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The Chinese Social Credit System and “Black Mirror”

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前言

这篇论文的目的在于介绍一个叫社会信用体系的中国项目。此工程将于一年内完成。我对这个体系很感兴趣，因为我明白了中国人对社会信用体系的观点。他们认为社会信用体系是一个很重要的项目为了整顿纪律、城市治安、规章制度。他们也认为社会信用体系会让人更值得信赖。反而，西方国家认为这个是一个大规模监视工具。

这篇论文分为三篇章。在第一个篇章内我描写社会信用体系是什么，它的根源和它的意味。过去，中国政府已经实施了各种项目，旨在控制人口。其中有户口体系。户口制度是一个控制国内移民的项目，但它成为一种能够将中国社会分为等级制度，能够在人口中造成不平等的工具。

档案系统与户口制度一起代表了中国政府为控制中国大陆人口所做的另一个体系。档案系统记录公民的表现并评估他们的行为。这些记录的内容仅供上级使用。由于这些信息，上级可以决定给予员工奖励，特别优惠或报复。每个公民和雇员都必须拥有档案系统才能被雇佣，晋升或转移。

随着中国防火长城的引入，政府希望通过审查来限制对国外网站的访问。这是因为中国政府认为互联网是一种危险的工具。

这些只是导致社会信用体系理念的一些项目。中国社会信用体系是一种评估体系，预计将在 2020 年在中国引入并衡量公民和公司的社会行为，以帮助政府了解个人的信誉度。该系统将记录和收集每个公民的几个数据，以创建一个强大的大规模监视工具。如有必要，通过激励或惩罚，政府可以改变公民的行为，以保持和谐。中国政府正在推动试点项目，以了解人口的反应。试点项目既有本地项目也有商业项目。最重要的本地项目是荣成城市的，因为荣成试点项目似乎是社会信用体系运作的最好例证。每个公民都作为社会信用评分。信用评分高的公民可以使用更好的酒店，家庭和学校；而信用评分较低的人可暂时或永久禁止乘坐飞机或火车。公民和居民真正相信社会信用体系，他们已经接受了这个项目。

除了当地试点项目外，还有商业试点项目。最重要的是芝麻信用。这是一个信用评分程序，它使用从阿里巴巴数据库收集的数据。这些数据包括交易历史和在线购物，在线电话支付等。

在第二章中，我将重点关注中国对社会信用体系的看法，与西方媒体的看法相比。中国人将社会信用体系视为一种能够提高生活质量和监管机构的工具。政府将中国社会信用体系作为一个伟大的项目，不仅有助于增强政府与个人之间的信任，而且有助于解决中国目前的所有问题。反而，中国社会信用体系被描述为来自西方国家的数千篇文章的噩梦，如美

国，英国，德国，法国，意大利，西班牙等。这是因为中国社会信用体系似乎是一个想要控制公民，社会和经济的极权政府。

在第三章中，我将把中国社会信用体系与电视剧“黑镜”联系起来。我将分析两者之间存在的一些相似之处。我还将它与乔治奥威尔的书“1984”进行比较。“黑镜”展示了一个令人不安的社会，一切都是由交媒体，技术和评级系统控制的。

乔治奥威尔的书“1984”与新疆试点项目进行了比较。新疆是中国最大的省份，也是社会信用体系原则走向极端的地方。在新疆，面部识别方法非常复杂。人们生活在新疆的情况是压迫的，它反映了一个真正的极权制度。这是政府建立的最极端的试点项目。

中国社会信用体系是一个有争议的话题。有些人认为这是一个伟大的项目，有些人则担心。由于该项目尚未实施没有人能够确切知道它将如何以及如何在中国各地实施。

INTRODUCTION

The idea behind this project is to present the various aspects and facets of the Chinese Social Credit System, a project which is likely to be implemented in China by 2020.

The reasons which brought me to choose such topic are linked to my interest in knowing the different ways in which Chinese authorities and Western media present the social credit system, as well as the will to show how Chinese citizens' evaluate this new project.

The thesis is divided into three chapters: in the first chapter, the Chinese Social Credit System is presented, also analysing the various step in Chinese politics which brought to the creation and to the idea of implementing such project. I will describe the local pilot projects, which have already been enacted in different Chinese regions by the government, and the commercial pilot projects. Finally, I will show how the Chinese Social Credit System has already influenced other countries, which are experimenting their own kind of social credit system.

In the second chapter, I will focus on the perception that China has of the Social Credit System, thanks to interviews released by Chinese citizens and thanks to the speech made by four experts of China, compared with the perception that Western media have.

In the third chapter, I will link the Chinese Social Credit System to the TV series "Black Mirror", analysing some similarities existing between the two, and to "Nineteen Eighty-Four", George Orwell's dystopian novel.

Lastly, in the conclusion of my thesis, I will expose in detail the results which came out from this research work.

CHINESE SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM: ORIGIN, MEANING AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

1.1 Origin of the Chinese Social Credit System

Since 1949, the year in which the Chinese Communist Party came to power, forms of social control and policing practices have been experimented in order to manage state security.

1.1.1 The Hukou System

The Hukou System (户口, hùkǒu) was introduced in China in the 1950s by the Chinese government in order to differentiate residential groups. It was modelled on the Soviet *propiska* which literally means “household registration system”¹, thus the registration under the hukou system represented the principal means of establishing one’s official status in China. Such status is inherited and therefore predetermined by the status of one’s family. The hukou system was created in order to control the internal migration, but it became soon a powerful tool able to divide the Chinese society into hierarchies² and able to create inequalities among people. This was possible because every hukou has a dual classification: it refers to the person’s residence and the person’s socio-economic eligibility. The first one refers to the rural or urban area in which a specific person lives. The second one distinguishes people belonging to the agricultural category from the ones belonging to the non-agricultural one. The rural residents depended on their own labour, while the urban residents usually had more profitable jobs and enjoyed more wealth. As a result, urban citizens were seen as superior to the rural ones in terms of

¹ Liu, Li; Kuang, Lei (5 November 2012). Denson, Tom (ed.). *"Discrimination against Rural-to-Urban Migrants: The Role of the Hukou System in China"*. Retrieved 6 September 2019.

² Mallee H (2000) *Migration, hukou and resistance in reform China*. In: Perry EJ, Selden M, eds. *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*. London: Routledge. pp 83–101.

social and economic status. Urban residents started to receive benefits such as better education, health care system and retirement of pension, while rural citizens were not taken under consideration and were often left to fend for themselves. Since 1980s, China has started different kind of reforms in order to replace the hukou system. Nowadays such system is not used anymore to prevent the rural-urban migration, though a division of the Chinese society between an agricultural segment and a non-agricultural one still exists. As a conclusion, the hukou system remains powerful and it is a key institution, still underlying Chinese people rural-urban disparity.

1.1.2 The Dang 'an

The Dang'an (档案, dàng'àn) together with the Hukou System has represented another effort of the Chinese government for the control of the population of mainland China. Its literal meaning is "record" or "archive", and it is an archival system which records the performance of citizens and evaluated their behaviour. A typical dang'an collects ten kind of materials which document personal information, such as resumes and updates; regular appraisals by superiors; test results; education; promotion or demotions; awards and honours; political history; professional credentials; personal writings and reports. The content of these records is only available to superiors. Thanks to such information, superiors can decide to give awards, special favours or to avenge themselves against employees.³ Every citizen and state employee are bound to have a dang'an in order to be employed, promoted or transferred.

³ Wang, Fei-ling (1998). *From Family to Market: Labor Allocation in Contemporary China*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 0-8476-8880-1. Retrieved 5 September 2019. p.118-125.

1.1.3 The Great Firewall

“The Great Firewall of China” project started in China in 1997, with the aim of regulate the internet through censorship in order to block several foreign websites and to regulate cross-border internet traffic. This happened because the Chinese government considered the Internet as a dangerous tool, defined as “A network that allows individuals to do as they please, lets them go brazenly wherever they wish; is a hegemonistic network that harms the rights of others”⁴. The main problem for Chinese authorities was represented by the fact that Internet was considered as an information centre, with the capability of making people aware of too many things. The second issue was that in the Net the major number of information were only written in English, causing a sort of “English hegemony” that Chinese government did not like. Xia Hong, manager of Public Relations at the China InfoHighway Space, stated:

It's not merely a matter of making the Net convenient for users in non-English-speaking countries. People have to face the fact that English speakers are not the whole world. What's the big deal about them, anyway? Our ideal is to create an exclusively Chinese-language network. It will be a Net that has Chinese characteristics, one that is an information superhighway for the masses.⁵

The internet was defined by a famous American TV programme, called “*Good Morning Taxi!*” as a mean able to lead to new ways of thinking, to new ways of living. This is exactly the kind of thing that worried China, which soon understood that in order to maintain control over its population, a project to regulate the Net was required. Before the introduction of the Great Firewall of China project, on February 1996, Li Peng (李鹏, Lǐ Péng), a Chinese politician, stated:

⁴ Mozur, Paul (13 September 2015). “*Baidu and CloudFlare Boost Users Over China's Great Firewall*”. The New York Times. Retrieved 8 August 2019.

⁵ Barne, Geremie R.; Ye, Sang (6 January 1997). “*The Great Firewall of China*”. Wired. Retrieved 29 August 2019.

The State is in charge of overall planning, national standardization, graded control, and the development of all areas related to the Internet. Any direct connection with the Internet must be channelled via international ports established and maintained by the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication. No group or individual may establish or utilize any other means to gain Internet access. All organizations and individuals must obey the respective state laws and administrative regulations and carry out rigorously the system of protecting state secrets. Under no circumstances should the Internet be used to endanger national security or betray state secrets⁶.

The main concern of Chinese authorities was that on the Net people had the chance to look for every kind of content or subject, and some of the information could question the sovereignty of China. In order to avoid the emergence of this kind of situation, Chinese authorities started to block most of Western media and other websites from abroad. The government started to manage the way in which citizens used the Net, by creating a new system of surveillance. Anyone who wanted to have an Internet connection, had to go to the Police in order to fill the Police File Report Form and to provide an ID card. The form was then transferred to the "Computer Security and Supervision Office". After that, the person had to sign the "Net Access Responsibility Agreement", with the oath of not using Internet to threaten national security, to reveal state secrets or to look for obscene and pornographic materials. Finally, the person willing to use the Net had to register in an application where all his/her information were contained. Such information comprehend the place in which a person lives, the profession, phone numbers, office numbers, details on his/her computer equipment. Everything was registered. Bai Jinghong, a café manager in Beijing, stated:

⁶ Barme, Geremie R.; Ye, Sang (6 January 1997). "*The Great Firewall of China*". Wired. Retrieved 29 August 2019.

Absolute freedom is an impossibility. It would create anarchy. To censor harmful things doesn't just ensure that the Internet can develop in a healthy fashion; it will also ensure stability for China.

The thing that Chinese people had to accept and understand was that the authorities were always going to censure something. People had the chance to use the Net, but they had to withstand to the regulations and prohibitions decided by the government.

The Great Firewall of China Project not only has censored websites, but has also blocked foreign internet tools, such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and has required foreign companies to adapt to Chinese regulations.

The Great Firewall has been and still is a great project for the Internet regulation and to ensure the control of authorities over Chinese citizens.

1.1.4 The Grid-Style Social Management

Beginning from 2001, during the years of the leader Jiang Zemin (江泽民, Jiāng Zémín), the Grid-Style Social Management (社会网格化管理, shèhuì wǎnggé huà guǎnlǐ)⁷ was instituted in order to maintain public security and social order. In its first phase, the purpose of such a system was to permit an active communication between the different public security bureaus. Each local government was asked to divide the territory under its jurisdiction into segments which, in turn, were controlled by a designated person. The agents entrusted were supposed to collect information about the population size in that area, the social organizations, the housing and facilities and so on, and to submit such information to the authority on a regular basis⁸. From the point of view of

⁷ Mistreanu, Simina (3 April 2018). "Life Inside China's Social Credit Laboratory: The party's massive experiment in ranking and monitoring Chinese citizens has already started" (PDF). FOREIGN POLICY. Retrieved 7 September 2019.

⁸ Yongshun Cai, *Grid Management and Social Control in China*, Theasiadialogue.com, 27 April 2018. Retrieved 8 August 2019.

the authorities, the Grid-Style Social Management was an efficient tool in order to obtain information on the residential communities located in every district. Such system has been employed both on rural and urban areas. In the cities, the average number of households a grid-manager was responsible of went from 15 to 20. In rural areas, instead, the grid-management staff was mainly formed by village cadres. Issues concerning the residents' daily lives were reported in the townships, even including people's complaints about the local authorities. Thanks to such a system, the ability of the government to collect information about citizens and units was enhanced, but the continuous input of financial resources to remunerate the grid-management staff was becoming an issue. Another issue was represented by the fact that the information collected by the people employed by the authorities about the citizens and about the communities were not public, and so they were not released to residents, resulting in lack of social support. The communities started to look at this system as illegitimate, and social disputes began to arise. However, such issues may not result in the government ending the system, which it is still perceived by the authorities as an efficient component in order to maintain stability and control.

1.1.5 The Golden Shield Project

The Golden Shield Project (金盾工程, *jīndùn gōngchéng*), also named National Public Security Work Information Centre (全国公安工作信息化工程), is a project which include a security information system, a criminal information system, a supervisor information system, a traffic management information system⁹. The Golden Shield Project was started in 1998 after the China Democracy Party members had been banned and imprisoned because they were considered by the Communist Party a threat that was not easy to control. The project was completed only in

⁹ 金盾工程". [中国网--网上中国](#). 中国网 (27 February 2003). Retrieved 5 September 2019

2006, but on December 2002 an inaugural exhibition of the project was presented showing the purchasing of high-tech security products, such as video-monitoring, human face recognition and Internet security products. Since September 2003, according to the Xinhua News Agency, the 96% of the population information of China were recorded into the Golden Shield Project database by the Public Security Department of China¹⁰. A number of about 3000 police officers was hired in order to maintain and control the security system. One of their duties was to prevent netizens, which are defined as “citizens of the net”, from violating the system. In Cybercafés, for instance, every person has to show a Resident Identity Card and if a “violating action” happens inside a cybercafé, the owner has the right to call the police and to send the information about the violator to the officers. As a consequence to the creation of the Golden Shield Project, several web sites have been censored. The Golden Shield Project is a powerful tool for the public security system, in order to control and monitor the domestic internet.

1.1.6 The Great Cannon

At a later time after the creation of the “Great Firewall” Project, in 2015 China decided to establish a new, more powerful tool for Internet control, called “The Great Cannon”¹¹. With such new project, Chinese authorities were able to block advertising traffic and to control the flow of foreign web traffic as it flew to Chinese websites. The differences between the “Great Firewall” and the “Great Cannon” is that the latter is able to spy on anyone who tries to report content which have been hosted on a Chinese computer. This is a tool thought in order to enforce censorship and it represented an escalation in the work done in order to control information. Another important ability of such project is that, besides blocking internet

¹⁰ 金盾工程数据库包括 12 亿多中国人的信息. 博讯. (9 April 2006). Retrieved 5 September 2019

¹¹ Perlroth, Nicole (April 10, 2015). "China Is Said to Use Powerful New Weapon to Censor Internet". The New York Times. The New York Times Company. Retrieved August 18, 2019.

traffic, it is able to address anyone on any website page the government wants the users to see. Probably, the same people who worked at the “Great Firewall” project have also projected this more powerful tool. Western countries look at this system with hostility, because China is using it also to find dissidents in order to punish them, without their knowledge. If a person, for instance, make some research on the Net regarding foreign websites or censored content, the Great Cannon will intercept that person’s personal computer, infect his/her web communications and spy on him/her. The only way to try and prevent a surveillance attack by the authorities, is encrypt one’s own PC.

