IMSISS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	**Glasgow** 2464133 **DCU** **Charles** 70760723 **Trento** 225066
Dissertation Title	Deciphering China's Social Credit Systems: Big Data, Surveillance, and Political Control

INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

Reviewer 1 Initial Grade	*Reviewer 2 Initial Grade*	*Late Submission Penalty*
A2/21 *Select from drop down list*	A2/21*Select from drop down list*	*Select from drop down list*

Word Count Penalty *(1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)*

Word Count: 23165   **Suggested Penalty: 0** *Select from drop down list*

JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

Final Agreed Mark. *(Following correspondence reviewers should list the agreed final internal grade taking before and after any penalties to be applied).*

Before Penalty: Select from drop down list   A2/21   **After Penalty:** Select from drop down list A2/21

DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	*Rating*
A. Structure and Development of Answer This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• *Originality of topic*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Application of theory and/or concepts*	-Select from list- Excellent
B. Use of Source Material This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• *Evidence of reading and review of published literature*	-Select from list- *Excellent*
• *Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence*	-Select from list-

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	Very good
• *Accuracy of factual data*	-Select from list- Excellent
C. Academic Style This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• *Appropriate formal and clear writing style*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)*	-Select from list- Excellent
• *Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?*	-Select from list- Yes
• *Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)*	-Select from list- Not applicable
• *Appropriate word count*	-Select from list- Yes

ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

This is a well organised and well-presented dissertation. It benefits from a clear problem statement: can SCS's facilitate political control in an authoritarian regime, and a precise statement of objectives: understanding why China has introduced SCS's, the functionality of SCS's; and the possibilities and limitations of SCS's in facilitating political control. The literature review successfully justifies the research question, focusing on motivations, the dataveillance concept, and three pillars of authoritarian stability including repression and co-optation. The research design and structure of the dissertation are clearly explained and justified. It is convincing to argue that SCS's are focussed on corporate actors and do not duplicate functions of police surveillance, but also that they have the potential to allow the joining up of different government surveillance systems, the creation of lists which determine preferential treatment by administrative agencies and commercial institutions and discriminatory treatment for those with 'bad' social credit scores, as well as allowing the design other behavioural manipulations based on 'performative expectations.' The analysis displays sensitivity to Chinese cultural specifics and the role of trust in the political system. The author demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of surveillance and how it operates not merely through control of individual people but through control of behaviours. Gerschewski's three pillars of stable authoritarianism provides an appropriate analytical framework for identifying the uses of dataveillance for political control. The author has made a credible effort to overcome the language barrier. She is aware of the limitations of her methodology. In terms of findings, she offers a sufficiently detailed description of the SCS institutions in each city, backed up with reference to primary sources. It is convincing to argue that SCS algorithms are not sufficiently well developed to be very useful in identifying untrustworthy individuals or target groups for repression, and that they would suffer from a lack of legitimacy if used for this purpose, but they may be useful in identifying individuals for selective co-optation, encouraging self-censorship and perhaps encouraging compliance with covid regulations, although that seems contingent on the wider legitimacy of these rules. The description of the functionality of algorithms could do with some more examples based on primary sources: it seems rather

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hypoethical. There is a concise summary of the findings in the conclusion. The author shows a good understanding of the limitations of the research and offers sensible suggestions for future research.
Reviewer 2

The author has envisioned and executed the dissertation with remarkable analytical clarity. It starts with a precise formulation of the research question, neatly supplemented by relevant partial sub-questions (the author lists two, but if we divide targeted repression and selective co-optation, there are actually three – together with behavioural manipulation). The dissertation ably identifies a research gap it then addresses, namely political utility of big data surveillance ('dataveillance') in autocratic regimes. The empirical focus on three testing sites of social credit systems in China is a logical choice.

The dissertation's structure rests on a thorough review of existing literature. The progress from the characterization of the general issue through identification of the research puzzle to its actual analysis based on the appropriately selected methodology is easy to follow and very persuasive in its results. I highly appreciate the author's conclusions: clear-cut yet nuanced, with an appreciation of possible further developments. In short, from the perspective of this reviewer this is an excellent, highly informative and extremely well crafted thesis.