

PROGRAMME

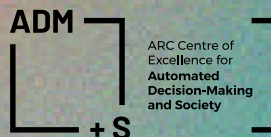
27/OCT

Symposium on

Decentralised Technologies and Global Chinese Communities



Department of Sociology
The University of Hong Kong



Contents

Symposium theme	3
Organising committee.....	4
Co-organisers	4
Conference funding	4
Associated Special Issue.....	4
Useful Information	5
Registration.....	5
Symposium enquiries.....	5
Connecting to HKU WiFi.....	5
Schedule	6
27 Oct: Symposium	6
28 Oct: Paper workshop (by invitation only)	8
Abstracts	10
27 Oct: Symposium	10
28 Oct: Workshop (by invitation only)	29

Symposium theme

Decentralised technologies—including blockchain, distributed ledgers, and the Web3 ecosystem (such as decentralised finance [DeFi], decentralised autonomous organisations [DAOs], and cryptocurrencies)—are transforming global economic, social, cultural, and communicative structures. Promising greater autonomy, transparency, and inclusivity, these technologies challenge established institutional power structures and enable new forms of organisation, interaction, and transaction.

For *global Chinese communities*—comprising diasporic, transnational, and mainland Chinese populations—decentralised technologies present both profound opportunities and pressing challenges. These communities are not only active in developing, investing in, and applying these technologies, but are also reimagining their networks, identities, and cultural practices through them. In doing so, they contribute to the emergence of new and alternative ideologies for blockchain, such as community-based governance models, reconfigured kinship or clan networks, and experimentation with decentralised collective action grounded in Chinese cultural and political contexts. These ideologies may differ significantly from the libertarian or techno-utopian beliefs often foregrounded in Western blockchain discourses.

These efforts offer rich potential for invigorating scholarly inquiry beyond the dominant Western frames that have shaped most blockchain research to date. Existing research tends to focus on competing ideologies embedded in decentralised infrastructures and their capacity to spread globally due to the technologies’ “borderless” nature. This symposium calls for deeper attention to how such ideological frameworks are adapted, challenged, or reshaped in Chinese contexts—ranging from grassroots experimentation with DAO governance to state-aligned visions of “trusted” decentralisation and platform sovereignty.

Moreover, this symposium seeks to broaden the scope of inquiry to include the making of the infrastructures—technical, economic, social, and logistical—that support decentralised technologies. This includes mining operations, server farms, coding networks, and investment infrastructures, as well as the (dis)continuities with earlier decentralised movements in Chinese history, such as rural mutual aid societies or early internet forums. What historical forms of decentralisation do these technologies recall, rework, or depart from?

To address these questions, we highlight the pivotal but underexplored role that Chinese communities have played in building the infrastructure and applications of decentralised systems. From mining operations and foundational code contributions to “pop-up” cities and citizen-led DAOs, Chinese actors have significantly shaped the technical, social, and ideological contours of decentralised ecosystems. At the same time, everyday adoption—via digital currency, social tokens, decentralised apps (dApps), and cross-border transactions—continues to transform daily life and communication practices for many Chinese users, inside and outside of the Chinese mainland.

This symposium brings together contributions that explore how decentralised technologies intersect with the evolving notion of global Chinese communities and transnational communication in and beyond mainland China. We especially encourage papers that draw from and contribute to media and communication research, including (but not limited to) digital platform studies, media infrastructures, the political economy of communication, cultural production, and theories of publics and counterpublics. By foregrounding communicative practices, media systems, and cultural discourses, this symposium aims to connect decentralised technologies to core concerns in communication and media scholarship.

Organising committee

- [Prof Tom McDonald](#), University of Hong Kong
- [Prof Yu Haiqing](#), RMIT University / ADM+S
- [Dr Hou Jiayi](#), RMIT University / ADM+S

Co-organisers

- [Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong](#), Hong Kong SAR, China
- [ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making + Society](#), Australia

Conference funding

- [Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong – Faculty Strategic Research Theme “Culture, Equity & Community Development”](#) Internal Seed Grant Scheme
- [ARC Centre of Excellence in Automated Decision-Making + Society](#) (ADM+S), Australia
- Partially supported by a General Research Fund grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (“Value, policy and infrastructure: Hong Kong’s Web3 visions and experimental futures”; Project No. 17609024).

Associated Special Issue

This symposium is designed to foster discussion and identify key questions related to the theme of "Decentralized Technologies and Global Chinese Communities." It also aims to encourage submissions for a Special Issue of the *Chinese Journal of Communication* on this topic. Further details are available in the open [Call for Papers](#). The deadline for full manuscript submissions is January 19, 2026.

Useful Information

Registration

- Please register via <https://sociology.hku.hk/dtgcc>
- Pre-registration is required and is free of charge
- Pre-registration closes on Friday 24 October 2024, 12:00 noon.

Symposium enquiries

- socievent@hku.hk

Connecting to HKU WiFi

- Members of other local and overseas universities may [connect via eduroam](#).
- All visitors have the option to [connect using Wi-Fi.HK via HKU](#), a WiFi network that requires no login and configuration and is operating in unsecured mode with limited bandwidth.

Schedule

27 Oct: Symposium

Location: Hybrid

- Social Sciences Chamber, 11/F., The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU ([Map](#))
- Online via zoom (Meeting link will be shared with pre-registered attendees via email)

Monday 27 October 2025

08:45	Attendees arrive / register
09:00	Opening remarks
	<i>Eric Fong, The University of Hong Kong</i> <i>Tom McDonald, The University of Hong Kong</i>
09:15	Keynote 1
	<i>Chair: Yu Haiqing, RMIT University / ADM+S</i>
	Situating, Localising, and Historicising Chinese Bitcoin Mining Overseas <i>Nicholas Loubere, Lund University</i>
10:00	Keynote 2
	<i>Chair: Tom McDonald, The University of Hong Kong</i>
	Governance in decentralised systems <i>Ellie Rennie, RMIT University / ADM+S</i>
10:45	Artistic voices
	The Country China: Fluid Histories and Metaverse <i>Huang Sunquan, China Academy of Art</i>
11:00	Tea/coffee break
11:30	Panel 1 — No Center to Hold: Decentralized Technologies and the Remaking of Social Hierarchies
	<i>Chair: Hou Jiaxi, RMIT University / ADM+S</i>
	How Global Chinese Scams Recast the State in "Decentralized" Cryptos <i>Rao Yichen, Utrecht University</i>
	Looking for angles: \$Trump and the Scaling of Memecoin trading <i>Yao Qicheng, The University of Chicago</i>
	Chineseness on Web3: Hong Kong and mainland Chinese collaboration in shaping contemporary Chinese culture and creativity <i>Hoi Ki Holy Shum, Hong Kong Shue Yan University</i> <i>Gallam Jialin Zhang, Hong Kong Shue Yan University</i>
	The Labor of Border-Crossing: Chinese Underclass Crypto Profiteers and Their Multi-Layered Migrations <i>Hou Jiaxi, RMIT University / ADM+S</i>
12:45	Community voices