The Great Cannon Project represents the most powerful tool in the hands of Chinese authorities for censorship and Internet control.

1.2 What is the Social Credit System

The study object of this thesis is the Chinese Social Credit System (社会信用体系 *shèhuì xìnyòng tǐxì*). The Chinese Social Credit System is a rating system which is expected to be introduced in China by 2020 and that measures the social behaviour of citizens and companies, in order to help the government understand how creditworthy a particular individual is. In 2014 the founding document of the system was realised by the State Council stating that: “the scheme should allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step.”¹²

The system will record and collect several data on each citizen, creating a powerful tool for mass surveillance. Mass surveillance in China has significantly increase since the former President Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in 2012.¹³ Since then,

¹² Mistreanu, Simina (3 April 2018). *"Life Inside China's Social Credit Laboratory: The party's massive experiment in ranking and monitoring Chinese citizens has already started"* (PDF). *FOREIGN POLICY*.

¹³ *"Inside China's Dystopian Dreams: A.I., Shame and Lots of Cameras"*. Retrieved 8 Septmeber 2019

China has concentrated its energy on creating a high-tech authoritarian future, with the introduction of technologies such as facial-recognition and artificial intelligence to track 1.4 billion of individuals. In China, technology has brought control, with more than 200 million surveillance cameras around the country. In the city of Xiangyang (咸阳, Xiányáng), in the Shaanxi province (陕西省, Shǎnxī shěng), the police installed cameras for facial recognition and put up big, outdoor screens. On such screen the names, the government ID number and the pictures of lawbreakers are displayed. China's new surveillance methods are based on an old idea, which is the idea that only strong authorities can maintain control in a turbulent country.

In Shenzhen (深圳, Shēnzhèn), the traffic police have installed a system called "Electronic Police at Zebra Crossing" also known as "The Smart System to Collect Evidence of Jaywalking"¹⁴. This is a system created in order to discourage people from crossing the roads when the red traffic light is on. People who do that will be recorder and identified through the bid data analysis and the portraits of the jaywalkers will be displayed on a LED screen.

The establishment of the Chinese Social Credit System is seen by the authorities like a new way for the government to manage society and economy, depending on algorithmic governance. Credit records will include information on financial, industrial and commercial registration, taxes and social security payments, as well as traffic violations. Details on the inner workings of the system are vague, though it is clear that each citizen and Chinese organisation will be rated. According to a planning document published by the State Council last year, its objective is to improve "sincerity" in government affairs, commerce and social interactions. The higher the credit score or creditworthiness of an individual or enterprise,

¹⁴ Xiao, Sun. "'Electronic Police' is on guard at Shenzhen's crossings". CGTN. Retrieved 11 August 2019.

the greater chance they will have to expand their influence and attract more clients.

The Social Credit System in China not only will affect Chinese individuals, but also foreigners working in China and foreign companies operating there. In the future, if considered successful, Chinese Social Credit System may also become a model for other countries. As of 1 January 2018, all companies with a Chinese business licence, which is necessary in order to operate in the country, were required to have an 18-digit “unified social credit code”. Through this business ID number, the Chinese government keeps track of all businesses, reporting transgressions on its National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System. If companies want to continue doing business in China, they have no other way but to comply with it.

The principal aim of the Social Credit System is to create a centre of information about natural and legal persons that the state can use to monitor and assess. If necessary, through the use of incentives or punishment, the government can change the behaviour of citizens in order to keep the harmony which is required by the Party.

According to the “Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System”, issued by the State Council in 2014, the Social Credit System will focus on four areas: "honesty in government affairs" (政务诚信 zhèngwùchéngxìn), "commercial integrity" (商务诚信 shāngwùchéngxìn), "social integrity" (社会诚信 shèhuìchéngxìn) and "judicial credibility" (司法公信 sīfǎgōngxìn).¹⁵

¹⁵ *Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014-2020)*, (14 June 2014). Retrieved 6 September 2019

1.2.1 Creditworthiness in government Affairs

Honesty in government affairs is considered to be the key factor in the construction of the Chinese Social Credit System. The aim is to administrate the System in accordance with the law in every process of supervision, decision-making, implementation and service in order to protect individual privacy, information security and commercial secrets and in order to establish effective mechanism for information sharing. According to the “Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System”¹⁶, further expand the system for public announcement and hearings in major decision-making is an important goal to reach. The social supervision should be strengthened, and the government credibility should be increased, in order to give a trustworthy and creditworthy image of a fair and open government. All this can be done by implementing actions of commitment in handling affairs for the common people. Such government policy commitment, as well as every kind of lawfully signed agreements, should be performed and honoured. In accordance with the government, the Chinese Social Credit System aims to create a market of fair competition and uniform efficiency and the statistic department should be encouraged to make lawfully and truthfully calculated statistics. The System wants to raise the government efficiency and the level of services, and to ameliorate the education system, strengthening the study of law.

1.2.2 Commercial Integrity

Another important part in the establishment of the Chinese Social Credit System is the creditworthiness in commercial affairs. This is a basic requirement in order to lower commercial operating costs, upholding commercial relations and improving commercial environment. It is fundamental to every commercial entity to have a sustainable development

¹⁶ *Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014-2020)*, (14 June 2014). Retrieved September 6, 2019

and is a safeguard in order to carry out commercial and economic activities. The Chinese authorities will focus on enterprises selling food, medicine, daily consumer goods, agricultural and farm products and they will establish statistic systems in order to share information on the quality of products among different regions and departments. Such information will be taken through an analysis of the data collected by the credit system. One aspiration of the Chinese Social System is to strength the enforcement of law against monopoly and unfair competition and to intensify the investigation of illegal acts such as market distortion, false publicity, commercial fraud, commercial defamation, and commercial bribery. The authorities also aim to establish system of health inspection to guarantee the best quality of products. The credit system will operate in the field of finance, too. Financial services will be improved in order to preserve the security of consumers' personal information and to protect their interests. The ambition of the Chinese Social Credit system is, therefore, to promote creditworthy business and fair competition.

1.2.3 Social Integrity

The principle of social integrity is intended as social harmony, stability and lasting peace. The belief is that only when people treat each other in an amicable way and when they are sincere and honest with one another, good faith and harmonious interpersonal relationships can be created¹⁷. Thus, the authorities will seek to establish reliable centres for disaster relief, for eldercare, for charity and for social security. Moreover, they will try to combat every kind of donation fraud and untrustworthy conduct. They will also build centres to check the economic situation and the information of citizens and establish public aid, social housing and so on.

¹⁷ Botsman, Rachel (2017). *Who Can You Trust? How Technology Brought Us Together – and Why It Could Drive Us Apart*. London, UK: Portfolio Penguin.

1.2.4 Judicial Credibility

Judicial credibility is another important part in the establishment of a social credit system. Its principle aim is social fairness and justice. The courts should enhance their credibility by increasing the level of judicial trials, punishing violators, breaking false contracts and by leading a trend of honesty and trustworthiness. In order to have a trusting relationship with citizens, the court should hear the opinions of the public, safeguard the individual's right to know, right of participation, right to supervise judicial work and the right of expression.¹⁸ At the same time, the court should establish mechanisms for special inspections, strengthening investigation and supervision, hence preventing crimes such as abusing public officials, and should pursue responsibility.

1.3 Pilot projects

The Chinese Government is pushing for the creation of pilot projects, in order to understand how the population will react when the effective Chinese Social Credit System will be enacted.

The pilot projects can be divided into two types. The first one comprises the government-run local and sectoral pilots; the second one the commercial pilots, which allow private companies to test non-mandatory credit scoring schemes. These pilots are the proving grounds for the Social Credit System, because they are important in order to understand how the system may or may not progress.

The Chinese government gives priority to some areas that it considers in urgent need in establishing measures of trustworthiness of citizens and in punishing infractions; that is why the pilot projects will be or have been experimented firstly in such areas. The fields which are considered to be

¹⁸ *Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014-2020)*, (14 June 2014). Retrieved 6 September 2019

overriding are production, taxes, pricing, e-commerce, healthcare, education, and IPR (Intellectual Property Rights).

1.4 Local Government Pilots

The experiments have been conducted by the State Council on 43 municipalities and districts. In December 2017 several model cities were selected by the National Development and Reform Commission and People's Bank of China to implement the pilot projects in order to demonstrate the efficiency of the Chinese Social Credit System. Among them are Hangzhou (杭州, Hángzhōu), Nanjing (南京, Nánjīng), Xiamen (廈門, Xiàmén), Chengdu (成都, Chéngdū), Suzhou (苏州, Sūzhōu), Suqian (宿迁, Sùqiān), Huizhou (惠州, Huìzhōu), Wenzhou (温州, Wēn Zhōu), Weihai (威海, Wēihǎi), Weifang (潍坊, Wéifāng), Yiwu (义乌, Yìwū), and Rongcheng (荣成, Róngchéng).¹⁹

1.4.1 The first pilot project: Jiangsu Province

In 2010, in the Suining County (睢宁县, Suīníng Xiàn) of Jiangsu Province (江苏, Jiāngsū), the first pilot project of the Chinese Social Credit System was launched²⁰. This project assigned to every citizen 1000 points, which represented the start point of every resident. After the distribution of such points to everyone, the game started. Residents were asked to live their lived normally, but with the awareness that for every good action, such as giving money to charity organizations, help somebody, do volunteer work, they could gain points. Raising points meant having the chance to benefit from discounts or being treated in a better way on planes, trains or restaurants. On the other hand, if, during the day, a person violated some

¹⁹ "首批社会信用体系建设示范城市名单公布". www.ndrc.gov.cn. Retrieved September 6, 2019.

²⁰ Sontag, Daniel, "We, the Data: An Inside Look at China's Social Credit System"(July 12, 2018). Retrieved September 4, 2019.

rules, such as crossing the street without looking at the traffic light, leaving trash in the streets or refusing to pay back a debt, the point lowered. Such points could go down from the initial score, which was 1000, causing to the owner of that score a lot of disadvantages. The same pilot project was then taken by Rongcheng city (荣成, Róngchéng) in Shandong (山东, Shāndōng), which further expand it, introducing some new elements, making the Rongcheng's pilot project the most important one in China.

1.4.2 Rongcheng's pilot project

In Shandong (山东, Shāndōng), in the city of Rongcheng (荣成, Róngchéng) another pilot project has been enacted. Although it is still unclear how the social credit will be implemented, Rongcheng is one place where that future is visible. Rongcheng's pilot project seems to be the best example of how the system should work, according to officials and researchers.²¹ A score of 1000 points is assigned to each of Rongcheng's 740,000 adult residents and these points can decrease for each infraction.



Fig. 1: score system in Rongcheng's pilot project

²¹ Mistreanu, Simina (3 April 2018). "Life Inside China's Social Credit Laboratory: The party's massive experiment in ranking and monitoring Chinese citizens has already started" (PDF). FOREIGN POLICY.

Let's illustrate some examples: if a citizen gets a traffic ticket, he or she loses five points; city-level awards, such as making a heroic act, are compensated with thirty points; for a department-level award, five points are earned. Transgressions can also include smoking on trains, using expired tickets, violating road safety or failing to pay fines, as well as spreading false information or causing trouble on flights, according to statements released by China's National Development and Reform Commission in March 2018.²² Citizens with high credit scores can have access to better hotels, rental homes and even schools; while those with low credit scores can be temporarily or permanently banned from taking planes or trains. Ronghcheng's authority have stated that any action which alters the points of a citizen need to be testified by official documents, in order to reduce subjectivity and to limit the penalties principally to breaking laws.

In addition to the points, every citizen also can get a grade which goes from A+++ to D. If the grade is high, people are likely to receive preferential treatments, such as the possibility of renting a bike without having to pay a deposit, or a heating bonus discount every winter. Some violations, on the other hand, can hurt the score: for drunk driving, for instance, one's scores goes straight to a C. Not only individuals, but also companies are included in these pilot projects. If they pay taxes on time and they avoid any sort of fines, they can remain in good standing and this ensures, for example, to get better loan conditions.

People with very high scores can see their oversized pictures on the city hall. This was the case, for instance, of the 24-year-old police officer Bi Haoran who saved some students pushing them out of a car before it crashed. Another example is represented by the picture of a woman, Yuan Suoping who, after her husband's decease, took care of her mother-in-law

²² *China is banning people with bad 'social credit' from using planes and trains*, (16 March 2018) *The Telegraph*.

and after remarrying she took the ill woman to come and live with them. In Rongcheng that are several boards which explain how you can win or lose points; residents seem to be very excited about it and they feel like this project might help improve people's behaviour. Good evidence of this can be found on a research done in the city of Rongcheng demonstrating that 90 percent of Rongcheng's population has a A score²³.

Zhou Aini is a woman who lives in Rongcheng and who has the task of "information collector"²⁴. She is retired, but when her town started this new pilot project, her services were required. She has to control the lives of her three thousand neighbours. Every month she has to collect information about people who do good actions and individuals who commit any sort of crime; even though is a small crime, she has to report everything. During her interview, she shows a notebook containing all sorts of information about the people who lives there, like the good action of a man who took a drunk boy home, or the bad one of a farmer who shouted at his employee. She likes her work. During the morning, afternoons and evenings, she goes around every corner of her small town and writes down if someone has left the trash in hallways, has crossed the street when the red lights were on and so on. Thereafter, she reports all these information to a secretary working in an office, and she has the task to rate every actions with a maximum score of 1000 points and the results go public. Zhou Aini talks about a cleaner from her village, called Wang Zhaosheng, who found a wallet and he immediately brought it to the Community Committee. The owner of such wallet, in order to thank him, made a silk banner. The silk banner was sent to the Community Committee too, to demonstrate the good act of Mr. Wang, to show his virtues and nobility and in order to give

²³ Mistreanu, Simina (3 April 2018). *"Life Inside China's Social Credit Laboratory: The party's massive experiment in ranking and monitoring Chinese citizens has already started"* (PDF). FOREIGN POLICY.

²⁴ *"China's 'Social Credit System' Has Caused More Than Just Public Shaming"*. HBO VIDEO, 12 December 2018.

him the rating he deserved. On top of that, he got a trophy, his scores were raised and he had the chance to benefit from discounts.

Wang Fengbo, Director of the Social Credit System in Rongcheng, declares that now, in the communities, people have good relationships with one another, they behave in a proper way and there are no fights²⁵. She said that after the introduction of the idea of the Chinese Social Credit System, life is good and there is no reason at all to fight. She believes that such system does not only work for the points which are assigned, but also because individuals want to save their faces. The Director, during an interview, describes the situation of a man who liked to drink alcohol. This addiction brought him to hurt his wife, repeatedly. One day, he cracked her head, causing her to go to the hospital. She finally reported everything. According to the rules of the system, his points were deducted. The man personally went to the Director complaining she should not have put those information on his credit score making those scores public, because in this way his reputation was ruined. The Director continued the interview explaining how important losing face is for Chinese people. Everything rounds around it and they would do anything to have a good reputation. This is why the Director is so proud about this new system; people now are incentivised in doing good actions because everything will be public and everyone will know what kind of behaviour a person has.

