

## *State-Society Relations in China's State-Led Digitalization: Progress and Prospects*

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### *Abstract*

This article provides an overview of research on digitalization and how it affects state-society relations in China and around the world. It offers a necessary background for understanding the Chinese government's incorporation of digital technology into public administration and how digitalization impacts state-society relations, which is a central theme of this special issue. We find that the Chinese government's proactive use of digital technology has given rise to the complex interaction between the citizens and agencies in a fragmented state system. While censorship and propaganda are still important functions of information and communication technologies (ICTs), we also find that different parts of the state adopt ICTs for various other purposes, and the use of ICTs results in multiple consequences. Higher-level governments aim to use an "e-Weberian" system to keep their subordinates in check, while some local governments seek to attract investment by leapfrogging in digitalization. Empirical evidence suggests that the quality of online responsiveness also varies across agencies and regions. We conclude that the process and outcomes of digitalization are shaped not only by the interaction between the citizens and government but also by the competition, strategizing, and collaboration among state actors.

Digitalization has become the leading force in reshaping our understanding of the modern state. In the first two decades of the 21st century, digital technology has become implanted in everyday life and changed

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