	Top 10 Bitcoin myths from Hong Kong Chinese ‘Disbelievers’ <i>BTB (畢特比), Bitcoin Association of Hong Kong</i>
13:00	Lunch break
14:00	Keynote 3 <i>Chair: Janet Roitman, RMIT University / ADM+S</i>
	Between the elite alliance and the funky crypto degens: A “field” approach to the communities of decentralizing technology <i>Wang Jing, NYU Shanghai</i>
14:45	Keynote 4 <i>Chair: Nicholas Loubere, Lund University</i>
	Financial Platforms: Displacing the Global North /Global South Divide <i>Janet Roitman, RMIT University / ADM+S</i>
15:30	Industry voices
	A vision for the future of Web3 in Hong Kong <i>Andrew Mak, Web3 Harbour</i> <i>Li Zelin, Web3 Harbour</i>
15:45	Tea/coffee break
16:15	Panel 2 — Organising and Authenticating: Decentralised Philosophies, Communities and Cultures <i>Chair: Ellie Rennie, RMIT University / ADM+S</i>
	The Dao of the DAO: Eastern Philosophies in Decentralized World <i>Helena Rong, NYU Shanghai</i>
	Decentralizing the Countryside: An Ethnographic Study of Governance Experimentation in Nantang DAO <i>Fan Jia, City University of Hong Kong</i>
	Decentralized Networked Publics – Assertions, Affordances and Actions in Chinese DAOs <i>Zhang Qikai, Fudan University</i>
	Tokenized Identity: Tracing Non-Tradable NFTs and Web3 Automation Practices <i>Violeta Camarasa San Juan, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</i> <i>Saskia Witteborn, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</i>
17:30	Roundtable and closing remarks
	<i>Tom McDonald, The University of Hong Kong</i> <i>Yu Haiqing, RMIT University / ADM+S</i> <i>+ Keynote speakers and Chairs</i>
18:00	Symposium ends
18:30	Symposium dinner (by invitation only)

28 Oct: Paper workshop (by invitation only)

The closed-door workshop aims to provide a supportive forum where paper authors can receive (and discuss) constructive feedback and suggestions for improvements on their draft manuscripts from expert reviewers.

- For papers presented during the Day 1 symposium, 30 minutes will be allocated to discussion of the paper: (20 minutes for reviewers' comments + 10 minutes for author's response).
- For other papers (marked with an asterisk [*]), 45 minutes will be allocated to discussion of their paper (15 min for presentation by author + 20 minutes for reviewers' comments + 10 minutes for author's response).

Tuesday 28 October 2025

		↓ Reviewers
09:00	Workshop Session 1	
09:00	Tokenized Identity: Tracing Non-Tradable NFTs and Web3 Automation Practices <i>Violeta Camarasa San Juan, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</i> <i>Saskia Witteborn, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</i>	Hou Jiaxi Ellie Rennie
09:30	Situating, Localising, and Historicising Chinese Bitcoin Mining Overseas <i>Nicholas Loubere, Lund University</i>	Yu Haiqing Tom McDonald
10:00	The Dao of the DAO: Eastern Philosophies in Decentralized Worlds <i>Helena Rong, NYU Shanghai</i> <i>Sun Zhe, NYU Shanghai</i>	Mahdi Yousefi Janet Roitman
10:30	Tea/coffee break	
11:00	Workshop Session 2	
11:00	Between the Elite Alliance and the Funky Crypto Degens: A "Field" Approach to the Communities of Decentralizing Technology <i>Wang Jing, NYU Shanghai</i>	Ellie Rennie Janet Roitman
11:30	The Labor of Border-Crossing: Chinese Underclass Crypto Profiteers and Their Multi-Layered Migrations <i>Hou Jiaxi, RMIT University</i>	Nicholas Loubere Rao Yichen
12:00	Looking for angles: \$Trump and the Scaling of Memecoin trading <i>Yao Qicheng, The University of Chicago</i>	Alex Preda Tom McDonald
12:30	Lunch break	
13:30	Workshop Session 3	
13:30	Decentralizing the Countryside: An Ethnographic Study of Governance Experimentation in Nantang DAO <i>Fan Jia, City University of Hong Kong</i> <i>Zhang Jinjin, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</i> <i>Liu Xiaofan, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</i>	Helena Rong Yu Haiqing

14:00	Decentralized Networked Publics – Assertions, Affordances and Actions in Chinese DAOs <i>Zhang Qikai, Fudan University</i>	Helena Rong Hou Jiaxi
14:30	Chineseness on Web3: Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese Collaboration in Shaping Contemporary Chinese Culture and Creativity <i>Holy Hoi Ki Shum, Hong Kong Shue Yan University</i> <i>Gallam Jialin Zhang, Hong Kong Shue Yan University</i>	Violeta Camarasa Mahdi Yousefi
15:00	Tea/coffee break	
15:30	Workshop Session 4	
15:30	Negotiating Centralization and Decentralization: Communication Practices across Chinese Blockchain Ecosystems* <i>Mahdi Yousefi, Hainan Normal University</i>	Holy Shum Rao Yichen
16:15	Mapping Chinese Newspapers' Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Web3* <i>Xu Jinghong, Beijing Normal University</i> <i>Yuan Yuhang, Beijing Normal University</i>	Tom McDonald Holy Shum
17:00	Chinese in Web3 Communities from the Perspective of Actor-Network Theory: A Case Study of DeBox* <i>Xu Jinghong, Beijing Normal University</i> <i>Liu Yahao, Beijing Normal University</i>	Yu Haiqing Hou Jiaxi
17:45	Concluding remarks	
18:00	Workshop ends	

Abstracts

27 Oct: Symposium

Situating, Localising, and Historicising Chinese Bitcoin Mining Overseas

Nicholas Loubere, Lund University

Abstract: A key argument put forward by proponents of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies is that these emerging financial technologies represent a decentralised and entirely virtual mode of value creation, transfer, and storage that liberates their users from centralised and political control. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that in 2021 the Chinese government opted to ban Bitcoin mining, creating a situation where almost overnight the country went from being the major global producer of Bitcoin to essentially not hosting any mining activities at all. While undercover mining operations have since returned to China, the ban itself prompted an exodus of Bitcoin miners searching for overseas destinations to resume their mining activities. One particularly attractive location was the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America, which boasts a favourable climate and cheap energy rates thanks to publicly owned legacy hydropower infrastructure along the Columbia River. However, despite initially seeming like a welcoming environment for Bitcoin mining activities, Chinese miners seeking to relocate to Northwest USA faced considerable challenges, including the reluctance of public utility departments to grant access to the energy. Ultimately only a few smaller operations ended up remaining in the region. Based on qualitative fieldwork and documentary data collection, this paper analyses the abortive attempt of Chinese crypto miners to take advantage of low electricity prices in Washington State. What emerges from this analysis is a complex picture of Bitcoin mining which—far from being flexible, agile, and entirely virtual—is contingent on geography, infrastructure, energy regimes, and political formations (both historical and current). At the same time, while Chinese Bitcoin miners did not remain in Washington State in large numbers, Chinese Bitcoin mining technologies continue to be a key feature of the Bitcoin industry in the region. As such, this case provides a valuable glimpse into the ways in which informal, non-state-led patterns of Chinese globalisation are subject to local contexts and histories, while simultaneously being intricately connected to broader global flows of resources, ideas, and technologies.

