voluminously on their experiences with China. The case of Stephen FitzGerald is especially useful because his historical recollections as Australia's first ambassador to China in 1973–1976 have the added benefit of being backed up by internal government documents that have since been released into the public domain.

These documents have been cited in Curran's book to illustrate various points in the narrative, such as a despatch sent in May 1976 by Ambassador FitzGerald to Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock that cautioned against the tendency of setting high goals for the China relationship (pp. 42–43).

Wikileaks revelations have also been used wherever possible by Curran to demonstrate the close interest taken by Washington in Canberra's China thinking. Apart from the now well-known conversation of March 2009 between Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, when Rudd counselled a "brutal realist" approach to Beijing by "preparing to deploy force if everything goes wrong," Wikileaks is also cited by Curran to reveal how the American Embassy in Canberra interpreted the Rudd government's defence white paper that regarded China, though without explicitly naming it, as "Australia's primary regional threat" (pp. 159–160).

Indeed, Curran's book devotes more space than earlier works on Australia–China relations to the US factor in Canberra's China thinking. While Canberra has often been troubled by a possible lack of full commitment by the United States to Australia's defence, Washington has also been anxious from time to time about the Antipodean nation's loyalty to the American cause against China. For example, as recounted by Curran, around the time of President Barack Obama's visit to Australia in 2011, a US congressman expressed misgivings about the possibility of "another Germany in Australia," namely, a "country that's a defence ally of ours but has become dependent on China for its trade" (p. 180).

This expanded coverage of the US role in Australia's China relationship is a strength of Curran's book, but also its weakness, especially for the readership of a Chinese-studies journal, like *The China Quarterly*, that is keen to learn more about China's motivations in conducting its international relations. In fact, Curran's book has nothing to say on China except taking Beijing's international behaviour as a given. The book would resonate more with readers of publications on Australian studies and, perhaps, US studies than with those of *The China Quarterly*.

Social Credit: The Warring States of China's Emerging Data Empire

Vincent Brussee. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023. 204 pp. €39.99 (pbk). ISBN 9789819921898

Marianne von Blomberg

Cologne University, Cologne, Germany; Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China
Email: m.vonblomberg@uni-koeln.de

The debate about social credit started on uneven factual grounds. Some portrayed the social credit system (SCS) as an emerging Orwellian surveillance technology, complete with score-based punishments for citizens, others held against such assertions, arguing that social credit is a strategy to enhance financial credit reporting and law enforcement. A basic account of the fundamentals of the SCS, as simple as it sounds, was missing in the debate, and is most comprehensively provided by Vincent Brussee's book. As he unpacks the SCS, the meaning of the subtitle *The Warring States*

of China's Emerging Data Empire becomes clear: like the historical period it references, in the context of SCS building, multiple stakeholders pursuing divergent interests hamper the formation of a unified system.

The book introduces the reader to the topic by addressing common misconceptions about the SCS, such as that the Chinese government administers a social credit score for every citizen. Brussee clarifies that what the central government terms social credit is ubiquitous already, not limited to China, and that the genesis of the SCS was inspired by Western systems. Chapter two outlines the three "credit problems" that led the government to devise the SCS strategy: a lack of financial credit reporting; lax law enforcement; and a perceived moral decay associated with economic reforms. In chapter three, Brussee designs three dimensions to describe the central government's vision of social credit: the problems the SCS is to address; the key target areas; and the actors involved. The SCS calls on both private and state actors to solve virtually any trust problem in the market, civil society, the government itself and the judiciary, making the very plan of the SCS appear "messy" (p. 59).

Chapter four develops the most comprehensive historical account yet written of the SCS, tracing it back to 2002. Brussee chooses to present the official founding narrative, which revolves around the entrepreneur Huang Wenyun. Drawing on the history of SCS building, Brussee argues convincingly that the culture of experimental policy implementation faces its limits in data-era China, where interoperability and standardized data formats are key. Chapter five examines social credit's most impactful component, blacklists for trust-breakers; these mainly target companies for not complying with the law. The following chapter demonstrates that during the fight against COVID-19 the SCS proved to be an enforcement tool that could flexibly adapt to changing political agendas. Brussee also describes criticism by Chinese legal scholars over the legality of social credit measures, and the state's ensuing responses.