The system created in Rongcheng is not only based on losing face. If the scores of a person goes down, there are several consequences. A resident of the village of Dong Huo Tang Zhai, Zhang Yijie, during an interview for HBO ²⁶declared that even if you score is average, you will not be allowed to take planes or demand money for loans. Zhang Yijie co-signed a loan

²⁵ *"China's "Social Credit System" Has Caused More Than Just Public Shaming"*. HBO VIDEO, 12 December 2018.

²⁶ ²⁶ *"China's "Social Credit System" Has Caused More Than Just Public Shaming"*. HBO VIDEO, 12 December 2018.

with a friend who later skipped out; Zhang paid his share, but the local court did not care and took away part of his points. On a summer day after that episode, Zhang went to the train station because wanted to go on holiday in the city where his parents live. When he asked for a first-class ticket, the employer told him his score was too low. He then asked for a regular ticket; he was denied even that one. He was obliged to take the bus, and to travel for 10 hours, while with the train he would have travelled for three hours. Surveys found out that more than 4 million people have been banned from taking trains and more than 11 million from taking flights. To raise his score, Zhang regularly goes to a Community Office to donate money the government says will go to charity. Zhang does not know if he can trust the government and the question that he asks himself is: "How would I know where the money is going?". In order to raise his scores, he have already donated blood, money and engaged in volunteer work. Zhang, however, remains faithful about this system, and he truly believes that only with the application of the credit scores will be possible to discipline the ones who cannot discipline themselves. Finally, now Zhang has gained his scores back and can buy tickets and ask for loans.

Displays all over the city show images of the most honourable people in Rongcheng, holding trophies. Near by the displays are posters showing how a person can gain or lose points. Every evening a television program shows images taken by the surveillance camera which captured people committing violations or doing good actions.



Fig 2: the picture shows the billboard with the most honourable people in Rongcheng and the instruction of how a person can gain or lose points.

The reason why Rongcheng has the most successful results among all the pilot projects undertaken by the Chinese authorities, is that citizens and residents truly believe in it and they have embraced this project. Researchers think that the reason why this happened is because the system is seen as “fair”, inasmuch it punishes violators only for breaking the law and, on the other hand, it honours local “heroes” with generous rewards. As a result, neighbourhoods, hospitals and schools are running their own versions of the social credit system by establishing a management team, even though the government has not asked them to do it.

This is an attempt to promote trustworthiness in the Chinese society and economy. The thing about the Social Credit System is that there is not a single system, not yet. Every place has its own rules.

1.4.3 Honest Shanghai

One of the first pilots was enacted by the Shanghai Municipal Government on November 2016, and it is still working. A mobile-phone application called

“Honest Shanghai” (诚信上海 chéngxìnshànghǎi)²⁷ was released during the “honesty week”, which was an event of an entire week where noble behaviour was celebrated. Through this application, users can insert their ID number and wait for a maximum of 24 hours to receive a score based on government data collection on them. The rating score can be either “very good”, “good” or “bad”.

Shao Zhiqing, deputy director of Shanghai's Commission of Economy and Informatization, which oversees the “Honest Shanghai” app said:

We want to make Shanghai a global city of excellence. Through this app, we hope our residents learn they'll be rewarded if they're honest. That will lead to a positive energy in society. The government is not omnipotent. In order to give a well-rounded rating for each resident, we'll need to tap the market for data. We'll look to industry associations, private companies, and social media.²⁸

Nevertheless, not everyone seems to look at the “Honest Shanghai” app in the same manner as deputy director Shao Zhiqing does. Zhu Dake, a Humanities professor at Tongji University in Shanghai, declared:

The government asks people to be honest, but it excludes itself from such scrutiny. The government should be watched as well, but who's watching them? Should we develop another app that allows the people to monitor them? If we did, they'd accuse us of breaking the law. You're wrong if I say so, you have bad credit if I say so. Where will this lead? They could easily expand the criteria and start judging people on moral or ideological grounds. They're using modern technology to create a vision of Orwell's *1984*.²⁹

²⁷ "What's Your 'Public Credit Score'? The Shanghai Government Can Tell You". NPR.org. Retrieved 1 September 2019.

²⁸"What's Your 'Public Credit Score'? The Shanghai Government Can Tell You". NPR.org. Retrieved 1 September 2019.

²⁹ "What's Your 'Public Credit Score'? The Shanghai Government Can Tell You". NPR.org. Retrieved 1 September 2019.



Good credit and social scores = More government services
 Bad scores = Isolation

Fig.3: Honest Shanghai App. Source: [Honest Shanghai app](#)

Of course, since it is still an experiment, the participation is not mandatory yet, which means that for the moment the government gives rewards to people with good ratings, without punishing those with bad scores. This situation is likely to change when the effective Social Credit System will be enacted, and the participation of every citizen will be mandatory.

1.4.4 Pilot projects in the provinces of Zhejiang and Henan

Other pilots have the aim of punishing people put on blacklist and of affecting their social and professional life. The provinces of Zhejiang and Henan, for instance, are collaborating with telecommunication companies in order to identify people who refuse to comply with a court order to pay money back. Thus, the court provides the telecommunications services with the name of these people while the telecommunication service has the duty of changing the dial tone of such blacklisted individual's phones in order to inform anybody who tries to call them that he or she has refused to comply with a court order, urging the caller to persuade this person to

honour the court order. The first experiments of these ringtones were tested in June of 2017.

1.5 Commercial Pilots

Apart from these local and sectoral pilots, there are also non-mandatory commercial pilots. Some private Chinese organizations have been authorized from the State to test out some experiments on social credit. The participation of citizens and organizations is non-mandatory. As happens with local government pilots, people with high scores are rewarded, but the algorithm used to assign the scores remains unknown. The most famous of such commercial pilots is the so called “Sesame Credit”, which gives users scores between 350 and 950 based on online criteria, such as purchasing of goods, timely bill payment, social connections and the behaviour of individuals on social networks. This kind of control is a powerful tool for totalitarian surveillance.

The Chinese authorities are watching these pilots very carefully. However, Chinese authorities have sent ambiguous messages about the future of these commercial pilot projects, because all the companies involved failed to protect users’ privacy, so their present status and their future value remains unclear.

1.5.1 Zhima Credit

The Zhima Credit (芝麻信用, *Zhīma Xìnyòng*), also known as the Sesame Credit, is a system developed by Ant Financial Services Group within the Alibaba corporate empire. It is a credit scoring and loyalty program which uses data collected from Alibaba’s database to compile its score. Such data include transaction histories and online shopping, phone payments online and so on. The Zhima Credit represents the first credit agency in China which can collect people’s data online and offline and can generate individual scores for consumers and small business owners. Thanks to this

system, companies, merchants and lenders can make a sort of credit and social analysis of their consumers and, through an attentive scrutiny of their data collection, can estimate the consumers' creditworthiness. Progressively, companies and merchants can give access to home loans, car loans and mobile-phone service contracts only to those consumers which are considered to be trustworthy. Chief Data Scientist of Sesame Credit, Yu Wujie, stated:

Sesame Credit is focused on those who may have little credit history at traditional credit agencies; they may have never obtained bank loans or applied for credit cards. However, they might be active Internet users who shop online a lot, e-pay their utility bills on time, have a stable residential status and have been using their mobile phone numbers for a long time. We will take these and other factors into consideration when assessing consumers' creditworthiness.³⁰

Eric Jing, Ant Financials' Chief Operating Officer, continued:

By leveraging the big data, we have and the state-of-art technology we deploy, we believe the debut of Sesame Credit will not only enable credit providers to make holistic and accurate decisions but will also empower merchants to provide more credit-related services. This will make their everyday life easier and help spur the development of a healthy economic and social environment.³¹

The Sesame Credit system, thanks to its connection with Alibaba Group, is able to collect data from more than 300 million registered users and 37 million businesses that make their economic transaction through Alibaba Marketplace, and through mobile-phone app of T-mall Mobile and Taobao Mobile. Moreover, one of Ant Financial's subsidiaries is Alipay, China's

³⁰ *Ant Financial Unveils China's First Credit-Scoring System Using Online Data* (28 January 2015), Alibaba Group. Retrieved 5 September 2019

³¹ *"Ant Financial Unveils China's First Credit-Scoring System Using Online Data"* (28 January 2015), Alibaba Group. Retrieved 5 September 2019

largest online payment provider. Since Ant Financial, together with Alibaba, is the basis of the Zhima Credit, payment history and data collection can also be taken from Alipay. Sesame Credit is also working with financial institution, public agencies and so on, in order to collect the biggest possible number of data and information.

In order to preserve the consumer's privacy, Zhima Credit officials underline that data collection can only occur with the consent of the individual subject. All data is segregated, and the access to specific data scores is allowed only with the authorization of the subject involved. Sesame Credit will not divulge exactly how it calculates its credit scores, explaining that it is a "complex algorithm", but such scores can range from a minimum of 350 to a maximum of 950. They are calculated on five different factors, each with a different weight in terms of importance. The factors involved are:

- Credit History: this can be useful to make a credit analysis of an individual. The credit history shows past payments, as well as debts, account payables, cash inflows and outflows.
- Behaviour and Preferences: this category reveals a user's preferences of products, basing on his/her online purchasing of goods; it also shows what kind of web sites have been visited from that particular individual.
- Fulfilment Capacity: through Alibaba account balances, it shows the capability of an individual to fulfil his/her contract obligations.
- Personal Characteristics: looking at the personal characteristics, it is possible to see where a particular person lives, what his/her mobile phone number is, the length of time of residence and so on.
- Interpersonal Relationships: through the interpersonal relationship it is possible to check the user's friends as well as the interactions between the individual and his/her friends.

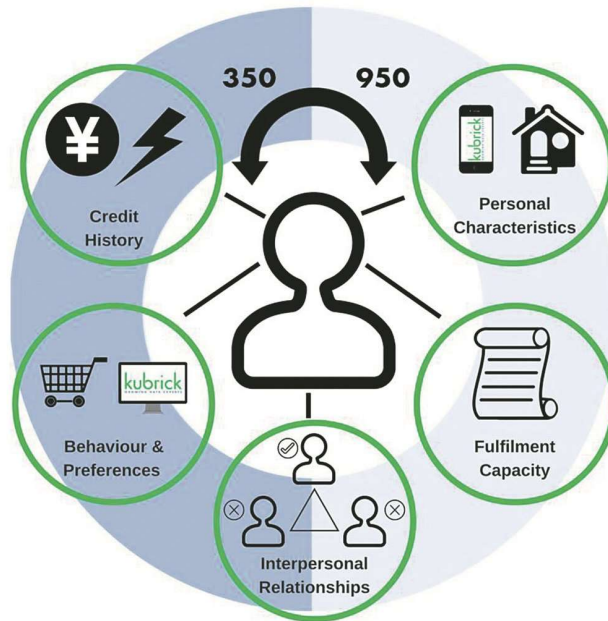


Fig.4: picture showing the Zima Credit score basing on the five factors explained above.

Li Yingyun, Sesame Credit’s technology director, in February 2018 reported to Chinese magazine “Caixin”:

Someone who plays video games for 10 hours a day, for example, would be considered an idle person, and someone who frequently buys diapers would be considered as probably a parent, who on balance is more likely to have a sense of responsibility.

The services provided by the Sesame Credit system are various and easy to apply in daily life scenarios. Suppose a landlord wants to assume a tenant, he can look for tenants with high credit scores and choose among them. The same situation can happen in any company looking for employees. The corporation, in order to make better hiring decisions, can look through the data and select the best applicant. Also, an individual has the chance to benefit from such system, because if his/her score is high, and so it is the level of creditworthiness, he/she can rent a car without paying a deposit. Chinese hotels are also promoting this system by allowing people with good rating scores to book a room and stay in the hotel without paying in advance. Sesame Credit, in addition, is collaborating with a dating application for mobile phones, in order to let

people look through their potential dates' credit ratings; in this way, a person can be quite sure not to meet someone who is dishonest or deceitful.

A 21 years old girl from Shanghai, good students and model citizen has a score on Sesame Credit of 752. Thanks to her score, she can rent bikes without leaving a deposit and her score also helps in raising her friends score. During an interview with the NBC³² she declared that such mechanism pushes people to become a better citizen, to be trustworthy, especially from the Chinese market point of view.

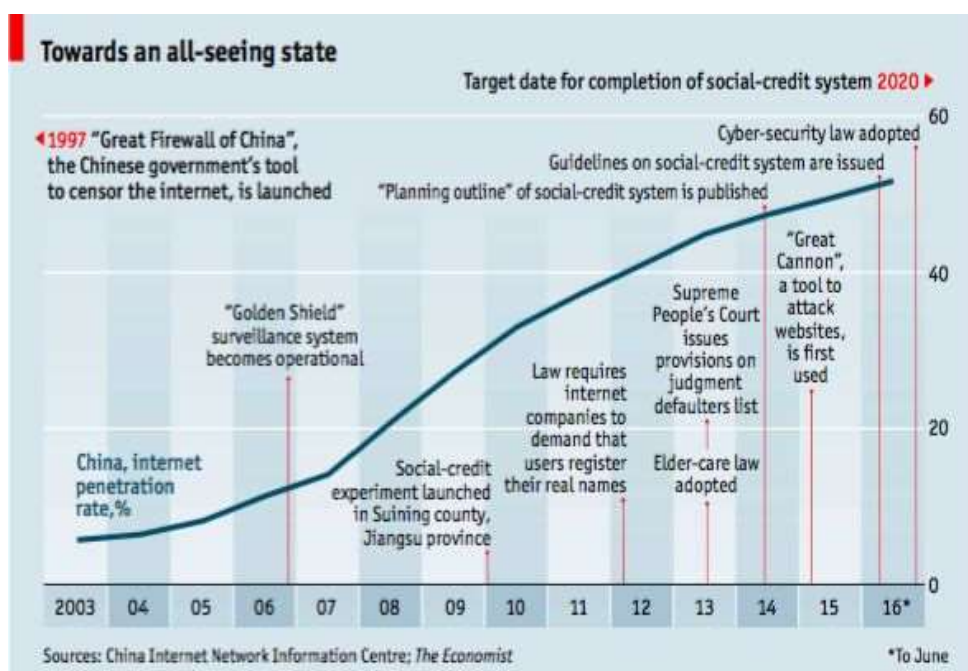


Fig. 5: The different steps which will bring to the creation of the Social Credit System by 2020.

1.6 The Social Credit System in other countries

China is not the only country to have experimented a social credit system in order to maintain control over its population. Several other countries

³² "A Look Inside China's Social Credit System" | NBC News Now, Video, 5 June 2019

have walked in the same direction. Among them there are Germany³³, United Kingdom³⁴, United States³⁵, Venezuela³⁶ and Chile.