Nicholas Loubere is an Associate Professor at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University and the co-editor of the *Made in China Journal*. His current research examines informal patterns and processes of Chinese globalisation, focusing on Chinese participation in resource extraction booms from the 19th-century gold rushes to the current phenomenon of cryptocurrency mining. He is the author of *Development on Loan: Microcredit and Marginalisation in Rural China* (Amsterdam University Press, 2019) and the co-author of *Global China as Method* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Governance in decentralised systems

Ellie Rennie, RMIT University

Abstract: This talk explores the institutional possibilities opened by distributed technologies and their implications for social ordering. Governance involves the ongoing practices of setting limits, rules, standards, and permissions that shape collective action. In the era of autonomous agents and AI, such practices become critical for determining how value is created, and what gets rewarded and sustained. To date, blockchain governance has struggled with problems of attention and collusion, brought about through the mechanics of smart contracts and onchain voting. To move beyond this, I argue that a broader array of governance processes must be made machine-readable, using concrete examples from my work on contribution systems and knowledge organisation infrastructures.

Ellie Rennie is a Professor at RMIT University. Her research is examining permissionless systems and on-chain communities using ethnographic methods, including validator governance, contribution systems and infrastructures for the collective governance of knowledge. She has also worked extensively on the topic of digital inclusion in remote Indigenous communities. Ellie is also a Research Director within the international research network Metagov and an Associate Investigator of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society.

The Country China: Fluid Histories and Metaverse

Huang Sunquan, China Academy of Art

This presentation reconsiders the pervasive narrative of the “technological singularity” by exploring the ways in which science fiction has long offered alternative visions of future and past. Rather than projecting a linear and deterministic trajectory of technological progress, writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Philip K. Dick have shown how speculative storytelling can generate plural temporalities, fractured realities, and open-ended possibilities. Their works invite us to see history itself as fluid, always entangled with imagination and politics.

Building on these insights, I will connect literary examples with curatorial practices in Hangzhou and Beibei, where experiments in digital media and exhibition design have attempted to rethink collective memory through immersive environments. The metaverse, in this context, is not simply a futuristic platform but a cultural laboratory in which local histories may be reanimated, remixed, and given a “second life.” By situating these practices within a broader discussion of speculative futures, the talk argues that science fiction functions not only as entertainment but also as a critical method: a way to resist deterministic technological futures, to question prevailing ideologies of progress, and to open a dialogue between past, present, and virtual worlds.

Huang Sunquan is a scholar, curator and artist renowned for his interdisciplinary approach. He is a professor at CAA and is the Director of the Institute of Network Society within the School of Intermedia Art. He holds a Ph.D. in Engineering from National Taiwan University, and has had teaching appointments at several universities across Hong Kong and Taiwan. Huang founded the avant guard *Pots Weekly* in 1994 and served as Chief Editor. His directorial debut, *Our New Homeland* (1997), documented the inaugural Chinese resistance to demolition and urban renewal, with screenings at art biennials and theatres in over twenty cities across Asia. Huang’s oeuvre, predominantly centers on networks, space, mobility, landless love (non-topophilia), and the discourse of the underprivileged. His work has been featured in the Taipei Biennial, Shanghai Biennial, Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture, Festival d’Avignon in France, Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India, and the CAFAM Biennale at CAFA in China. His notable curatorial projects include *Lulu Shur-tzy Hou Solo Exhibition — Look toward the other side — Song of Asian Foreign Brides in Taiwan III* (2010), *Out of Place — A Trilogy on Kaohsiung Military Dependents’ Villages: Lulu Shur-tzy Hou Solo Exhibition* (2017), and *Acts Without Effort — The Societal Architecture of Hsieh Ying-Chun* (2018), among others. His publications include *Green Bulldozer, Unless We Seek Beauty* (《除非我们寻找美丽》) and *Architecture and Utopia*, with translations like *DIY Culture: Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*, *Social Media Abyss*. His editorial works include *The Cultural Annals of Greater Taipei*, *Soul Dreams of Mud: Hidden Souls of the City*, and as the Chief Editor for the Network Society Series, he edited *Art in the Anthropocene — Stiegler’s Lectures at the China Academy of Art*, *Let’s Platform Cooperativism*, and *Essays from the Network Society Annual Conference*, among others. He is widely recognized as an ‘artist’ straddling the realms of architecture, media, social movements, and the arts.

How Global Chinese Scams Recast the State in "Decentralized" Cryptos

Rao Yichen, Utrecht University

Abstract: This article examines two ethnographic cases of scams to explore the paradoxical roles of the state in the ostensibly “decentralized” world of cryptocurrencies, challenging conventional views of the state as merely a centralized regulator of “decentralized” finance. The first case revisits the crypto market meltdown on May 19, 2021, triggered by a political scandal in which a hidden crypto mine in China—disguised as Asia’s future largest supercomputing center and supported by local government—was revealed to have been financed by laundered cryptocurrencies and infrastructured to mine at scale. The second case concerns the FBI’s recent recovery of deposits from a Kansas bank defrauded in a large-scale pig-butcher scam operated by overseas Chinese criminal networks. By working with Tether and Coinbase to trace illicit flows and freeze wallet addresses, the FBI assumed an ambiguous role within a system often celebrated as stateless. Together, these cases show how states do not simply regulate crypto from above but intervene in distributed and unexpected ways—sustaining, compromising, and reconfiguring the very infrastructures and ideologies of decentralization. By foregrounding scams in global China as analytic windows, this article highlights how crypto economies continually generate alternative state functions that exceed the conventional frameworks of financial governance.

Rao Yichen is an Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University. He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies from The University of Hong Kong and has held research positions as a Postdoctoral Research Associate in Comparative Media Studies at MIT, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan, and an Ernst Mach Fellow in Anthropology at the University of Vienna. From 2024 to 2027, he serves as the council member for the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S). He is also the board member of Sci-Tech Asia, an international research network. Currently, Rao is developing a research project on digital scams, particularly “pig-butcher scams” in global China, investigating how the semiotics of digital deception operate across cultural and geopolitical boundaries.

Looking for angles: \$Trump and the Scaling of Memecoin trading

Yao Qicheng, The University of Chicago

Abstract: Through digital ethnography within the Chinese-language cryptocurrency scene on WeChat, X (Twitter), and Telegram from 2023 to 2025, this paper investigates two emerging subjectivities. While “P-little-generals” (P小将) refers to traders immersed in the intense player-versus-player (PvP) competition on memecoin launchpads like Pump.fun, “wool-pullers” (羊毛党) refers to those who seek emerging pre-launch projects and make small, incremental gains by completing reward tasks like boosting community engagement. This paper investigates how the two emergent figures of personhood are framed as contrasting participation frameworks, value regimes, and temporalities.

This paper first examines the hype around \$TRUMP, the Donald Trump memecoin purportedly profited mostly by Chinese traders. Rather than framing the event as a simple contest between opportunistic insiders and naïve retail traders, this study situates \$TRUMP within the memecoin genre and the broader Chinese-language trader discourse surrounding it. Drawing on theories of style from art history, linguistic anthropology, and material culture studies, it analyzes how \$TRUMP’s visual design, promotional framing, and trading discourse constitute contested processes of “enregisterment” (Agha 2007) that linked coin style to trading strategies. Traders highlight developing “muscle memories”, or bodily attunement to the market as the key to intuitively navigating volatility, but also caution against the over-identification with a normative trading style. Through metapragmatic reflections, traders contrast sentiment-based with value-based trading strategies, reanimating the contention between value investment and native trading theories of chip distribution in the 2000s. Moreover, traders debate whether \$TRUMP departs from conventional memecoin trajectories as a potential initiator of a new “celebrity coin” genre, warranting a different mode of engagement. Ultimately, \$TRUMP’s case illustrates the entanglement of semiotic ideologies, affect, and emergent financial subjectivities.

