

The PhD Pitch @ CCIT Symposium (11/12/2023)

The Dilemma of Decoupling: an ethnographic case study of data driven Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices in a Chinese social enterprise

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My background

- Interdisciplinary researcher with a focus in sustainability and development studies
- Affiliate researcher at the Oslo SDG Initiative at the Center for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo

Previous projects

- MultiChina (University of Oslo)
 - Chinese Multilateralism and its Impact on Environmental and Democratic Governance in Africa and Latin America
- Sustainable finance and investment (WWF Norway)
- Nordic Green Experiences (Networking activities between China and the Nordics)

The Dilemma of Decoupling: an ethnographic case study of data driven ESG practices in a Chinese social enterprise (My PhD project)

European Research Council funded project

“Decoupling IT? A Global Comparative Ethnography of the Role of IT in the Mitigation of the Climate Crisis”

Time frame

2023 Sep - 2026 Sep

Partnership and research participant

YZ - An IT social enterprise in Shanghai

Main goal

Understanding the role of YZ and its data professionals in the implementation of climate mitigation initiatives

Understanding the development of ESG (environmental, social and governance) discourse and how it has been implemented in the Chinese context

Theoretical framework

Social Technological Studies, Development, political economy

Methodological tools

Fieldwork, ethnographic observation, interviews, participatory workshops, survey etc.

My contribution

- Contributing to a 'decoupling' logic from a non-western and grassroots account generated in the spaces between IT, climate change and capitalism
- Contributing to the study of China's changing role of global governance, exploring local dynamics
- Understanding theory-practice gap through anthropological approach of exploring local discourse of ESG implementation for climate mitigation and green transition
- Methodologically, reflexivity, ethnographic participatory approach

Research Questions

What's role do data and do data professionals play in the ESG implementation in China? (exploring the intersection of ESG implementation within the nexus of social enterprises, corporate power, and government)

- Sub-RQ1 regarding **organizational level on identity, role and performance**: How do data-driven environmental NGOs contribute to mediating the relationship between international and local ESG standards, and between policy makers, companies, and other relevant stakeholders in environmental governance?
- Sub-RQ2 regarding **individual level on values, ethics and belief**: How are the daily practices of data professionals in environmental NGOs in China informed by their individual values, beliefs, and worldviews?

My motivation

- An exploration and better understanding of conflicts and tensions around ESG emergence, standardization and implementation
- Contributing to a collective effort for green transition and climate mitigation



Challenges

- My positionality, e.g. wearing two hats as “researcher” and “practitioner”
- Navigating my research considering the current geopolitical tensions
- Getting access to the relevant ESG networks and communities

THANK YOU 😊

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