1.6.1 Germany

Regardless of what we may think, western countries are not so far from a system like the social credit one. In Germany, for instance, a universal credit rating system called *Schufa* was developed. *Schufa* is a private company which assess the trustworthiness and the creditworthiness of about three-quarters of the entire German population and more than 5 million companies in the country. Similarly as what happens in China with the pilot projects, German people who want to rent a house, or who demand a loan are requested to verify their *Schufa* rating score and only if the score is high enough, they can proceed. There are some factors which can raise or lower your score independently of how you behave in daily life. For instance, the “geo-scoring” is a factor which raise a person score if that person lives in a high-rent neighbourhood and lower it if he/she lives in a low-rent one. Additionally, if the neighbourhood is habited by people with bad credit rating, the scores of the other people who live there will automatically decrease.

Everybody is encouraged to rate other people in websites like Amazon, Airbnb, eBay. German health insurers offer premium to people who share their data from fitness-tracking applications. To an increasing number of consumers some services are denied if they do not present some kind of rating.

³³ "Warning: Germany edges toward Chinese-style rating of citizens". Handelsblatt Global Edition. 17 February 2018. Retrieved 8 September 2019.

³⁴ Williams, Zoe (12 July 2018). "Algorithms are taking over – and woe betide anyone they class as a 'deadbeat'". the Guardian.

³⁵ "America Isn't Far Off From China's 'Social Credit Score'". Observer.com. 19 February 2018.

³⁶ "Chinese telecom giant 'helped Venezuela develop social credit system'. ABC News. 16 November 2018. Retrieved 22 August 2019.

The director of the Harding Centre for Risk Literacy at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin and advisor of the German Ministry of justice, Gerg Gigerenzer, declared:

We live in a world where judgment is being replaced by numbers, by scores that calculate the value of a human being, with the help of algorithms. If you don't adhere to social conventions, if you search for the wrong website, if you buy too many video games, if you cross the road on a red light or even if you have friends with a low score, then your own score will fall. Should your score fall too much, your children won't be able to go to the better schools and many other limitations will apply.³⁷

Mr. Gigerenzer attack this system stating that it would create self-censorship even within families. However, he believes German people will encourage the establishment of such a system because it will help citizens in verifying the trustworthiness of people. Anyway, Mr. Gigerenzer also declared that he does believe that the technology we have nowadays is not up to the job yet.

A lot of critics have emerged in Germany regarding the lack of transparency behind the algorithm which calculate the score of every individual. Speaking of this, Mr. Gigerenzer concludes its interview:

At the moment, we are investing billions in digital technologies, when we should be investing just as much in digital education so that humans are aware what algorithms really can, and cannot, do. We cannot just stand by as they are used to change our minds and our societies.³⁸

³⁷ *"Warning: Germany edges toward Chinese-style rating of citizens"*. Handelsblatt Global Edition. 17 February 2018. Retrieved 8 September 2019.

³⁸ *"Warning: Germany edges toward Chinese-style rating of citizens"*. Handelsblatt Global Edition. 17 February 2018. Retrieved 8 September 2019.

1.6.2 United Kingdom

Public debate in the United Kingdom on “datafication” has been overwhelmingly concerned with individual privacy and the protection of personal data. Similarly to the Chinese Social Credit System, every member of the society is ranked and rated through a series of algorithms. Such ranking decide which kind of people can get access to, for instance, job applications, advertisements for housing and products and so on. They decide whether a particular individual is a reliable employee, a good tenant or a desirable customer³⁹. Several platforms have been created in order to score citizen on a ranking system. INCENTCO, for instance, is a platform through which tenants can get rewards and points if they act in a desirable way, for example paying rent on time, and if they align with landlords’ interests. Rewards include new appliances, smart home technologies and general home upgrades.

The power of algorithms in the United Kingdom is also growing in public sectors. Government and local authorities, for instance, are using digital tools to verify which families deserve support. Authorities also uses data to decide who can get access to basic public services and to establish who can get citizenship. The problem is that seemingly innocuous data on behaviours or locations or consumption used to estimate a person’s creditworthiness can also divide society on the basis of race, gender and class and, thus, create inequalities among people.

1.6.3 United States

America is another country influenced by the credit score system fever. Researchers declare that American people don’t realize how much of their everyday life is being analysed and tracked⁴⁰. In the USA the main goal of data collection companies is selling things to costumers, and so

³⁹ "What's your score?". neweconomics.org. Retrieved 6 September 2019.

⁴⁰ "America Isn't Far Off From China's 'Social Credit Score'". Observer.com. 19 February 2018.

specific advertisement will appear on people's phone or computers, depending on the research they have done on the internet. However, this is not the only data which are collected. Every smartphone has a GPS function, so every person is tracked anywhere he/she goes. The credit bureaus keep data on every information concerning credit and payments, and then sell such information to lenders who use it to determine the reliability of an individual in paying taxes, rents and so on. The latest changes in tax reforms are financing even more companies such as Amazon, Google and Facebook in order to let them become even larger corporations. In this way, these companies will continue to possess more and more people's data without making public what kind of information they are collecting and how they are going to use it. The financial aspect is the most tangible way people can be impacted by this kind of data collection. In an unregulated invasion into people's privacy, the giants of the digital system, such as Google, You Tube, Amazon, Facebook, are tracking everything people say, research, the places in which they go, what they buy⁴¹. The New York State Department of Financial Services announced that life insurance companies will give premiums to people, basing on what they post on their social networks, such as Facebook or Instagram.

1.6.4. Venezuela

The Chinese ZTE Corporation (中兴通信股份有限公司), a giant in the telecommunication services in China, is assisting Venezuela in the creation of a new smart card in order to start a program similar to the Chinese Social Credit System⁴². Such card is known as the "fatherland card" and its scope is to collect a series of information and data about the cardholders. From the Government's point of view, this card will help in order to provide better

⁴¹ "China's social credit system coming towards America". Weekly Blitz. 1 June 2019.

⁴² "Chinese telecom giant 'helped Venezuela develop social credit system'". ABC News. 16 November 2018. Retrieved 22 August 2019.

services to citizens. The database stores information such as medical history of a person, presence on social media, if the person is a member of a political party and if he/she has voted during political elections.

Many people in Venezuela are worried about this kind of control which will inevitably strengthen the social supervision and that will monitor aspects of people's daily lives. The former President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, stated that the aim of this card was to collect data in order to provide identification credentials for the millions of people in Venezuela who does not have basic documentation. Hector Navarro, one of the founders of the ruling Venezuelan Socialist Party, and a former advisor under Hugo Chavez, says that "Venezuelans with the cards now have more rights than those without⁴³".

⁴³ *"China-style social credit system comes to Venezuela"* Taiwan News. Retrieved 22 August 2019.

HOW THE SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM IS PERCEIVED IN CHINA AND IN THE REST OF THE WORLD

2.1 Perception of the Social Credit System in China

In the first chapter an analysis of the Chinese Social Credit System has been done revealing some features, linked to the control and to the mass surveillance, which can be controversial. Several researchers and professors have expressed opinions about this project, creating debates and showing different points of view. In order to understand how the Chinese population perceived such system, in July 2018 political scientist Prof. Dr. Genia Kostka conducted a study at the Institute for Chinese Study in Berlin⁴⁴. More than 2,200 Chinese citizens took part in the survey. Such survey showed that the 80% of participants already engage in a volunteer commercial social credit system and 7% take part of pilot projects requested by the local government. According to the study, Chinese citizens living in an urban area can benefit a lot from good ratings from commercial social credit system. More than the 40% of the surveyed people stated that, thanks to such credit system, they did not have to pay deposits in hotels, in renting a car or in any other service for which a deposit is often demanded. Moreover, high rated citizens can benefit from priority check-in treatment and better banking services. Focusing on the survey, it was evident that individuals living in urban areas were more inclined to accept the social credit system compared to those living in a rural one. As a matter of fact, in urban centres the percentage of approval is 82%, while in rural areas only 68%. The results of the survey are pretty clear: they

⁴⁴ "Study: More than two thirds of Chinese take a positive view of social credit systems in their country". Freie Universität Berlin. 23 July 2018.

show that the Chinese population look at the Social Credit System more as a tool capable of improving the quality of life and able to regulate institutions ,such as the banking sector and the legal system, than as an instrument of mass surveillance. Genia Kotska, the Professor who made the survey, declared:

In a country where consumers must be concerned about toxic baby milk or contaminated strawberries or where internet fraudsters harass hundreds of thousands of people, the social credit system is perceived as a platform for reliable information. The criticism of the collection of personal data has thus receded into the background in China⁴⁵.

The Social Credit System already impacts the way Chinese citizens act and the way they behave. Results show that 18% of the people who participate at the university survey have changed their posting behaviour on social networks in order not to lower their score, and have erased some social network's friends, because they would have had a negative influence on their own assessment. The 72% also stated that they were influenced by the commercial social credit system in purchasing what the companies showed as a good offer.

⁴⁵ *"Study: More than two thirds of Chinese take a positive view of social credit systems in their country"*. Freie Universität Berlin. 23 July 2018. Retrieved 5 Septmeber 2019

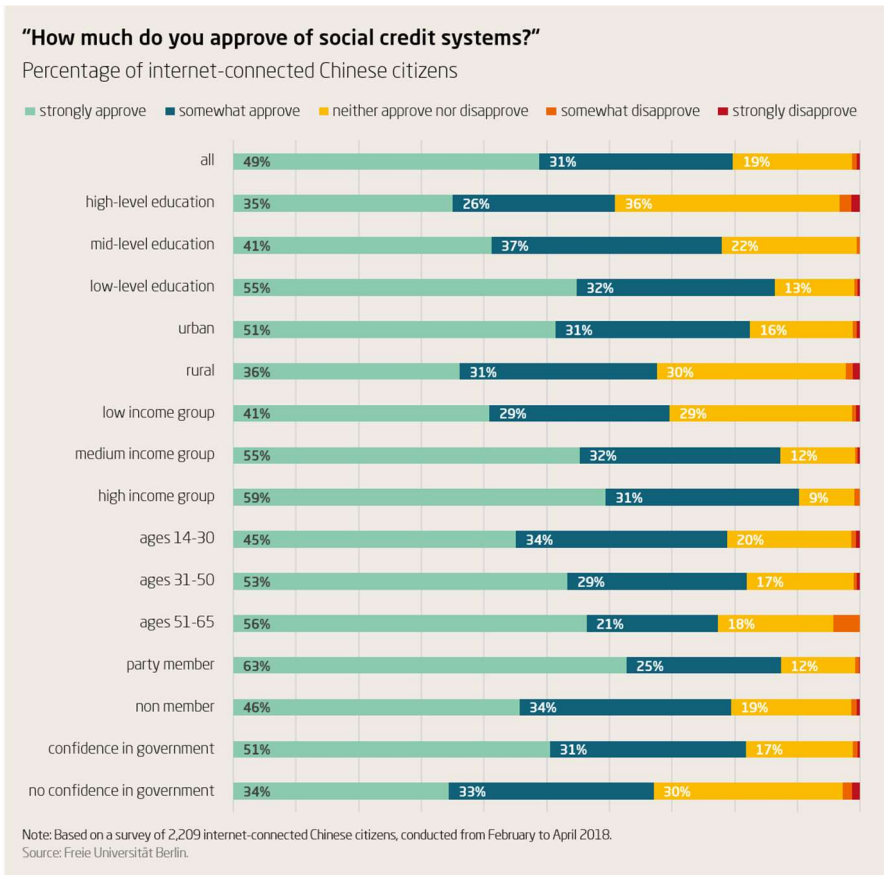


Fig 6: Results and percentage of the survey conducted by Prof. Genia Kotska on 2,209 Chinese citizens.

Concerning the topic of the Chinese Social Credit System, Asia Society, a global non-profit organization that focuses on educating the world about Asia, interviewed four different people who work in the communication sector and who work or have worked in China, asking them what their perception of the Social Credit System was.

2.1.1 The Social Credit System explained by Kaiser Kuo

Kaiser Kuo, co-founder of the China-Focused Sinica Podcast and former Director of International Communication at Baidu, in an interview released at Asia Society explained his vision of the Chinese Social Credit System⁴⁶. From his point of view, a system in which every individual is rated in order to understand how creditworthy he/she is, is an essential improvement in

⁴⁶ *Social Credit System part-I*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 9 September 2019.

Chinese society since there is not the presence of rating systems such as Equifax or FICO⁴⁷, and lenders in China would like to have some guarantees of the creditworthiness of people. The “social” part in this method is represented by the scores that people can collect through social media behaviour. Mr. Kuo does not believe that the individual’s behaviour on social media is reliable to such an extent that it can judge a person’s creditworthiness, but he thinks this could be a start, adding that he would not lend money to people who spend most of their time on social networks, either. Mr. Kuo believes that the majority part of Western countries is too worried and focused on the surveillance part, on the millions of cameras installed, on the facial recognition and on the artificial intelligence. From his point of view, Western societies are exaggerating the problem and are not considering the system and the project in a broader sense. He states that the surveillance part is certainly a worrying element, but it’s not the main focus of the Chinese Social Credit System. The technology development which is occurring in China in these years is seen as a great innovation and has demonstrated that China can be innovative, it can create something that nobody else has created yet. According to Mr. Kuo, Western countries cannot believe that China, which used to be the be the country of the derivate products, where everything was copied by other nations, managed to create this enormous system and, thus, anxiety has occurred. Mr. Kuo believes that the tensions that exist nowadays between China and other nations are mostly concerned with technology, especially with the United States. The tensions are about Chinese industrial policy, about China becoming an important leader in future technologies, thanks to advanced robotics, self-driving cars and electric vehicles. The United States perceive China as a sort of rival, and this can be confirmed by the media environment the US are creating, which exaggerates negative stories and aspects of China and shows its abuse of technology. Mr. Kuo thinks that people should understand what is motivating the focus on such things and

⁴⁷ Equifax and FICO are credit rating systems present in the United States.

try to look at the Social Credit System as something different from a merely surveillance system. The Social Credit System grows only in part out of a desire for social control, but the most important aspect is the creation of an efficient lending system. In conclusion, Mr. Kuo underlines how Western countries make a mistake in calling the Social Credit System a “Digital Dictatorship”⁴⁸, because Chinese authorities do want to convince people to act with a good behaviour or into what they define “good behaviour”, but it is not a techno-authoritarian State, which wants to disrupt anybody’s privacy.

2.1.2 Manya Koetse

Editor-in-Chief of *What’s on Weibo*, Manya Koetse, also shared her point of view about the Chinese Social Credit System⁴⁹. She explains that what China is creating is not a system, but an idea implemented by the government in order to govern people, organizations, and institutions, with the aim of being more creditworthy. Those which demonstrate not to be trustworthy and reliable will be punished. What the government wants to put in people’s minds, Miss Koetse believes, is the idea that this system is helpful both for the government and for the individuals, who can understand who to trust and who not to trust and, thus, is something which has to be built together. Not just authorities, not just individuals, but people and government together, starting from the idea that everybody will benefit from this new system. Manya Koetse sees an enormous difference of opinions between western people and Chinese ones. Looking at western journals and articles, the Chinese Social Credit System is described as a big threat. She declared that it is not rare to see images on western media which portrait an evil man looking at people carrying number on their deck (Fig.