This paper moves on to investigate the political economy of wool-pulling workshops. Experienced wool-pullers set up informal workshops in apartments and industry parks, recruiting through their kinship and personal networks to scale up their practices. Unlike P-little-generals dreaming of rags-to-riches overnight, wool-pullers profit incrementally as they negotiate overheads, employee incentive structures, and local financial institutions. Moreover, in contrast to the fast-paced attention economy of memecoins, where a token would be launched and abandoned in a few hours or even minutes, wool-pullers engage in a longer temporal cycle where they sow in bear markets and reap in bull markets. The arms race between wool-pullers and crypto projects wanting “real engagements” leads to increasingly elaborate anti-Sybil measures (and countermeasures). Finally, this paper argues that P-little-generals and wool-pullers are different kinds of “parasites” (Kockelman 2010). This is not to condemn Chinese traders and wool-pullers as opportunistic profiteers, which is a constant trope in English-language presses, but to recognize the importance of mediation in animating and putting together sociotechnical assemblages. If P-little-generals stimulate the market by preying on the relations between fellow market actors, wool-pullers weave together local financial, relational, and technological infrastructure to make marginal gains.

Daniel Qicheng Yao is a Ph.D. student in Anthropology at the University of Chicago. He holds a BA in Media, Culture, Communication and Art History from New York University. His past research examines how non-fungible token (NFT) companies/platforms, influencers, and players enregister this technology in China by drawing on various spatiotemporal framings (or chronotopes). His digital ethnography illustrates how different framings entail alignment with different value regimes and

participation frameworks. Iterations of his honors thesis have been presented at conferences and received the top student paper award in the language and social interaction division of International Communication Association. For future research, he is interested in the applications of blockchain technologies and how local communities affectively engage with them.

Chineseness on Web3: Hong Kong and mainland Chinese collaboration in shaping contemporary Chinese culture and creativity

Holy Hoi Ki SHUM, Hong Kong Shue Yan University

Gallam Jialin Zhang, Hong Kong Shue Yan University

Abstract: In recent years, the Beijing Government and the HKSAR Government have implemented cultural policy initiatives to promote and deepen cooperation between Hong Kong and the mainland in cultural and technological development. China's 14th Five-Year Plan aims to strengthen the mainland's collaboration with Hong Kong and Macao in innovation and technology and to pursue high-quality development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The Hong Kong Cultural and Creative Industries Development Agency (CCIDA) states on its webpage that it would fund various Hong Kong creative sectors to organise exhibitions, exchange activities, and more in other Greater Bay Area cities or to co-organise different projects with them. These policy initiatives clearly highlight the authorities' emphasis on techno-cultural collaboration between Hong Kong and the mainland.

This paper explores the collaboration between Hong Kong and Mainland China to redefine 'Chineseness' through cultural and creative development on Web3. Existing research often confines itself to studying digital art and culture in either Hong Kong or mainland China exclusively (e.g., Jin & Liu, 2022; Ng & Hu, 2024; Snels, 2022; Shum, 2024). Even when examining cultural exhibitions across different Chinese regions, the focus remains on separate contexts rather than on their collaborative relationships (Zhang & Liu, 2024). This paper provides a unique transboundary perspective on how the convergence of contemporary culture, technology, identity, and nationhood in Hong Kong and mainland China is reshaping Chineseness through Web3 technologies.

The use of the label 'Chineseness' occurs so frequently that its status remains untheorised and taken for granted. Chow (2000) argued that Chineseness is something opposed to Western hegemony and that it is used to establish cultural integrity in defence. The decolonised world needs to shift towards a new ethnicist stance by utilising cultural differences. Chow further argued that the examination of Chineseness cannot be confined to mainland China. The heterogeneous, ununified China presents an alternative force for China Studies. Drawing on semi-structured individual interviews and cultural artefact analysis, this paper examines several collaborative cultural productions between Hong Kong and mainland China using blockchain technology to understand 'Chineseness' on Web3 platforms. The concept of Chineseness in this paper is viewed on two levels: 1) the projection of contemporary Chinese culture, and 2) the Chinese creative labour studies through techno-cultural collaboration between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese practitioners on Web3.

The main contribution of this paper is to expand the Western ideological understanding of Web3 infrastructure beyond focusing solely on democratisation or decentralisation. By adopting a transboundary perspective of Hong Kong and mainland China, we examine how the decentralised Web3 technology provides a socio-cultural platform for the Chinese diaspora's creative practitioners to reestablish their cultural collaborative efforts and reshape people's perceptions of Chinese culture.

Holy Shum is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Hong Kong Shue Yan University. Her research focuses on how new technologies are transforming creative industries and their practitioners in mainland China and Hong Kong. Holy also takes a keen research interest in popular culture, social media, and postcolonialism. Her work has been published in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Global Media and China*, *Media International Australia*, and *Social*

Transformations in Chinese Societies. Before her PhD studies, Holy worked as an advertising copywriter and marketer.

Through the lens of gender and Sinophone studies, **Gallam Jialin Zhang** is interested in exploring how scientific knowledge and technology came to be in everyday life. Trained in cultural anthropology, philosophy, and business, Gallam is currently researching Hong Kong—China collaboration and Chineseness on Web3.

The Labor of Border-Crossing: Chinese Underclass Crypto Profiteers and Their Multi-Layered Migrations

Hou Jiayi, RMIT University

Abstract: Although China has been known for progressively tightening regulations on cryptocurrency trading and mining since 2013, culminating in a comprehensive crackdown in 2021, a vibrant crypto economy quietly persists at the grassroots level. For many socio-economically disadvantaged individuals—including peasants, migrants, and precarious workers—decentralized technologies are not merely an ideological choice but, more importantly, an economic necessity. In an era of slowing economic growth and fewer conventional job opportunities, the global Web3 ecosystem offers a crucial lifeline for financial survival and mobility.

Based on an ongoing multi-sited ethnography across China, Japan, and Australia, this paper develops the concept of the “labour of border-crossing” to analyse the complex socio-technical assemblage through which marginalized actors navigate an expansive global crypto economy. This labour specifically refers to the immense, often invisible, effort required to adjust themselves to multiple layers of migration: from China’s regulated internet to the global web; from the platform-centric Web 2.0 and the more chaotic Web3; across linguistic and cultural divides; and between digital and physical worlds. I argue that the labour of border-crossing becomes necessary within the emerging Web3 ecosystem that, while ostensibly decentralized, is in fact deeply entangled with existing power dynamics. This labour unfolds across four key dimensions: technical, spatiotemporal, linguistic-cultural, and relational.