The final part of the book addresses scoring, which has unfortunately become a synonym for social credit, as illustrated by sociologist Steffen Mau's use of the SCS as an introductory case for his book titled *The Metric Society: On the Quantification of the Social* (Polity, 2019). Brussee highlights the limited application of scoring in the SCS, contemplates its potential and casts doubt on its efficiency for reaching the goals of the SCS. The book concludes by offering future scenarios. While the digitization of the SCS will continue at a slow pace, he suggests that legally less problematic social credit innovations will expand, such as the enterprise credit risk classification scheme by the State Administration for Market Regulation – a scheme that aims to tap various data sources to classify companies by risk of future non-compliance.

The book's analysis draws upon a considerable database of SCS policy documents, public data and news reports from cities that pilot the SCS, and Chinese scholarly contributions. The latter in particular is largely overlooked in English-language research on the SCS, despite the significant findings it offers and the fact that early government-commissioned research laid the foundation for the current SCS framework. As Brussee acknowledges, the data used is subject to Chinese government supervision. Usual concerns as to the accuracy and completeness of such data are as valid as they are on any topic of political interest in contemporary China. Nevertheless, worries about additional censorship regarding information on the SCS are likely unfounded as they are grounded in misconceptions of the SCS as the primary surveillance tool of the party-state. In fact, the government frames the SCS as a prestige project for deepening economic reforms, leading to new policies and reports being issued daily. The challenge Brussee masters lies in distilling meaning from the myriad of data.

The book's main contributions are threefold. First, Brussee offers answers to debates within political sciences over the dauntingly slow pace of SCS implementation. The broad wording in the SCS grand plan has allowed implementing departments to interpret it in line with their particular interests, leading to conflicts where such interests differ. Even where interests align, administrative hierarchy often obstructs horizontal data sharing. Second, Brussee not only corrects erroneous

depictions of the SCS but also examines the reasons behind these misconceptions. He argues that conflating a government prestige project like the SCS with the expansion of China's public security apparatus entails considerable risks.

The main contribution, however, lies in the book's aspiration to "reconstruct the jigsaw-puzzle of the SCS" (p. 7). The seemingly straightforward question the author addresses – what is the SCS – has been giving scholars, journalists, managers and politicians headaches. By addressing all facets of social credit, the book covers a wide spectrum of themes, including financial credit reporting, food safety regulation, surveillance, scoring technologies and CPC theory of governance. Brussee succeeds in walking a fine line between rigorous inquiry into primary sources that detail the workings of the SCS and providing accessible explanations to broader questions that emerge from the investigation. Instead of developing a theoretical argument himself, he creates a complete framework of the SCS. Given that social credit research to date is scattered across multiple disciplines with little reciprocal engagement, often building on different presumptions about the very core of the project, the book's account of the SCS serves as an invaluable starting point for future research.

Raising questions across a wide field of contentious issues in China, from banking to central–local government relations to handling of personal data, this book offers an engaging read for students in the field of China studies and professionals alike. Scholars with an interest in social credit find a reliable roadmap, a contextualization of current debates, as well as some juicy hypotheses. The book's fresh and engaging style, balancing personal notes with in-depth policy analysis, renders it an enjoyable read.

The Labor of Reinvention: Entrepreneurship in the New Chinese Digital Economy

Lin Zhang. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. xvi + 312 pp. £25.00 (pbk). ISBN 9780231195317

Jenny Chan

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China
Email: jenny.wl.chan@polyu.edu.hk

Lin Zhang's new book examines entrepreneurship and its promise and disappointment in a digitalizing China. After the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the party-state called for "mass entrepreneurship" to attempt to address the growing employment challenges. Between 2011 and 2019, Zhang conducted multi-sited interviews and observation to assess how the changing cultural political economy has affected people's lives. The author found that many aspirants in urban and rural areas, as well as those in the diaspora, responded to the call by grasping new opportunities that emerged in the internet-based working world. The results of China's "regime of entrepreneurial labour" are varied, as narrated in the three main parts as follows.

Part one traces the historical background of socialist modernization and techno-nationalism in Beijing's Zhongguancun, known as Silicon Valley. As the capital of the People's Republic of China, Beijing mobilized scientists and engineers in leading universities and government research centres to cultivate science and technological capabilities in the Zhongguancun district. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when the Chinese higher education system was gradually rebuilt,