⁴⁸ *Social Credit System part-I*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 9 September 2019.

⁴⁹ *Social Credit System part-II*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 8 September 2019.

4), while in China the same system is seen as a positive thing, as something that was missing and that can help in building trust together.



Fig. 7: How western media perceive the Chinese Social Credit System

Miss Koetse explains that from her point of view, the biggest misconception of Western media is that they are not so informed about it and they mix the Commercial Credit Score Systems, such as The Zhima Credit or Sesame Credit, with the effective Social Credit System implemented by the government. Rongcheng's pilot project, for instance, is a good example of what the social credit system will be. Government, there, is not just punishing people, but also encouraging them to act in a good way, with a good behaviour. She suggests a new name for the Social Credit System, which is the "Society Trust System". In this way the focus would be on society, and people who do not respect it would be punished and put in the "lose trust list". People on such lists would have so many limitations that they would feel almost obliged to respect the rules. Even though there is not a "lose trust list" and the name of the new system is not "Society Trust System", all this is already happening. Individuals who do not respect the rules of society suffer limitations, do not have premiums or bonuses and they are actually put on blacklists and only if they deal with their debts and solve the situation, they can go off the list.

Manya Koetse, during her interview, also gives her opinion regarding the Commercial Social Credit Systems, such as Sesame Credit. She affirms

that her Chinese friends are actually very excited about this commercial project because, having high scores, they can benefit from a lot of discounts and preferential treatments. From her point of view, the Sesame Credit is a very efficient system because she thinks that in the sharing economy people can abuse the system, while in the commercial credit one, where everything is registered, vandalizing the society and abuse the system becomes impossible. As a consequence, she believes that this kind of projects are enforcing the sharing economy. She declared that the responses of Chinese netizens for the commercial credit system and for the social one are all very positive, because contrary to what the west media see, Chinese population seems to see only the positive effect of this system. She concluded her interview declaring that in China, individuals are very much aware of the differences existing between the commercial credit systems and the social credit system and that Western countries should be more informed on the disparities between the two.

2.1.3 Rogier Creemers

Rogier Creemers, the third person interviewed by Asia Society on the topic of the Chinese Social Credit System, is a researcher in the law and governance of China at Leiden University, with degrees on Sinology and International Relations and a PhD in Law⁵⁰. He defines the Chinese Social Credit System as a mechanism created by the government in order to generate trust in society. The idea firstly originated at the beginning of the century, when China wanted to become a market economy. Issues, however, started to come out because people were not honest in respecting rules and there was not a way to stop them from violating the law. China really needed a system in order to create trust for the market to work efficiently. The Chinese name of the Social Credit System contains the word 信用 which, as Mr. Creemers underlines, does not only mean

⁵⁰ *Social Credit System part-III*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 8 September 2019.

“credit” but also, and in this case above all, “trustworthiness”. The second element which was missing in China and that was fundamental in the creation of a market economy, was the banking system. China needed to invest in the banking system, in order to create an efficient lending system which could enhance the Chinese economy. Nowadays, there is the idea that China is living a moral crisis which needs to be healed. The focus of the Social Credit System, hence, is to create sincerity in society and not just in the market economy. Individual and government, as well as morality and governance, have to walk by one other in a trustworthy relationship. In order to reach this objective, in 2012 the former President Xi Jinping began a campaign against corruption called “The Anti-Corruption Campaign”, aim to erase income inequalities and to protect the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party⁵¹. Concerning such campaign, Minxin Pei, Professor of Government and Director of the Keck Centre for International and Strategic Studies, declared:

In the future, if China wants to continue to perform well economically, fighting corruption is an absolute necessity. [...] the campaign deals with corruption only at one level, and in a particular aspect, that is official corruption, involving government officials, government contracts, land, and so forth. There are many other aspects of corruption. [...] To get rid of corruption in an economy, you really have to strengthen the rule of law⁵².

Minxin Pei suggested to strength the rule of law, and this is what the Chinese authorities are willing to do with the introduction of the Chinese Social Credit System.

Mr Creemers continues his interview underlying that the Chinese Social Credit System operates on different layers, which are not strictly connected to one another. On a national level, the government has several blacklists

⁵¹ "Can Xi Jinping's Anti-Corruption Campaign Succeed?". ChinaPowerCSIS. 13 June 2016.

Retrieved 7 September 2019

⁵² ibidem

containing the names of people who have failed to comply with a court order. The blacklisted people can be “punished” with different kind of sanction and various disadvantages. They can’t take planes, can’t stay in good hotels, they can’t become officers or have important carriers. These government-run systems, though, are pretty basic, because a person is either on a list or not, they are only based on official data and the decision to put someone on blacklists is not working with an automated system, but it is manual. On a local level, cities are experimenting with scoring systems and, finally, there are private credit scores which are the most widely used in China. The private, commercial credit score systems are the most sophisticated and their function is to rate individuals on the basis of their movements. The more a person does on the platform, the more he/she gets positive scores. Since they are not mandatory systems, they are just created with the intent of rewarding people; thus, if someone does a bad action, he/she will not be punished for it. Even though such systems are not punitive, people are encouraged to do good actions anyway, because they are projected on the rewards they will get. Between the private systems and the government-run ones, there is very limited exchange. Thus, they are not so connected with one another. Commercial credit systems also have blacklists of people who are not considered to be trustworthy, but these lists are public and are very different from the ones the government owns. Commercial blacklists do not allow a blacklisted individual to buy luxury goods, for instance, on platform such as Tmall Mobile; government blacklists, on the other hand, employ “disproportional sanctions”⁵³, because if you fail to comply with the rules or with the law, you have disadvantages on every aspect of daily life. Chinese system had to introduce these so-called disproportional functions because the proportional ones, which had been tried out in the past, have not been effective.

⁵³ *Social Credit System part-III*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 8 September 2019.

Mr. Creemers states that the reason why the Chinese Social Credit System is seen as a negative and scaring project only in the West and not in China, is because Chinese population is not worried about being controlled. The Chinese authorities have tried for a long time to put in people's minds the idea that "if you have not done something wrong, you have nothing to worry about"⁵⁴. The population believe and is confident of the fact that the Chinese Social Credit System will solve a lot of problems which still exist in China, and that it will raise the level of satisfaction among people along with their quality of life. Mr. Creemers affirms that Western media often present the Chinese Social credit System as an instrument of mass surveillance, similar to George Orwell's invented reality, described in 1984. He believes that the information Western media receive are second hand or third hand information, and that the Social Credit System is something to fear for some aspects, though it is not terrifying to such an extent to be considered a "dystopian nightmare". The Social Credit System, from the point of view of Mr. Creemers, is already active and in the moment of the official implementation, which is forecasted for 2020, things will not change a lot from the situation which is now occurring.

2.1.4 Mirjam Meissner

Mirjam Meissner, Senior Analyst at the consultancy Sinolytics and former Head of Program Economy & Technology at Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), was the last person interviewed by Asia Society on the topic of the Chinese Social Credit System⁵⁵.

She presents the Chinese Social Credit System as a project which wants to regulate the market economy in China, by improving the behaviour of market participants in a way which is considered satisfying for the Communist Party and for the Chinese Leadership. The problems which

⁵⁴ *Social Credit System part-III*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 8 September 2019.

⁵⁵ *Social Credit System part-IV*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 6 September 2019.

have led to the creation of the Social Credit System are correlated to the lack of trust the Chinese authorities had in the market economy and in market participants. Since this system will engage individuals and companies, its aim is to create incentives for trustworthy behaviours of every person and company in every sector, in order to create a society of sincerity and honesty. The interesting point of such new system, according to Miss Meissner, is that the government relies on the individuals and want them to be self-regulated, thus the government role in the Chinese Social Credit System is not so visible. As Mirjam Meissner declared during her interview, “the Social credit System is an attempt of creating an ‘invisible hand’”.⁵⁶ For the individuals, this system is a connection of several different systems, which exchange data results. Negative individual ratings can influence the prestige and the scores of the company in which that particular individual works in. In this sense, the system projected for the individuals and the one thought for companies can easily be connected. Governmental agencies produce rating for companies, looking at the company’s environmental behaviour, tax behaviour and so forth. if the rating is not high enough, this could lead to the insertion of a specific company in a blacklist. It is not clear what the requisite to be out of a blacklist are, though. The lists are different and, basing on the type of list in which a company is collocated, the sanction will be diverse. The ratings of a company are influenced by individuals because if a corporation has negative feedbacks on customer satisfaction, the government will automatically lower the environmental rating of such company. The data that are collected by the authorities and which are useful in order to create ratings and scores, are often submitted to the government by the corporation itself, which is asked to do it. The requirements that apply to companies, differently from those applied on individuals, are very detailed, and are the proving ground for the creation of the effective Chinese Social Credit System. The “social” part that companies have to respect, for

⁵⁶ *Social Credit System part-IV*, asiasociety.org. Retrieved 6 September 2019.

instance, regards the environment. A corporation which respects the environment in which it operates and live in, will have a high rating score; moreover, a company which puts effort into charitable donations will also have good reports from the government. According to Miss Meissner, the difference with Western countries can be seen in the type of control practiced by the Chinese government, which is much more widespread and detailed from the one other countries in the West have. Chinese companies are required to share a lot more information respect to the data that are asked to Western corporations. Another difference is that Chinese authorities, in order to prevent companies in doing actions considered to be bad and incorrect, focus on public shaming. Since for Chinese people losing face is an important affront, the humiliation which derives from it can be unsustainable. Miss Meissner also focus on the disproportional sanctions, stating that she does not consider fair giving to two different individuals who have committed diverse crimes the same sanction, especially when the two violations are not comparable in terms of gravity. All companies in China are already subject to the Chinese Social Credit System, but only the big multinational companies are heavily affected by it. The Small Multinational Economies, on the other hand, are not so influenced the credit system, and their score and ratings mostly come from private entities, not from the government.

Miss Meissner, in conclusion, believes that the Chinese Social Credit System will certainly raise the Chinese economy, adding that the Chinese authorities, in her vision, would be willing to accept a temporary break in the economy if, in the beginning, the Social Credit System will hurt the economic system. The expectation, in fact, is that in the long run the Social Credit System will help the economy and will make it in line with the government's policies. Nowadays, she says, is difficult to understand and to specifically tell what the Chinese Social Credit System is, because everyday something is added to the system or erased from it, and it will continue to change even after the actual implementation in 2020.

2.2 The Chinese Government's view of the Social Credit System

The government presents the Chinese Social Credit System as a great project, useful not only to enhance trustworthiness between government and individuals, authorities and company, people and society, but also to solve all of China's current problems. In a few words, the Social Credit System is seen as a powerful tool able to guide the country and to cheer the economy up⁵⁷.

Chinese authorities want to create a "culture of integrity" (诚信文化) by restoring social trust (社会诚信) and honesty among people. In order to make people behave in a good way, the government will reward the model citizens and will punish the bad ones. Chinese values will be represented as moral value that every citizen should respect and practice. The last but not the least element that Chinese government wants to underline in order to create a "culture of integrity" is the so called "internet integrity", which means that people should behave in an educated manner also on the internet. Any sort of episode of cyberbullying will be punished with sanctions. The principal goal of the Social Credit System is to transform society for the better.

The second important element and task of the Chinese Social Credit System will be related to the economic sphere, in the sense of solving economic problems. Firstly, the Chinese society as a whole should try to sustain market efficiency and economic growth. Secondly, it should develop an anti-fraud campaign and protect the Intellectual Property Rights. The food sector should be strengthened, in order to allow every citizen to buy the food they need. Chinese media consider this element to be the most pressing issue in society.

⁵⁷ Mareike Ohlberg, Shazeda Ahmed, Bertram Lang, *CENTRAL PLANNING, LOCAL EXPERIMENTS* (12 December 2017). Pag 5. Retrieved 10 September 2019.

People may wonder: why food sector? In China, especially in the latest years, contaminated food or low quality food has severely hurt citizens' health. But the food market does not work in the same way as other markets do. The contribution of the government is essential, because in companies which do not sell food, consumers decide whether a particular product should be sold or not, and on the basis of this choice, inferior products will eliminate themselves. In the food industry, on the other hand, things are different, because people do not immediately understand if an alimentary product is good for health or not, leading companies to sell damaging products which can hurt people's health. The consumers should always be protected, thanks to the introduction of new policies which safeguard them. As a matter of fact, the government is creating a platform on a national level with references to the government plan which swears to "protect consumers' rights (保护消费者合法权益) and provide consumers with authoritative and trustworthy information about goods, manufacturers, and companies"⁵⁸.

Drug safety is another important aspect that the government should analyse to solve economic problems deriving from it. Lastly, in the economic sector, customs services and controls should be improved.

The government is also trying to work on the improvement of the governance itself, by working on increasing its credibility. To achieve this objective, the data collected by the government through the Social Credit System will remain private, thanks to the creation of private areas for each citizen, which can be accessed only by the specific person who owns the profile. Within bureaucracy, the different sectors should communicate more with each other in order to raise the efficiency of services and should also try to fight corruption altogether, which has always been a plague in Chinese society. Ultimately, the government should sustain the growth of

⁵⁸ Mareike Ohlberg, Shazeda Ahmed, Bertram Lang, CENTRAL PLANNING, LOCAL EXPERIMENTS (12 December 2017). Pag 7. Retrieved 10 September 2019.

local pilots, such as the Rongcheng's one, which has already brought several results.

2.3 The Social Credit System is the Chinese Dream

The Chinese Social Credit System is seen by the Chinese authorities and by the population as a grand project, the one which will show that China is capable of taking technology and bringing it far beyond other countries. It is a demonstration of the power of this huge country which is creating something that is never been created before. Of course, nothing is officially implemented yet, so China still struggles in deciding how to standardize the credit rating mechanism. To try and understand what the most efficient actions were in order to create the “perfect system”, the government has requested pilot projects, which are the grounds for the Social Credit System and that guide the behaviour of individuals and companies. Chinese citizens are not feeling obliged to act in a certain manner, nor are they feeling oppressed. They like it and look at this system as something fresh and new, able to pick this enormous country up.

In a survey done in Shanghai by Asia Boss, a media company, the opinions of several people about the Chinese Social Credit System came out⁵⁹. In Shanghai, most of the citizens interviewed were already using the Sesame Credit, an app created by Alipay which works as a credit system. It is a system through which Alibaba strongly surveil its users, it collects data from people's daily lives, and then such data are put in a database which scores users. During this interview, people were asked what their reaction was when they first found out about Alipay's app.