Practitioners must first perform technical work to bypass state censorship and master complex platforms, apps, and tools. They also have to bridge a spatiotemporal divide, synchronizing themselves to a global market that often operates on US/UTC time, forcing them into nocturnal schedules that disrupt daily life. Furthermore, as individuals lacking formal education and cultural capital, they also engage in linguistic-cultural labour to operate in English-centric spaces, where their creative tactics and vernacular knowledge risk being algorithmically flagged and excluded (de Seta, 2020). As a partial response, many deploy relational labour, re-activating the global Chinese community as essential infrastructure. Diasporic networks are enrolled to convert currency and move hardware across borders, anchoring these digital efforts in a transnational material support system.

By framing these disparate practices through the integrated lens of the “labour of border-crossing,” this study aims at making two contributions. First, it critically interrogates the implementation and application of blockchain in a subaltern context, moving beyond mainstream developmentalist and techno-solutionist frameworks (e.g., Kshetri, 2017). Second, it extends current discussions on the global migration of technical workers into a complex sociotechnical landscape (e.g., Xiang, 2007; Amrute, 2016; Zhang, 2023). I demonstrate how engagement with blockchain profoundly redefines not just technical and sovereign borders, but also the very boundaries of ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic identity. In doing so, this study poses questions about what it means to be underclass and Chinese, and what migration itself signifies in an era of decentralized, transnational networks.

Hou Jiayi is a Research Fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University. She is an interdisciplinary ethnographer exploring the interplay between marginality and digital technologies, with an emphasis on social class. Her current work focuses on the socio-cultural ramifications of emerging innovations, particularly blockchain and AI, in subaltern contexts across the Asia Pacific.

Top 10 Bitcoin myths from Hong Kong Chinese 'Disbelievers'

BTB (畢特比), Bitcoin Association of Hong Kong

Abstract: In this thought provoking talk from Hong Kong's longest-running Bitcoin meetup, BTB examines the top 10 myths holding back Bitcoin adoption among 'disbelievers'. From claims that fiat money is sufficient to fears of fixed supply, BTB uses real-world examples and economic insights to argue that Bitcoin is essential. He highlights global debt crises and network value, drawing from interactions with bankers, housewives, and professors. Learn how Bitcoin appreciates over time unlike debasing fiat. Discover the four types of people in Bitcoin adoption and why he believes that it's never too late to start.

BTB is Director of Bitcoin Association of Hong Kong, which hosts one of the longest-running public Bitcoin Meetups in the world. He is developing blockchain applications and a new economy built upon Bitcoin as the base layer.

Between the elite alliance and the funky crypto degens: A “field” approach to the communities of decentralizing technology

Wang Jing, NYU Shanghai

Abstract: This research examines how the communities in blockchain ecosystems, often framed as decentralized, are in practice structured by hierarchies shaped through distinct forms of social, technological, cultural, and political capital. This structure resonates with the power dynamic that shapes the Bourdieuan idea of the field, but it has added a new technological dimension to it. While decentralization is celebrated as an ideal in these communities, both Chinese and Western contexts demonstrate recurrent processes of centralization. In China, political constraints, including financial regulations, restricted channels, and limited public discourse, have shaped the privileged access for and concentrated influence of the elite actors. In Western contexts, market dynamics and political forces became entwined with social media promotion, producing forms of discursive openness that, paradoxically, reproduce central authority through visibility, virality, and symbolic power. In my talk, I demonstrate this paradox through a technographic analysis of Ethereum’s online communities and the adjacent discussions on X and Discord. These exchanges, vibrant yet often inaccessible to the broader public, reveal how mechanisms such as staking rewards, infrastructural dependencies, and reliance on core validators construct barriers to entry and enable the formation of “elite alliances” that extract rents and entrench dominance. Elite authority is not only acknowledged by community participants, particularly developers, but is also reinforced by speculative traders who have amplified these power asymmetries. What emerges is a blockchain “utopia” that, despite its rhetoric of openness and decentralization, operates through limited-access orders. Within this order, elite alliances consolidate power by combining financial resources with the reproduction of cultural, social, and political capital, thereby mirroring and amplifying the existing hierarchies in the tech domain.

Wang Jing is an Assistant Professor of Interactive Media and Business at NYU Shanghai. She is also an Affiliated Faculty of the university’s Program on Creativity and Innovation and the Center for Global Asia. Jing received her Ph.D. in Communication and Information from Rutgers– The State University of New Jersey. Her research studies how information and communication technologies influence the financial domain in the global context. Her work has been published in the leading journals in Communication Studies and China Studies, such as *Big Data & Society*, *Telecommunications Policy*, *Media, Culture & Society*, *International Journal of Communication*, *The Political Economy of Communication*, *Platforms & Society*, *The China Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Contemporary China*. In addition to her academic roles at NYU Shanghai, Jing serves as Associate Editor of the journal *Finance & Society* and is a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Cultural Economy* and *Cultural Studies*.

Financial Platforms: Displacing the Global North /Global South Divide

Janet Roitman, RMIT University

Abstract: Financial platforms are generally seen as the basic infrastructure of platform capitalism. These decentralized technologies are therefore also seen as vectors of ‘infrastructural power’. However, different assumptions are made about the effects of decentralized technologies depending on geographical location. For example, while financial platforms are approached as inherent to processes of technological innovation and financialization on a global scale, they are reduced to processes of financial inclusion when referencing the ‘Global South.’ Analyses of financialization as a one-way-vector – Global North to Global South – overlook the variability, the limits, and responses to financialization. By focusing on the latter, we can better understand the specificities of value creation via digital platforms. We also shed light on the problem of labeling specific geographical areas, such as the African or Asian continent, or nation-states, such as Kenya or China, as “the Global South.”

Janet Roitman is a professor at RMIT University. She is founder/director of the Platform Economies Research Network (PERN) and an Associate Investigator with ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-making and Society (ADM+S). Her research focuses on digital financial technologies and emergent forms of value. She is the author of *Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa* (Princeton University Press) and *Anti-Crisis* (Duke University Press). She sits on the editorial boards of *The Journal of Cultural Economy*, *Finance & Society*, *Platforms & Society*, and *Cultural Anthropology*. Prior to joining RMIT, Janet was a University Professor at The New School in New York. Her research has received support from the Ford Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation, The US Institute of Peace, Agence française du développement, The American Council of Learned Societies, The Institute for Public Knowledge, and The National Science Foundation.

A vision for the future of Web3 in Hong Kong

Andrew Mak, Web3 Harbour

Li Zelin, Web3 Harbour

Abstract: Representatives from Web3 Harbour, Hong Kong's premier Web3 industry association will discuss their successful efforts to cultivate a professional web3 community in the city. They will describe how they have engaged and represented Web3 builders, investors, users, and leaders to promote a pro-innovation, pro-collaboration, and inclusive environment for the development of the decentralised internet and digital asset economy. They will also introduce the Hong Kong Web3 Blueprint, which describes their policy vision for the future of decentralised technology in the city.

Li Zelin is completing her Master of Finance at HKU, with experience in PE, consulting, banking, and Web3 exchanges. At Web3 Harbour, she focuses on university outreach and community operations, as well as coordinating the association's Blueprint initiative working groups. Her primary area of interest now lies in asset and wealth management and the intersection with Web3.

Andrew Mak is the Head of Partnerships at Web3 Harbour, focused on fostering an environment where native Web3 companies and organizations looking to get plugged into the Web3 ecosystem can collaborate. Previously, he was at an NGO leading its digital transformation initiative across the organization.

