- Employs big data which “Track Everything about Everyone at All Times.”; blurs the Interplay Between State and Commercial Sectors; lead to sanctions predictive decisions about individual citizens (Andrejevic & Gates, 2014.)

Three phrases: data collection, data aggregation, data analytics

Data collection stage: involves multistakeholder mechanisms by which public and private data are gathered from various sources; combination of (giant) government database and private sector data sets

Data aggregation: building of several data platforms for integrating separate data into a state surveillance infrastructure

Data analytic: allow the evaluation of every actor in the society and the establishment of reward and punishment system

Concerns (Liang, Kostyuk & Hussain, 2018):

1. It is unknown whether the data collected will be used solely for security reasons or for political ones
2. Risks of data security when personal information becomes easily obtainable
3. Information asymmetry between those holding the data and ordinary people (increased difficulty for counter-surveillance)

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