One girl answered she thought it was necessary, because the personal credibility is important to everyone and this platform can help people improve their trustworthiness. She also adds that she had always wanted a social

⁵⁹ *“Is China Becoming A Black Mirror Episode (Social Credit)”*, ASIAN BOSS, 17 September, 2018.

credit system she could trust. In the Sesame Credit app there is the section “behaviour and preferences”. Online behaviours that might affect the score are returning rentals on time, pay credit card bills on time, because it is important to honour one’s own promises. An aspect the interviewed girl does not like about the system, is that the purchase of low-quality items can reduce one’s scores. The question she asks herself is, “how are they able to define low-quality? If they have the right to sell it, then we have the right to buy it⁶⁰!” She thinks the system should only check if people pay their debts and bills on time and if they return their stuff; what citizens buy, should be private. Sesame Credit also take into account the “interpersonal relationships”, and if a person’s friends have low scores, this will automatically alter the other person’s scores too. The girl would not unfriends on the platform her real friends, even if they had low score, but she thinks it is okay that her score is connected to her friends’ scores, because this would encourage people in having good friends and into behaving in a certain way in real life. People will behave the best they can, knowing that other people could find out what you do. It is like a monitor for one’s social life, and she thinks it is fine. She hopes the introduction of the real and official social credit system will happen soon, because the government already tracks citizens’ credit card information, and authorities can track criminal records too. From her point of view, building a social credit system just makes it easier to understand who a person’s is dealing with. She makes the example of job interviews stating that, nowadays, employers such as she is, have to interview total strangers in the hiring process. Having a good and high social credit score is the ultimate resume, because it shows that a specific person is a good citizen, who has a good background. She is not concerned about the fact that the information collected by the Chinese Social Credit System could be used by other organizations with other purposes, because she thinks her info has already been misused a lot. She firmly believes that the pros of such system

⁶⁰ “*Is China Becoming A Black Mirror Episode (Social Credit)*”, ASIAN BOSS, 17 September, 2018.

outweigh the cons. She also trusts that the government would enforce more rules to protect people's data. From her perspective, it would not make sense not to build such a system just because citizens could be afraid that one's own information could be mishandled.

Another man stated that he thought Sesame Credit was great, adding that he believed there should be more systems like the Sesame Credit one, making the examples of the "jaywalkers" problem: from his point of view, such behaviour should affect their credit history. Only then, people would be less likely to break the rules. He told the interviewer that if Alibaba was using its power only to rate citizens and score them like this, he would have been contrary to that. However, the bottom line is that Alibaba collects data from Alipay, which most of Chinese citizens use, and they convert such data into Sesame Credit. As a matter of fact, he states that regardless of the use of Sesame Credit, Alibaba would still have all that information in its database, so why not use it? The thing that bothered him was the fact that Sesame Credit actually rates individuals also basing on their online shopping. He found this ridiculous and considers wrong for a company to judge people in this way. Buying low-quality items is not a standard by which to judge people's behaviour. On the topic of the interpersonal relationships he said that he understood why the system had decided to introduce this function, but he thought it was just stupid. There is no way, he added, he would cancel his friends on the platform just because they have bad scores. He believes that Chinese government is seeking to implement a mandatory system by 2020 in order to regulate citizens, to build trust among people and institutions. Moreover, people with high scores will have more convenient lives. He definitely would like to participate into the government implemented social credit system, since he is a good, law-abiding citizen already. The interviewer asks the man if he is concerned about the fact that his Social Credit scores could be misused or abused by other people and organization; his answer is pretty direct: "If nowadays, there are still people who believe that their personal information

will not be leaked, then I feel sad for those people". He declared he does not care about his privacy, and he believes that trying to protect one's own information is a waste of time, especially during this digital and network era. He considers futile to even try to protect one's own info. Through one person's mobile phone, organizations, government, authorities already know where an individual works, where he/she lives, what are his/her interests and so on. Nowadays, in this age, there is no such thing as "privacy".

A couple was then interviewed; the man said he thought the system was good, since his credit score was pretty good, so for him using Alipay to purchase goods and stuff is more convenient than before. A downside was represented by individuals who have to buy things for work. For instance, people who work in the food industry might have to buy a lot of snacks for their job, but Sesame Credit would misunderstand their behaviour, assuming that such person eats junk food all day long. For what concerns the aspect of the "interpersonal relationships", the woman declared that rating people on the basis of one's own friends and relationships was unacceptable, and the man added that this aspect sounded ridiculous and hilarious to him. Although the couple did not seem to like the Sesame Credit a lot, they both believe that the introduction of an official social credit system is necessary, provided that it will be more transparent. On a central site, the system should outline what kind of information the authorities collect and what they will do with that information. It should also specify what information will not be used. Everything should be codified, in order to let citizens understand what they should expect.

The fourth girl interviewed did not know about the existence of such platform, but after having received an explanation of the Sesame Credit, she declared she would not have any sort of problems with being rated, since she behaves well and she has good scores in school. She thinks some bad behaviours should be regulated, like fraud and cyberbullying. She feels

concerned about the fact that other organization could use her score and rating for other purposes, though she knows her information are already being abused. This can be seen by the advertisement which change from person to person, basing on individual preferences, on the basis of online reasearch and so on. Hence, she believes that a system to regulate citizen is required, but one's own info should be protected. The task of protecting people's privacy is up to the government.

Not every mechanism and policy tested on the local pilots are adopted nationally, some remain merely local. Anyway, such mechanisms still represent a massive tool of power and control for the government. Even in the moment in which the effective Social Credit System will be enacted, standards and conditions will continue to vary across different cities, and every individual or company will have to comply with the local jurisdiction.

The Chinese authorities are already thought of exporting the Social credit System overseas, even though such system is not so esteemed in Western countries. The Chinese government is well aware of this situation and, thus, its aim is to implement the Social Credit System in China, to show the results that it will bring on every sector of society and to see the reaction of other countries. As a matter of fact, for the years to come, the government will focus on the creation of a functional system only in China. Many Chinese people agree that there is a lack of trust and creditworthiness in their home country, and everyone is excited to see what this new project will bring and how it will change society.

2.4 Dream or nightmare?

What has been described as the "Chinese dream", the innovative project which is likely, in Chinese people's vision, to bring up economy and save society; to guarantee honesty and sincerity not only among individuals, but also in government affairs; which has the elements requested in order to erase corruption, is described as a "dystopian nightmare" in thousands of

articles coming from Western countries, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and so on. So the question is, will this new system be a dream or a nightmare? Who is telling the truth? Are Western media exaggerating or are Chinese authorities and citizen not calculating the dynamic of this new system? The answer could be in the middle between these two opposite visions.

It is undeniable that the Chinese Social Credit System presents aspects of a totalitarian regime which wants to control citizens, society, economy and every possible sphere. So, why Chinese people are willing to adopt this system? Why are they excited? The answer is quite simple: Chinese citizens wants stability, economic growth and a safe environment. The Social Credit System aims at reaching everything citizens have asked for in the last years. Chinese people already live in a dictatorship, they already respect rules established by the Party and they are known for their moral integrity and for honouring the Chinese values. With the introduction of the Social Credit System, citizens will be rewarder for good actions and punished for bad ones. It is not difficult to imagine how the people which already respect all the rules and follow moral values are considering the idea of the establishment of a system which will reward them. They are not concentrating on the surveillance part, even because the Chinese media try to hide this controversial topic and focus on the benefits in society that all this will bring. Western journals and articles talk about a reality which came out directly from George Orwell's book, "1984", and for a person who has read the book, it is not difficult to find similarities. In the same way, it is easy to understand why Chinese people are not even considering such idea. "1984", George Orwell's masterpiece, was censored in China in February, 2018⁶¹ , after the news of the consolidation of power of former President Xi Jinping and the removal of term limits. The reason behind this apparent casualness about the topic of control and surveillance by the

⁶¹ *"Cina, censura sui social network, Vietati i libri di Orwell e la lettera N"*, Corriere della Sera Esteri. 28 February 2019. Retrieved 5 September 2019.

Chinese population is that they are not properly informed. They only know what the government and the Party wants them to know. They are happy with it, because they have faith in the authorities and to them this new system is not a prison, nor a nightmare. The Chinese Social Credit System is focused on trust, thus the population cannot help but trust its government.

In a world different from the Chinese one, people are looking at such system with fear, and if citizens in China can only see the good aspects coming out of the Social Credit System, in the West people seem to only see the bad elements. The second part of this chapter will focus on the different perspective of the Chinese Social Credit System present in the West, in order to understand how the same project can be seen in two very different ways.

2.5 The Western vision of the Chinese Social Credit System

“China’s ‘social credit system’ straight out of Orwell’s ‘1984’”; “China’s ‘Social Credit’ System: An Orwellian Society In The Future?”; “The complicated truth about China's social credit system”; “China’s Social Credit System is a real life Black Mirror nightmare”; “Black Mirror coming true in China”.

These are only a few titles of the thousands of articles which can be found on the topic of the Chinese Social Credit System in western countries. Articles are often combined with scaring images representing a dystopian future in which everyone is controlled and where technology reigns. To have an idea of what can be found in articles from all around the world, I will present some images related to the Chinese Social Credit System from the point of view of different Western countries:



Fig 8: "China is watching you".

This image can be found in an article called "Freedom in the Net; the rise of digital authoritarianism"⁶². It clearly shows the relation with the most famous sentence of George Orwell's book "1984", which is "Big Brother is watching you"⁶³. This article states that in Beijing, authorities are trying to strengthen the role of internet and social media in order to increase their own power, by controlling the population. China is described as the "worst abuser of internet freedom in 2018". The internet tool is not seen like an instrument able to give more freedom to citizens anymore; on the contrary, it represents a tool for mass surveillance. China has become a scaring apparatus of surveillance and censorship. From the Western countries' point of view, one of the most terrifying elements is represented by the introduction of tools for the facial recognition.

In the region of Xinjiang (新疆, Xīnjiāng), facial recognition machineries, along with other instruments for surveillance and control, are being used in order to monitor the population and attack any action which can hurt the public order or national security and the local authorities even thought about intern such "system enemies" in re-educational camp, which Chinese officials call "vocational education and employment training centres".

⁶² Shahbaz, Adrian, "Freedom in the Net; the rise of digital authoritarianism", Freedomhouse.org. 2018. Retrieved 6 September 2019

⁶³ Orwell, George, "1984", New York: Signet Classic, 1949.

Although the effective Social Credit System is still under its way to be enacted, the government already has a list of people which have been backlisted due to their behaviour in relation with the government and with the rules, losing their social credit. The idea that the authorities want to put in citizens' minds is that if you have been blacklisted, you are considered a reject in society. In this way, a person is forced to respect the rules that the government decide to be the rules for the creation of a good and honest society, because otherwise, you will live a solitary life. Images concerning this topic have been created, such as the following one, representing a man who falls in love with a woman, but cannot ask her out because she has seen his oversized picture on the billboard of shame. This picture was shown by the government itself in order to attract the interest of the population.



Fig 9: People refused by other people because they have been blacklisted.

Western countries believe that the Chinese Social Credit System is a huge threat to civil liberties, more than any other project has ever been. Chinese firms and companies are playing an important role in the creation of this system. They have, in fact, provided to the government several tools for surveillance and control, also basing on the data collected by the commercial pilots which have been created. Some of the companies involved are CloudWalk, Hikvision and YiTu. CloudWalk is an artificial intelligence facial recognition firm situated in Guangzhou (广州, Guǎngzhōu). Its technology is applied in the aviation sector, in the public security and in financial services. Hikvision is a global firm in the security services and it produces surveillance products; the headquarter is in Hangzhou (杭州, Hángzhōu). Yitu is a technology firm engaged in fundamental research for artificial intelligence and it is situated in Shanghai (上海, Shànghǎi).

Countries in which democracy reigns, look at such technological improvements as a “techno-dystopian expansionism”⁶⁴. Every government agency and corporation which operate in China has to follow the ethical rules imposed by the authorities and in order to be sure that such rules are respected, the government along with security vigilance and official oversight bodies will constantly keep an eye on everything. Democratic countries talk about “online terrorism”, because in China authorities have started to classify as “fake news” every news on the internet which can be considered dangerous. This is a representation of deliberately misleading content and online manipulation. Such manipulation follows the argumentation that only the State can decide what is the truth and what is the fiction, with the consequence that independent voices have to be stopped. This is another point which allow western countries to define China as an Orwellian reality, with its own “Ministry of Truth”. In George

⁶⁴ Shahbaz, Adrian, “Freedom in the Net; the rise of digital authoritarianism”, Freedomhouse.org. 2018. Retrieved 6 September 2019

Orwell's book "1984", the Ministry of Truth was a government ministry with the task of checking propaganda, news, articles and past history: "The Ministry of Truth, which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts"⁶⁵. Actually, this ministry did not serve to show the truth of fact but, on the contrary, it was used to falsify historical events which were considered dangerous, in order to make them "government approved".



Fig. 10: China defined as the "world's first digital dictatorship".

This picture shows Chinese journalist Liu Hu (刘虎), who was listed as one of the "One Hundred New Heroes" by Reporters Without Borders in 2014⁶⁶ after having accused a Chinese politician, Ma Zhengqi (马正其/馬正其), of corruption. If by Reporters Without Borders he was seen as a hero, in China authorities were not of the same opinion. He was taken by the police with the accuse of defamation and held at the Beijing Detention Centre. He was asked by the Court to apologize for a series of tweets he wrote, and after he apologized in front of the authorities, they told Mr. Hu his apology was insincere. After the introduction of pilot projects of the Chinese Social Credit System, he was put on the government backlists, without even knowing it. He realised what happened when, in 2018, he tried to book a flight.

⁶⁵ Orwell, George, "1984", New York: Signet Classic, 1949.

⁶⁶中国三位媒体人入选全球"百位新闻英雄". Voice of America, 2014. Retrieved 21 August 2019.

Authorities told him he was banned from taking planes and flying because he had been included on the list of untrustworthy people. He became a digital dissident and, because of that, he cannot book planes or trains, he has been banned from social media and even his parents, family and friends lost social credit points. This is the reason why people talk of the “world’s first digital dictatorship”.

Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister of Canada, during an interview held in October 2018⁶⁷, has expressed her opinion about the Chinese Social Credit System. She declares to be frightened by the fact that China is willing to take the dystopian novel of the 20th century and transform it into reality. She believes the level of surveillance in China is too big and inconsistent with the view and the way of thinking of western countries, where the right of the individual to have its own privacy is a fundamental one. People should have the chance to live their lives privately, because privacy is a very important value.

Erin O’Toole, Canadian Foreign Affairs Critic, also has focused on this topic. He declares that China is trying to sell its artificial intelligence and surveillance tool to other nations, almost as a way to expand this “dystopian reality” abroad. Mr. O’Toole is concerned about it, because he believes that some of these monitoring system and surveillance tools are made straight out of Orwell’s 1984 and everybody should be concerned about it. He adds that western companies should be very careful with State-owned Chinese enterprises and in doing joint ventures with them because they would try to impose their ideas on the western firms. Additionally, speaking of the re-educational camps established in Xijiang, he says that people should be frightened by this, because the State is actually changing people beliefs and monitoring language and faith. In his vision, western countries should condemn it.

⁶⁷ “Exporting Dystopia, China’s Social Credit System”. CBC NEWS VIDEO. October 7, 2018. Retrieved 4 September 2019.

In the USA, media are wondering how does a person's life change when he/she knows every little movement of his/her life is being watched. 200 million surveillance cameras, artificial intelligence and facial recognition methods are doing their job in order to guarantee that such situation will soon become reality. There is even an app which shows people who have been put on blacklists, so that everyone could know. One scaring reality is that among all the surveillance cameras present on the planet, a half are only in China⁶⁸. Chinese people, though, are not afraid since they believe that cameras represent safety. They can be relaxed when walking down a street, because in this way they do not fear criminality.