The Dao of the DAO: Eastern Philosophies in Decentralized Worlds

Helena Rong, NYU Shanghai

Abstract: In chapter 62 of *Tao Te Ching*, Laozi describes the Dao as “the hearth and home of the ten thousand things. Good souls treasure it, lost souls find shelter in it.” Contemporary DAOs are often framed within Western discourses of decentralization, autonomy, and Web 3.0 innovation. However, emerging practices—especially in Chinese-speaking communities—reveal a distinctive layer of cultural imagination deeply rooted in Eastern thought. This research proposes to understand DAOs from Eastern philosophies by examining how Taoist principles inform the values and practices of DAO communities in Asia to articulate alternative visions of autonomy, community, and social organization. Concepts such as *wu wei* (non-action) and natural spontaneity are increasingly referenced in the context of blockchain governance in Asia. Using SeeDAO, a prominent DAO in the Chinese-speaking Web3 space, as a focal point, this study will explore how concepts such as non-action governance, the “Dao follows nature”, symbiosis, and “emergence” are operationalized in digital governance practices. The research seeks to make three key contributions: first, to document the lived experiences and ethical visions of DAO participants in Asia; second, to provide a culturally grounded theory of decentralized governance rooted in Eastern philosophical paradigms; and third, to explore how ancient philosophical ideas find renewed life in emergent socio-technical forms.

Dr. **Helena Rong** is an Assistant Professor of Interactive Media Business (IMB) at NYU Shanghai and affiliated with the Program on Creativity + Innovation (PCI). Her research operates at the nexus of urban studies, design, technology studies, data science, and public policy. She focuses on leveraging innovative technologies and methodologies to foster social impact in urban decision-making, aligning incentives across diverse stakeholders to maximize the societal benefits of technological innovation, and developing adaptive urban interfaces that respond to evolving community needs. Currently, she researches decentralized pop-up cities and the ontology and governance of decentralized AI. Rong holds a PhD in Urban Planning from Columbia University, a Master of Science in Architecture and Urbanism from MIT, and a Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University.

Decentralizing the Countryside: An Ethnographic Study of Governance Experimentation in Nantang DAO

Fan Jia, City University of Hong Kong

Zhang Jinjin, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Liu Xiaofan, City University of Hong Kong

Abstract: Background: This study examines China’s first rural Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO)—Nantang DAO—in Anhui Province, as a unique case. Over the past 30 years, Sanxing Village, Fuyang City, where the DAO is resided, has been renowned for pioneering democratic farmer organizing practices: from the Farmers’ Rights Protection Association to the province’s first agricultural cooperative, and arguably the first localization of Robert’s Rules of Order in Chinese rural areas. As a governance experimentation, Nantang DAO was established in 2024 amid a local agricultural cooperative’s debt crisis and near-stagnation in cultural and economic development, aiming to leverage Web3 technologies and concepts to introduce new ideas for rural organizational and economic construction.

Theoretical Perspective & Questions: These farmer-organizing practices essentially reflect the pursuit of cooperativism—meeting common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. Nantang DAO represents a novel experiment in cooperativism, characterized by decentralization and autonomy, featuring the adoption of blockchain and smart contracts as technological infrastructure and the integration of blockchain-based tokens into its cooperative governance model. In particular, the tokens play three key roles in Nantang DAO: fostering dispersed ownership (tokens as collectively owned shares), inclusive decision-making voice (tokens as votes), and self-driven participation (tokens as external incentives).

Drawing on the framework of cooperativism, two research puzzles are identified: (1) externally, whether Nantang DAO, as a new cooperativism form, can incorporate broader rural shareholders amid uncertainty in integrating its decentralized logic with existing collectivism-rooted Chinese village governance; and (2) internally, whether Nantang DAO could achieve breakthroughs in rural China by realizing jointly-owned and democratically controlled structures, despite shortcomings like centralization and apathy observed in the contexts of Western DAOs. These puzzles are specified as: RQ1: Does the introduction of Nantang DAO foster a broader ownership structure and more democratic governance by connecting with local entities (villagers and the cooperative)? RQ2: Is Nantang DAO sufficiently decentralized in its ownership structure and decision-making, avoiding inner oligarch risks and inequalities? RQ3: Does it incentivize autonomous and durable participation?

Methods & Findings: This study adopts an ethnographic approach in Nantang Village from March 15 to April 30, 2025, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 14 representative individuals (DAO members, cooperative employees, and local villagers) and quantitative analysis of extensive internal organizational documents (e.g., governance proposals, token transactions). Findings reveal that Nantang DAO’s democracy is limited to internal actors, failing to achieve broad rural community connection; DAO members remain village outsiders due to their stark background differences from rural groups and a mismatch between its construction direction and villagers’ fundamental needs. Internally, economic sources present investor monopolization risks; decision-making shows a centralized token ownership structure and gradually weakening member autonomy because of unreasonable token incentive mechanisms and frequent conflicts.

Implications: The study offers first-hand insights, highlighting DAO's challenges to revolutionize rural governance by blending decentralized tech with traditions. It reveals cooperativism's defect in underestimating cultural clashes between DAO individualism and rural collectivism. Technological innovations are no guarantee for cooperativism's realization; those detached from people's needs struggle to sustain.

Fan Jia is a PhD candidate in the Department of Media and Communication at City University of Hong Kong. His research focuses on human behaviour in decentralized autonomous organizations (DAOs). As an emerging computational communication scholar beginning to incorporate anthropological methods, he seeks to explore multi-method approaches to analyze social science issues with depth and breadth.

Decentralized Networked Publics – Assertions, Affordances and Actions in Chinese DAOs

Zhang Qikai, Fudan University

Abstract: Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) represent a novel form of community characterized by blockchain-enabled flat hierarchies and democratized decision-making. Drawing on a 10-month hybrid ethnography of Chinese DAOs, this article examines how blockchain (Web3) — instead of social media platform (Web2) — is constructing a new kind of networked public. These communities develop a distinct spatiotemporal worldview regarding the social life of themselves and cryptocurrencies, and materialize the decentralized publicness envisioned by blockchain and Web3 advocates. The study shows how technological affordances in networked publics operates at a mediation level between community members rather than a content level between audiences or users, which shapes shared temporality and spatiality, lifestyle and identity, and collective action.

The article commences with a descriptive analysis of DAOs, conceptualizing DAOs and ‘DAOism’ as networked publics for discourse-sharing, consensus-building and collaboration-automating, as well as distinct economic structures which incentivize participants through tokens. Three dominant, technology-afforded discourses thus emerge: (1) spatial scalability, (2) the promise of exponential future growth, and (3) a nomadic, neo-tribalist lifestyle underpinned by reputation economies. This article critically analyzes how these discourses are intertwined with the technological affordance of blockchain: On one hand, the ‘consensus-making’ algorithm in blockchain networks is adopted in human organizations both metaphorically and technologically; On the other hand, economically, blockchain underpins DAOs’ operation and DAO member’s personal life. This techno-economic system is divergent from social media platforms, and in turn replicates blockchain’s spatiotemporal logic in human organization and supports a specific lifestyle-related identity.

However, the assertions of DAOism have led to practical dilemmas in cohesion and collaboration. The article also documents how members of Chinese DAOs reflexively critique this system. By employing adaptive strategies such as online debates, ‘workstreams’, and in-person hackathons, they facilitate real-world collective action within the DAO framework both online and offline. These practices illustrate the agency of networked publics to reconfigure their relation with technology.

Zhang Qikai is a PhD candidate in communication studies at Fudan University and currently a visiting researcher in Institution for Money Technology & Financial Inclusion at UC Irvine. He is actively involved in cryptocurrency communities as a way to inquiry the relation between technology and society within our economic and cultural life. In his doctoral work, he use the development of Money to expound why media has always coupled with trust technology, and how that would change our understanding of media and communication themselves.

Tokenized Identity: Tracing Non-Tradable NFTs and Web3 Automation Practices

Violeta Camarasa San Juan, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Saskia Witteborn, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract: November 2024. Bangkok (Thailand). A group of Taiwanese Web3 enthusiasts hang out at a relaxed evening event dubbed EthTaipei Meetup. Tired after an intense day at Devcon, the largest annual Ethereum conference, they chat over food and drinks. At the entrance, guests are welcomed by three QR codes printed on A4 sheets displayed on a whiteboard. One of the codes leads to the POAP (Proof of Attendance Protocol) website, where users can mint a cryptographic unique token, or NFT, especially designed for the occasion. After striking a conversation on the event POAP token, the organizers pulled out their smartphones and opened the POAP app to show their collections of POAPs — round images paired with short explanatory texts — joking about who had the most. Minting, in the Web3 context, means using an Ethereum digital wallet account to approve the transaction, thus creating an immutable record of their attendance on a blockchain, or public ledger. A graphic representation of such record will appear on the POAP collections of all the EthTaipei Meetup guests that minted the event POAP. The associated metadata (e.g., wallet addresses that minted a specific POAP) will be publicly available on the blockchain for anyone to consult, either manually or computationally.

Current debates on blockchain technologies predominantly discuss non-fungible tokens (NFTs) as decentralized ownership records or financialized commodities for trade. NFTs have been defined as “digital tokens that represent unique assets on a blockchain” (Dylan-Ennis, 2024, p. 89) by assigning “identification codes and metadata” (Bawany & Bawany, 2024, p. 15) to the unique assets. This paper shifts the focus to a specific type of NFTs used in Web3 circles not for buying and selling, but as digital identity tokens communicating information about their holder, often through automated identification systems. For the purpose of this paper, we refer to these as identity NFTs. Identity NFTs function both symbolically and computationally. Symbolically, as the initial vignette illustrates, identity NFTs allow holders to communicate identity attributes such as membership in or commitment to a project, through their collections. Computationally, identity NFTs enable users’ interactions with automated systems of social organization designed to manage permissions based on the NFTs held by group members (e.g., access, writing, or voting rights). This later aspect has allowed blockchain developers to experiment with decentralized forms of sociality and governance relying on the digital recording of social activities, such as attending events or contributing to a project.

Drawing from media and technology studies and cultural anthropology, this paper argues that identity NFTs are part of a long history of identity marking and people sorting, in which the process of what we call “identity tokenization” plays a central role. Through a two-case study based on document analysis, the paper examines how identity attributes of users are computationally tokenized through the production of identity NFTs, thus becoming machine-readable and usable in automated decision-making. To better understand the sociocultural implications of these seemingly new practices, the paper traces identity NFTs back in history. The tokenization of identity is thus discussed as a historical process, and conceptualized in connection to digitization, datafication, and automation. The paper, therefore, aims at exploring answers to the following guiding questions: What is tokenized through Web3 identity NFTs? How and Why?

Violeta Camarasa San Juan is a PhD Candidate in Media Technologies at the School of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). She was a visiting scholar at the

School of Media Studies, University of Amsterdam, where she contributed to the Global Digital Cultures research priority area. Her dissertation explores practices of digital identity emerging around the use of digital wallets and automated forms of social interaction in blockchain/Web3 environments. Drawing on digital and embodied ethnographic studies, interviews and other qualitative methods, the study focuses on the uses of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) as identity markers produced and circulated computationally with the active involvement of users.

Saskia Witteborn is a Professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). Her research stands at the intersection between critical technology studies, migration, and mobilities. She works on migration and the geopolitics of identity, migration into immersive environments (VR), and the datafication and automation of international migration. She was a visiting scholar at Free University of Berlin, at the Berlin Institute for Migration and Integration Research at Humboldt University, Télécom Paris, and the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research has appeared in leading journals and in edited collections, including the *Journal of Communication*, *Cultural Studies*, *Telematics and Informatics*, and the *Journal of Refugee Studies*. She is author of *Unruly Speech: Displacement and the Politics of the Transgression* (Stanford University Press, 2023), co-editor of *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration* (SAGE, 2020), and co-author of *Together* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

28 Oct: Workshop (by invitation only)

Negotiating Centralization and Decentralization: Communication Practices across Chinese Blockchain Ecosystems

Mahdi Yousefi, Hainan Normal University

Abstract: This article explores the tensions over centralization and decentralization in the communication practices within Chinese blockchain ecosystems. The Western narratives of decentralized technologies such as blockchains, DAOs and cryptocurrencies as necessarily liberating and anti-institutional often do not track the formation and use of these technologies in Chinese communities, where their application is a complex articulation of autonomy, cultural traditions, and state regulation. To comprehend these dynamics is important, since Chinese actors on both the mainland and throughout the diasporic world form a critical part of the process of construction of the technical infrastructures, conversations and practices of Web 3 on a global basis.

Methodologically, the article is multi-sited and qualitative in approach. We collect data from a body of 25 semi-structured interviews with blockchain developers, community builders, investors, and users in mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the diaspora communities across North America. This can include cross-referencing primary interviews against documents found in documentary and virtual archives such as white papers, DAO charters, crypto community forums, and WeChat/Telegram discussion groups. This multisided approach enables triangulation between participants' lived experiences and textual and digital evidence, thus offering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the ways in which decentralization is understood, experienced and contested within Chinese settings.

The findings articulate three prime patterns: (1) multi-modality of territorialized aspirations amid the soundings of cultural logics of hierarchy, trust and collectivism; (2) legitimation and emplacement negotiations in the wake of China's restrictive regulatory environment; and (3) hybrid governance archetypes that mix decentralized infrastructures with concentrated supervision, oftentimes under Confucian, familial or nationality justifications.

Contribution: This article makes threefold contributions. First, it contributes to communication studies through examining blockchain practices in the context of Chinese culture and politics, challenging Western-centric stories of Web3. Second, it shows that decentralization is compatible with, and can complement, centralizing trends, contesting binary understandings of governance. Lastly, it empirically illustrates how the transnational Chinese communities leverage decentralized technologies to reconstruct communication, identity and trust.