Hikivision company is the world's largest company for surveillance security and it is situated in Hangzhou (杭州, Hángzhōu)⁶⁹. In the past years, a huge amount of surveillance materials, such as cameras, artificial intelligence and so on, has been sold. In order to avoid the continuous growth of tools used to control and monitor the population, the Trump administration was considering stopping the supply of several devices useful for surveillance to China and, in particular, to Hikivision company. China started to worry about it, because the US is the major provider of high-tech instruments used to monitor people. Chinese authorities are aware of the fact that if such block of components will become reality, China will have several problems in dealing with the kind of surveillance it wants to implement. If the major supplier gets out of the business, China will have to make some step backwards. For Chinese authorities this would be outrageous, because in ten years the purchase and the use of surveillance components has continued to grow. In 2010, 235 billion yuan was spent in the purchase of surveillance machineries; in 2015 the number arrived at 490 billion yuan. The sales of such products are forecast to raise and reach 800 billion yuan by 2020. The number of surveillance companies has also risen by 20%

⁶⁸ "A Look Inside China's Social Credit System" | NBC News Now, Video, 5 June 2019

⁶⁹ LAULY LI, COCO LIU, CHENG TING-FANG, "China's 'sharp eyes' offer chance to take surveillance industry global" June 5, 2019. Retrieved August 22, 2019.

from 2010 to 2015. In the USA, the total number of surveillance cameras is 50 million; in China, about 176 million. Hikivision in 2010 was considered the number 10 in surveillance industries, while in 2016 he became the first industry in the world in the field of surveillance and security.

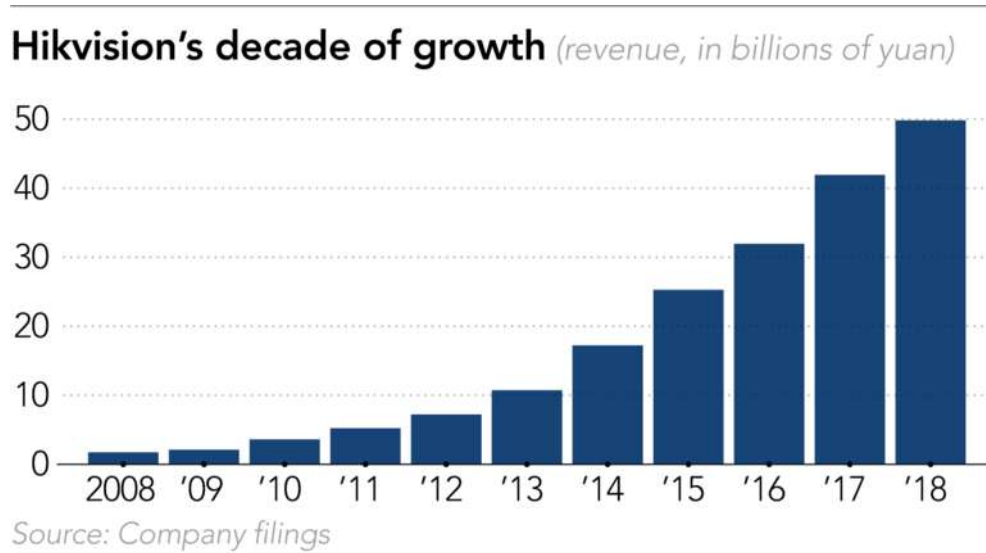


Fig 11: The growth of Hikivision Company from 2008 to 2018, calculated in billions of yuan.

THE CHINESE SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM: A REALITY INSIDE BLACK MIRROR

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on “Black Mirror”, a British TV-series, written by Charlie Brooker, along with the similarities between the show and the Chinese Social Credit System. “Black Mirror” is a science fiction show, which takes place in a possible future where everything is controlled by technology. Its aim is to show the consequences that the use of technology could bring to our lives. Several episodes deal with a dystopian future, from which people are not able to escape. Almost every episode is surrounded by a dark tone and atmosphere. By now, the TV show has already released 5 series.

Charlie Brooker came out with the idea of this television series while he was watching another drama series, called the “Twilight Zone”.

3.2 The Twilight Zone



Fig 12: The Twilight Zone's cover.

The “Twilight Zone” is an American television series created by Rod Serling. It has been aired for five seasons from 1959 to 1964 on CBS. This TV show represents a mixture of genres, such as psychological thriller, fantasy, horror and science fiction, and every episode ends leaving a feeling of suspense in the spectator. The original series was entirely shot in black and white. The stories behind this series all reflect the chaotic transition between post- World War II and the 1960s, such as the anxiety brought by the War, which was reflected on every person’s face; the strict control of the government; the constant thought of the atomic war; the space exploration; the value of morality. The interesting thing, though, is that, although decades have passed since it was aired for the first time, the themes and the reality presented in the “Twilight Zone” can still be found in today’s reality. The fear of the unknown is a main theme of this Television series and it represents something everybody is afraid of. Regardless of the historical period in which a person lives in, is a fear which will never pass. Even though the “Twilight Zone” is a science fiction, the creator wanted to concentrate and focus on the human being, and on how people react in relation to specific and unexpected situations. In 1975, during a college class where he was been asked to give a lecture, he stated that “If you can’t believe the unbelievability, then there’s something wrong in the writing”. This sentence perfectly represents the work that he was doing and that he wanted to do with his TV series: show something that had not happened yet, and that probably never will, through the eyes of character’s people could relate with. His aim was to imagine the world as it could become in the future.

Now, time has passed, and the “new” century has arrived. Some of the features which characterized the dystopian future invented by Sterling has actually became reality. Some of the inventions considered “supernatural” or incredible in the 1960s have occurred and have already become normal things; inventions that we take for granted. Several aspects of the “scaring

future” presented by Sterling are now perfectly conceivable today and not at all scaring by our generation’s point of view.

One episode which can show how things have changed is called “Static” and it was first aired in 1961⁷⁰. The main focus of the story is on the melancholy and nostalgia an adult man can experience in his life, along with the will of get back in childhood. One of the most famous scene of this episode portraits a man who is able to listen to songs he listened to when he was a little boy. At the time when the episode was aired, this really was something unrealistic. Today, with platforms such as Spotify or YouTube, people are able to do this every day and we consider it a commonplace.

Several other episodes predicted the use of automatic pilots in vehicles, which is something Google has projected in its “Google’s modern-day fleet”.

Among all the different themes of the TV series, there is also the focus on government surveillance, which is a current topic; plastic surgery; human-robot, robotic lovers and employees, robotic handmaid. Today, people have the robot “Siri” on iPhone, which does what the owner asks her to do. In houses, people have robots which clean their floor.

Obviously, not every single thing which has been predicted in the TV series has occurred. Humans still habit the planet Earth, while in the episode called “On Thursday we leave for home”, people were expected to move to another planet by 1991. By 1985, a nuclear war was predicted in “Elegy”. In the episode “Two”, a particular scene shows how in 2061 the primary source of news will be found in print newspaper, and it is not difficult to image that is not likely to happen.

In the episode called “The Obsolete Man”, the focus is on a man who works in a library and who does not accept that the government controls its

⁷⁰ LaFrance, Adrienne. "How The Twilight Zone Predicted Our Paranoid Present". The Atlantic. Archived from the original on 2017-08-11. Retrieved 5 August 2019.

citizens through a rigid system of surveillance. Such government does not respect the citizens' privacy and imprisoned them without giving any sort of explanation or justification. The episode shows a totalitarian world, one that citizens would fear. Although it is not the future that people are dreaming of, it reflects the current situation of several countries, included China. Maintaining the focus on this topic, other episodes reveal the will of the author to underline the gravity of government surveillance. At least three other episodes reflect this reality, showing that people are not permitted to ask questions, because asking questions is dangerous. In particular, citizens must not ask about government secrets and government programs. In 1963, the episode "No Time Like the Past" was realised; a famous sentence from such episode is:

We live in an exquisite bedlam, an insanity, made all the more grotesque by the fact that we don't recognize it as insanity⁷¹.

The message is that people have to recognize the reality of facts, they have to understand if the government is acting to benefit citizens or to benefit itself, regardless of people's rights.

"The Twilight Zone" has enchanted its public because it was able to take people's fears and transform them into a TV series. It shows a dystopian future, but the real monster which have transformed the Earth into something everybody should fear, are the humans themselves.

Understanding why the TV show "Black Mirror" has been inspired by "The Twilight Zone" is not difficult. Brooker, Black Mirror's creator, was fascinated by the idea of dealing with controversial themes, putting them in an unrealistic future, so as to avoid censorship. He thought he could do the same, by focusing on current thematic such as the addiction on technology. The day before "Black Mirror" was aired, he declared:

⁷¹ LaFrance, Adrienne. "How The Twilight Zone Predicted Our Paranoid Present". The Atlantic. Archived from the original on 2017-08-11. Retrieved 5 August 2019.

If technology is a drug – and it does feel like a drug – then what, precisely, are the side effects? This area – between delight and discomfort – is where Black Mirror, my new drama series, is set. The 'black mirror' of the title is the one you'll find on every wall, on every desk, in the palm of every hand: the cold, shiny screen of a TV, a monitor, a smartphone⁷².

3.3 Black Mirror



Fig 13: Black Mirror's cover.

Similarly at “The Twilight Zone”, Black Mirror episodes are not connected to one another. Characters are different, stories and plots are different, also the years in which episodes take place are different. Each instalment has its protagonists and its own nightmare scenarios. Brooker, during an interview in 2012, talked about the first episode of the series he wrote:

My wife was watching me using an iPad and watching TV and using a mobile phone – and I think I may have had a laptop open at the same time. And she pointed out that in the future I'd have every wall of my house as an iPad screen⁷³.

⁷² "Charlie Brooker: the dark side of our gadget addiction". The Guardian. London. 1 December 2011. Retrieved 10 September 2019.

⁷³ Lambie, Ryan (12 February 2012). "Charlie Brooker interview: Black Mirror, videogames, Gameswipe and A Touch Of Cloth". Den of Geek. Retrieved 6 September 2019.

After listening to his wife's words, he came out with the idea of the first episode, where everything was controlled by technology.

"Black Mirror" describes a future which may happen, in a dark and almost scary atmosphere. While some episodes clearly describe a world which is very distant from the real one, others show a future which is likely to become reality soon. Watching the episode called "Nosedive", for instance, it's easy to see linkages and similarities with the Social Credit System.

3.3.1 "Nosedive"



Fig 14: Lacie, main character in "Nosedive" episode.

In the third season of the TV show, the first episode, called "Nosedive" is set in a "not so far to imagine" future, where everybody is rated on a one-to-five stars scale, on the basis of their actions. The system works thanks to mobile phones and to the instalment of eye implants; through one's own smartphone, everybody has to share their daily activities and be rated day by day. Such score can alter the socioeconomic status of people and everybody can see it, because it is public. The protagonist is called Lacie, a woman obsessed with her scores and who looks at the rating system with admiration and devotion.

At the beginning of the episode, Lacie lives with her brother Ryan who, contrary to her, does not care about rating and does not have an obsession with his score. Lacie believes that living with a brother who is not interested in raising his social score, will influence her score too, thus she seeks to buy a luxurious apartment in her town. The rating requested in order to have a discount on the residence is 4.5, and Lacie is a 4.2. She consulted a psychologist to understand what to do to raise her score and he suggests her to hang out with popular people. Hence, she decides to post a picture showing a Teddy Bear that she and a childhood friend of hers, called Naomi, have made together. Posting such picture was not a casualty, because Naomi happened to be very popular, with a score of 4.8. After seeing the picture, Naomi asked Lacie to be her maid of honour at her wedding, even though the two had not hang out together for a very long time and, in the past, Naomi had hurt Lacie's feelings. In order to raise her points and to be esteemed and respected by the people who could, potentially, rate her, she decides to accept the request of her popular friend. Confident that her rating will have risen, she commits on the apartment she wanted. After her commitment, she was supposed to take a flight in order to attend the wedding of her friends Naomi, but a series of unlucky events occurred. She had a fight with her brother, which caused her to miss her flight and, accidentally, spilled coffee on a high-rated woman. Both the brother and the other woman rated her negatively, and her score went down. She tried anyway to buy a new ticket at the airport, but with her score she was not permitted to fly. She decided not to accept this situation and made a dramatic scene in front of the employee, until the airport service police intervention arrived. The police, as a punishing action, took away from Lacie's rating score one full point for 24 hours, and this made her score lower even more because every citizen could rate her negatively after seeing the scene she had done at the airport. Because of such situation, the only possibility for Lacie to attend the wedding was to rent an old car and to drive herself, missing, in this way, the rehearsal dinner. Unluckily,

the car got out of power and she had no way to fix it. She decided to continue her long travel to the wedding, and she had no other way but hitchhiking, until she met a truck driver called Susan, who had a score of 1.4. Susan was the only person willing to give her a ride, since Lacie now was just a 2.8. Lacie, though, received a call from Naomi, who told her not to come to the wedding, since her score had become too low. Lacie decided to attend the wedding anyway and made an honest speech in which she told everything she thought about Naomi and about the current society, not caring about the rating.

She was, in the end, imprisoned for her behaviour, and the technology supporting the rating system was taken off of her eyes. Lacie and the man to the opposite cells, who also had not the eye implant, understood that they could now talk freely to each other, and that they had gained their freedom.

3.4 The similarities between Nosedive and The Chinese Social Credit System



Fig 15: A display shows a facial recognition system during the 1st Digital China Summit at Strait International Conference and Exhibition Centre in Fuzhou, China.

In the episode “Nosedive”, a disturbing society in which everything is controlled by social media, technology and rating system is presented. Many articles and interviews deal with the terrifying reality behind Black Mirror and behind “Nosedive”: they call such reality “Social Credit System”. In the second chapter, it has already been explained that Western media only try to underline the scaring, controversial part of such system. It is true that some similarities can be found between the science-fiction episode of Black Mirror and the reality of the Chinese Social Credit System. The two elements, though, are not identical and the rating score presented in Nosedive is an exaggeration compared to the rating score of the credit system. The Chinese Social Credit System is not only based on ratings, though they represent a major part of it.

In the first episode of the third season of Black Mirror, there are some scenes which reflect the idea behind the Chinese Social Credit System. The fact that the main character must have a score of minimum 4,5 out of 5 to receive the discount in order to buy the residence, for instance, represents what has already become reality in China. The Guangzhou Medical Women and Children Centre, in Guangzhou (广州, Guǎngzhōu), to give an example, is the first hospital which functions on the basis of social credits⁷⁴. If people have high rating, they can benefit from discounts, skip the lines and be examined by the best specialists in the hospital.

Another scene shows the protagonist, Lacie, who is trying to buy a flight ticket, but she does not succeed in doing it because her score was too low to fly. For this reason, she was obliged to rent a car. Such situation happens every day in Rongcheng, where the government has located the most important pilot project of the Chinese Social Credit System.

⁷⁴ “La Cina come Black Mirror: entro il 2020 introdurrà un punteggio sociale”, TPI, March 20, 2018. Retrieved September 10, 2019.