Mahdi Yousefi, Ph.D., is a Research Associate at Hainan Normal University, China, where he contributes to a national-level project on the branding of Hainan Free Trade Port. He holds a Ph.D. in Intercultural Communication from Shanghai International Studies University. Dr. Yousefi has served as a Research Fellow at Yale Law School and the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. His research focuses on international and intercultural communication, with particular emphasis on China-Middle East relations, digital communication practices, and transnational cultural dynamics. His work bridges communication studies, cultural diplomacy, and global branding strategies. Email: Yousefi.mahdi@gmail.com

Mapping Chinese Newspapers' Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Web3

Xu Jinghong, Beijing Normal University

Yuan Yuhang, Beijing Normal University

Abstract: Web3, often referred to as the decentralized or semantic web, represents a new type of read-write-own ecosystem (Wu et al., 2025). The surge of interest in the metaverse in 2021 brought Web3, as its underlying technological foundation, into the spotlight of China's internet industry. However, an April 2022 article titled "Web3.0, Irrelevant to China" contended that the country lacks the essential conditions for developing Web3, dampening the enthusiasm of its ambitious followers. Although the article later faced substantial criticism, China's strict regulation of cryptocurrencies has continued to fuel controversy over the technology's future. Thus, this study examines how Chinese newspapers construct sociotechnical imaginaries of Web3 and negotiate its perceived (ir)relevance to the state.

Research Questions:

Sociotechnical imaginaries are "collectively held, institutionally stabilized and publicly performed visions of desirable futures" (Jasanoff, 2015, p.4). This concept offers a lens for understanding the politics of scientific and technological innovation (Vicente & Dias-Trindade, 2021), including autonomous driving (Graf & Sonnberger, 2020), artificial intelligence (Bareis & Katzenbach, 2021), and cloud computing (Baur, 2024). Despite its growing prominence as an emerging technological ecosystem, Web3 has received little scholarly attention, notably lacking discussions from Chinese discourse. Given the important role of media institutions, particularly newspapers, in shaping collective imagination and identity (Leder, Mackley, & Jewitt, 2024), this study examines how Web3 is publicly presented, accepted, or denied in Chinese newspapers to further clarify the debate surrounding the claim that "Web3 is irrelevant to China." The research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: What sociotechnical imaginaries of Web3 are presented in Chinese newspapers?
- RQ2: How do Chinese newspapers construct the (ir)relevance of Web3 to the state?
- RQ3: What dominant tone characterizes Web3 coverage in Chinese newspapers?

Method:

Data were collected through a keyword search ("Web 3.0," "Web3," and "Web3.0") in the WiseSearch database, focusing on content published by key newspapers in mainland China. The sampling period was set from January 1, 2014 (the year Web3 was first proposed) to June 30, 2025, covering the peak cycle of Chinese newspapers' discussions on Web3. A general Baidu search was also employed to supplement newspapers' reports on the same topic. After removing duplicates, irrelevant topics, and reports with fewer than 300 words, we selected 516 articles as the final dataset.

Then, we employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 1995) to analyze the 500 articles. Specifically, we began with a close reading of the selected articles, followed by coding and clustering statements related to Web3. We then analyzed how these narratives negotiated the alignment or tension between Web3's sociotechnical imaginaries and national development, including how conflicts were addressed. Finally, we identified the dominant discursive strategies used in reporting on Web3, and interpreted the political and cultural orientations embedded within them.

Expected Contributions:

The research provides an observation of Web3 in Chinese newspapers, which is particularly important for understanding public debates on emerging technologies. Meanwhile, it illustrates how Web3 is framed, accepted, and adapted within the Chinese context, thereby responding to calls for greater attention to technological practices in non-Western settings.

Xu Jinghong is a professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, Beijing Normal University. His research interests include new media and internet governance, health communication, intercultural communication, film and television study, and game research. He has published 4 books and more than 130 English and Chinese papers in *New Media and Society*, *Public Relations Review*, *Digital Journalism*, *Telecommunications Policy*, *Social Media + Society*, *Policy and Internet*, *Media and Communication*, *Journalism*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Health Communication*, *Journalism Practice*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *Convergence* and other journals.

Yuan Yuhang is a doctoral candidate at the School of Journalism and Communication, Beijing Normal University. His research interests include digital platform, journalism, and health communication. His work has published more than 10 English and Chinese papers in *New Media & Society*, *Policy & Internet*, *Health Communication*, *Journalism Practice*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, and other journals.

Chinese in Web3 Communities from the Perspective of Actor-Network Theory: A Case Study of DeBox

Xu Jinghong, Beijing Normal University

Liu Yahao (via zoom), Beijing Normal University

Abstract: Blockchain, as the foundation of Web3, is reshaping internet evolution with its decentralization nature. It plays a significant role in protecting privacy (Kshetri, 2017) and heralds innovative models for democratic society (Bychkova & Kosmarski, 2023), promising decentralized internet governance where users retain ownership of their data and content (Järvekülg et al., 2024), while also enabling Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) as novel governance frameworks (Saurabh et al., 2024). Chinese users have consistently demonstrated active adoption of internet technologies, cultivating diverse related imaginaries (Yu, 2017). As a prominent Web3 platform with a substantial Chinese user base, DeBox integrates core Web3 functionalities: issuing Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) with dual entertainment-financial functions (Zaucha & Agur, 2025) and facilitating DAO communities, providing a typical case for studying Chinese users' Web3 practices.

Research Questions

Existing research has begun to focus on Chinese groups participating in blockchain and cryptocurrency activities (Hou, 2023), however, there remains a significant gap in understanding the interaction mechanisms of these groups. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 1987; 2005), with its emphasis on the "translation" activities of a plurality of actors, provides an analytical lens for examining the practices of Chinese groups on the DeBox platform, addressing the following research questions:

- RQ1: Within the interaction scenarios of Chinese users on DeBox, what core actors are involved? How are the attributes of these actors enrolled into the interaction network?
- RQ2: Through what processes do these actors reach consensus and sustain interactions? What conflicts or coordination mechanisms exist within these processes?
- RQ3: What structural characteristics define the social networks formed through actors' interactions? Based on interactions within the actor-network, how do Chinese users construct and express their digital identities?

Research Design and Methods:

This study employs a mixed-methods approach integrating case study, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews.

- **Case Study:** This research employs an instrumental case study methodology, centering on the DeBox platform with specific focus on its global Chinese users.
- **Participatory Observation:** To capture authentic interaction patterns, researchers conducted immersive participant observation through dedicated DeBox accounts. Starting in Jan. 1st, 2025, they actively engaged in 6 Chinese-focused DAO communities over an extended period, meticulously documenting field notes on interaction dynamics, communication modes, and emerging community norms.
- **Semi-structured in-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted with 30 Chinese DeBox users, employing a combined recruitment strategy of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Interviews will explore users' experiences, interactions, and identity formation. Then researchers employ the thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2021) to analyze the interviewed data, including six phases: 1) data

familiarization; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report.

Expected Results:

The research will identify the core actors within the DeBox Chinese community and their attributes, delineating their enrollment processes into the interaction network. It will reveal the unique interaction logics employed by Chinese users in Web3's decentralized context, offering a novel perspective on social network formation within Web3 communities.

Jinghong Xu is a professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, Beijing Normal University. His research interests include new media and internet governance, health communication, intercultural communication, film and television study, and game research. He has published 4 books and more than 130 English and Chinese papers in *New Media and Society*, *Public Relations Review*, *Digital Journalism*, *Telecommunications Policy*, *Social Media + Society*, *Policy and Internet*, *Media and Communication*, *Journalism*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Health Communication*, *Journalism Practice*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *Convergence* and other journals.

Liu Yahao is a doctoral candidate at the School of Journalism and Communication, Beijing Normal University. His research interests include international communication, social media studies, and media theory.