In the middle of the episode, we see the main character at work. A colleague of hers, Chester, offers her a milkshake, and while taking it, she sees that the rating scores of such colleague have lowered a lot. She does not know what is the reason why this happened, and she accepts the milkshake. After few seconds, several colleagues of Lacie's rate her negatively, because of her friendly contact with a low-rated person. From that moment on, she will not rate him again, only because her colleagues told her so. She does not even know what are the reasons why Chester's score have lowered so much, but whatever message is gathering the most attention or producing most emotions must be the truth; such conception makes people give judgement on the basis of emotions instead of facts. The pilot projects of the Chinese Social Credit System rate citizens also on the basis of their interpersonal relationships. This means that if a person has low-rated friends, it will automatically lose points on his/her social credit. The system knows everything about the social movements of a person. It can see with whom a person has talked to, has interacted with, what kind of conversation have they had and so on. In such a reality, experts advise citizen not to hang out with individuals who have a low rating, even if people like those individuals. This is exactly what happens in "Nosedive".

At the end of the episode we see Chester, Lacie's colleague, who is asking for help, because he needs somebody to rate him positively, since his scores are lowered to such an extent, he lost his job. Rating does correlates with class: if you are not good enough of a person, you cannot even have a place of work. On the other hand, the higher your rating, the more you get paid. All that matters in this world, is appearance. Everything Lacie does, from her way of dressing, her way of behaving, her way of moving or laughing, is made to impress. Nothing is real. The only real element in the episode is represented by a woman, Susan, who explained to Lacie that life and people's behaviour could not simply be reduced to numbers. Life is much more than this, people are beautiful because they are unique, and they do not have to be standardized into one single way of acting or

behaving. The reputation of a person is different from everybody's, some people will love it, some people will hate it, that is real life. This is shown with how nice Susan is, regardless of her lower points, despite all the things that happened to her.

In order to receive high scores and to become popular, Lacie needs to be rated by high-rated people. During her spare time, instead of focusing on her hobbies and passions, she obsessively checks the profiles of popular people, in order to understand what to do to be just like them.

The individuals living in this world seem to be trapped by such all-encompassing form of social media. Charlie Brooker's himself stated, during an interview, that his intention is not to warn people, but to worry them⁷⁵, by proposing current thematic which are likely to become reality soon. Something that already happens in Eastern and Western countries, for instance, are mobile phone applications which allow people to rate workers on a one to five stars scale. Even in Italy, it is possible to take a taxi, to pay through the app and to assign a rate score to the taxi driver, which is the same thing that happens in *Nosedive*.

The aspect of social media is one of the main themes of the episode and it shows how people always have to be careful on what they write, because a single controversial post can bring to losing one's job.

The episode shows a game, a social game, where people compete for social recognition in order to have such a high rating that all people will know how good you are as a person. However, the idea of being a good person is not well defined, because not everyone can have the same conception of what "be a good person" means. Everybody has one's own perspectives, expectations and experiences, which are uniquely different. The way in which people look at their friends cannot be simplified by looking

⁷⁵ "*Black Mirror Analysis: Nosedive*". YouTube video, July 8, 2017

at the rating scores they have gained or lost. In the episode, it does not seem to be any mention of any individual who had succeed in achieving an average of a 5-star rating; perhaps those are reserved for those empowered or for celebrities. This rating system could potentially overthrow any form of value system people have, in exchange for narcissism and obsession. People will become the stars of their own reality TV show, and they will love it. Individuals are trying to get the best possible rating from the other people, this is why in “Nosedive”, the main character, Lacie, obsessively rates her friends with scores of 5 stars, in order to be scored too in return, and to incentive her friends not to give her a score lower than a 5. In a world where good ratings represent the ground to live an easier life, individuals must contribute to the working of this system whenever they have a moment to spare, by rating other people. Rating individuals becomes a necessity, and everyone tries to behave in the best way, even by falsifying one’s own personality. This can be seen in the scene where Lacie, in the bathroom, in front of a mirror, experiments different ways of laughing, because an absurd laugh could result in embarrassing and in a decreased rating.

Another scene shows Lacie in a bar; she orders a cappuccino and a biscuit, but the truth is she does not want to eat the biscuit nor to drink the cappuccino. She positions the elements in front of her, makes a pretty composition and she takes a picture. Satisfied, she posts it on her profile. It is clear from that scene that the focus of going into a bar is not eating something, drink a hot beverage and so on, but to appear on social platforms, on social systems. Such situation could happen in China too, when people will do something not because they want to do it, but because they want to appear and to be rated.

Lacie in different scenes present a false personality, and she acts in that way just to impress other people. She changes her behaviour in relation to the person she has in front of her. Such rating system, as presented in

Black Mirror, is somehow more restrictive than prison. Now the question is, is this the future we are headed towards? Maybe only time will tell.

The episode aims to show that in a world where everybody is focused on getting good scores and who is always careful not to say something rude, something too direct, to smile in every situation, reality becomes a fiction. In a world where people are controlled in every movement and where ratings are so important to have benefits in real life, everybody gets addicted to it, in order not to be left alone. The fact that to get high rating, people would not be themselves anymore, is a scaring fact. It's not just about privacy, which is a fundamental right, but it is also about losing one's own personality in order to conform to a system which wants people to act in a good way and to be quiet. In "Nosedive", very few people considered the rating system as something trivial; the majority of them lived for the system. It had become their house, their safe place, their friend and family, their life.

The same is happening in China, where most of citizens like and appreciate the Social Credit System, they believe in it and they think that the idea of a project which force you to always act in a good way and be kind to people in order to have high rating is a great one. As a matter of fact, living in a world where you can trust everybody because they are all good is not bad. But the question is, who can you trust? Are those people effectively good or are they acting in order to get high scores?

The Social Credit System has been created to bring trust among people, among individuals and government, to establish a trustworthy relationship. The issue of trust, however, is likely to arise when the system will become an addiction, and everybody will "play" to satisfy such addiction.

Rachel Botsam, British author and economist, examined in depth the topic of trust in digital society, in a book called "Who Can You Trust?: How Technology Brought Us Together and Why It Might Drive Us Apart".

3.5 Trust in digital society

Chinese society believes that trust is in a state of crisis, and though it is true that major institutions such as government, charity, politics, banks and media could use more trust, something more profound and fascinating is happening.

People are entering a massive trust shift from institutions to individuals and the consequences of such shift are both good and bad. Many people talk about trust considering it a value, they think of it as an asset that can be managed by government, communications and marketing. From the point of view of Rachel Botsam, trust can be these things but in order for trust to become an asset and a value, a continuous process is needed⁷⁶. Through such process which goes on and never stops, trust can become an asset. Governments and institutions often say: “we are going to rebuild trust”. This is a very particular sentence, because trust is not something people can decide to “rebuild”. Individuals can choose to be more trustworthy; other people, on the other hand, decide whether to give their trust or not. In conclusion, trust can be defined as a continuous process of something that is given to a person, an institution and so on.

Miss Botsam states that in order to be considered trustworthy, a person or an organization show the so-called “trust signals” which are defined as symbols or clues that people knowingly or unknowingly use to decide whether a particular person is trustworthy or not. The bad thing is that some symbols are louder than others, and very untrustworthy people are often able to manipulate such symbols. Wearing a police uniform, be part of volunteer organizations or charity ones, are symbols that immediately portrait a person as trustworthy; they create an illusion. Diego Gambetta, an Italian social scientist and Professor of social theory at the European

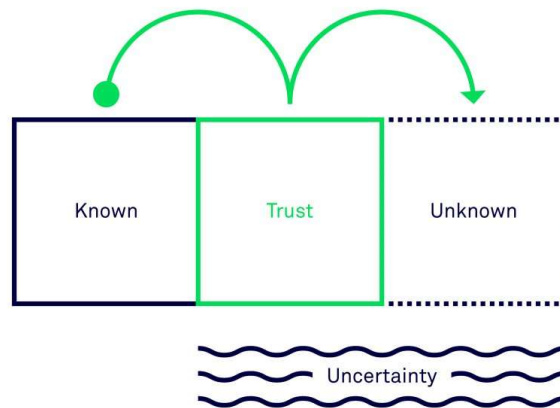
⁷⁶ “Trust in the Digital Age: Why It Matters Now More Than Ever”. YouTube Video, published by The Aspen Institute, June 28, 2018.

University Institute in Florence, stated: "Trust has two enemies, not just one: bad character and poor information."

Could technology help solve these problems making people smarter about whom to trust? Or is technology encouraging individuals to give their trust to the wrong people and in the wrong places? One important thing to remember is that trust is highly subjective and highly contextual. Trust is something which shifts, but never destroys. Since technology has become such an important part of people's lives, the role of trust has changed. It is a trust which flow between individuals, through networks, social media, systems and platforms, but it can operate in ways we have never seen before. The way in which people behave has already changed, and this can be seen simply by looking at the information we share on social media. The Net can allow total strangers to trust one another. Technology has accelerated the process of trust by creating trust leaps, defined by Rachel Botsam as "elements that let you take a risk by doing something new or different from the way we have always done it"⁷⁷. People, today, are being asked to leap faster than ever before. For instance, putting the details of a credit card on a website for the first time requires trust; the first time using an ATM; the first time we will get in a car and let the machine do the work. These are all trust leaps; they are confident relationship with the unknown⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ "Trust in the Digital Age: Why It Matters Now More Than Ever". YouTube Video, published by The Aspen Institute, June 28, 2018.

⁷⁸ Botsman, Rachel, "Who Can You Trust?: How Technology Brought Us Together and Why It Might Drive Us Apart", PublicAffairs (November 14, 2017).



RACHEL
BOTSMAN

Fig 16: Trust defined as a “confident relationship with the unknown”. The trust leaves the “known” behind for the “unknown”.

More and more, institutions and platforms are trying to create trust and trustworthy relationship with people through transparency. The concept of “transparency”, though, is not related to trust. If trust is defined as a “confident relationship with the unknown”, transparency cannot help in restoring it. Societies where every individual has to show his/her movements, in which organizations and companies have to report everything, are transparent society, which means, contrary to what people may think, that are low-trust societies. Transparency is the opposite of building a high-trust society. Trust does not need to speed, it needs time in order to let people understand if a person, a machine, a system, a process is worthy of it.

3.6 How Social Media is changing China



Fig 17: The use of internet and social media in China as of August, 2015.

A very important thing that should be analysed is the role that different social media play in a person’s life, especially in young people. Nowadays, 90% of the users in China are on social media, 70% of those are young people under thirty years old⁷⁹, making youth a huge part of the driving force of social media in China.

For the first time in China, young people are starting to ask themselves “who am I?”, and they are trying to build their own identity. They are choosing different social media to help explore this identity issue they are constructing right now. The innovation represented by the social media is that everyone can constantly have everything on their own mobile phone: photos, videos, audios, social and so on. Because of all these new capabilities, young people are creating immense new languages for themselves.

⁷⁹ “How Social Media is changing China and Asia” (Kevin Lee, Duncan Clark, Kitty Lun), February 7, 2013.

They feel like, for the first time, they have their space to make their voice be heard, to say something, without even realizing they are controlled, more than before.

Besides “Black Mirror”, the Chinese Social Credit System has been compared to George Orwell’s “1984”, defining it as an “Orwellian society”.

3.7 Nineteen Eighty-Four, 1984

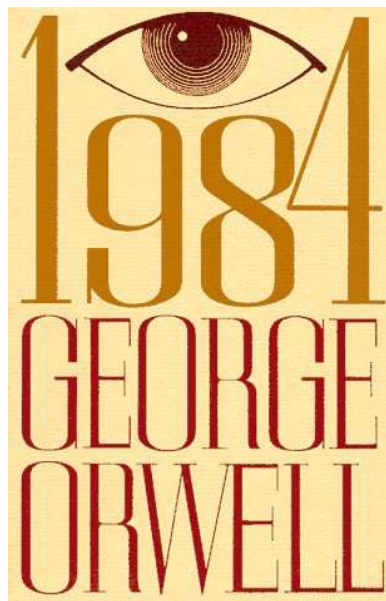


Fig 18: “Nineteen Eighty-Four cover”

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a dystopian novel written in 1948 and published in 1949 by the British novelist George Orwell. The principal topic of Nineteen Eighty-Four is the totalitarian system. The totalitarian government is the one who tries to control every aspect of life: how people spent their days, even in private moment; who they can associate with; what are they allowed to say. The totalitarian government even tries to control what people think and what people believe. What Orwell was trying to do with Nineteen Eighty-Four, was to give his readers a picture of what would happen if countries were under totalitarian rules.

Nineteen Eighty-Four takes place in London; the London in the book is a depressing place, where there is never enough to eat, the food is disgusting,

there are not enough clothes or shoes, and the city is pretty dilapidated, except for giant buildings, where the government is located, which rise above the landscape. There is some sort of war going on, but no one really understands what it is about. Rockets frequently explode in the streets and blow people to death. The worst part is that the government is always watching everything people do. There are posters of the “Big Brother”, who is supposedly the leader of the Party, which say “Big Brother Is Watching You”⁸⁰ (Fig 19).



Fig 19: Poster of the leader of the Party, which states “Big Brother Is Watching You”.

The thought-police hides cameras and microphones literally everywhere. The government can watch people in their homes, through their TV screens, and citizens are not allowed to turn their TV off, ever. There are a lot of things which are prohibited in society, and if a person does not respect the rules and does those things anyway, police can take him/her and send him/her into a force labour camp.

People cannot have close friends, cannot fall in love; they are supposed to save all emotions for the Party. Then, there are things people must do: they have to watch the government programme in TV, you have to

⁸⁰ Orwell, George, “1984”, New York: Signet Classic, 1949.

respect the “two-minutes hate” exercise, where people have to extern all their anger against characters which are described as “bad” and “evil” by the government. Citizens do not have time for their own thoughts, because the party is constantly filling their heads with propaganda.

The main character of 1984 is Winston Smith, he is 39 years old, he has a job inside the government, and he lives this terrible life in oppression and sadness. He does not have any friends, anyone in his life. At the beginning of the book, he starts writing a diary, in which he explains how much he hates life in his society, even though writing a diary is one of those things people get killed for if they are caught. His diary is his safe place, where he can write all the things he thinks about society, imagining what would life been if the world was different from the way it is. There’s no way for him to know if things were ever different before, because the government have burnt all the records of the past and re-written all the history books.

At the beginning of the novel, there are two other people who mattered to Winston, although he does not even know either of them. One of them is Julia, an attractive young woman who works in the same building as him. She is some kind of mechanic. Winston basically hates her, because she is pretty and he cannot have her, but he also believes she is the sort of person who would turn him into the thought-police. As a consequence, he is afraid of her but also fascinated by her.

The other person he is interested in is a man, called O’Brian. He is a member of the Inner Party, which means he is a boss, much higher up than Winston. Winston should be afraid of him, but he gets the sense that O’Brian is intelligent, thus he has this desire to be friends with him. He thinks O’Brian would understand how he feels about life.

The turning point of the book is represented by the fact that one day, Julia gives Winston a note, that says "I love you". This completely change Winston's world.

Obviously, he is interested, he cannot wait to get in touch with her, but it is very hard for them to say two words to each other, in private, without having the police spying on them, through microphones and cameras. Finally, they do manage to get out of the country, and they start their love affair.

The love affair makes them both very happy; it is dangerous, because they can get caught and be sent to labour camps, but that makes it more exciting. At least, Winston has someone who understands him and who hates the Party as much as he does.

Winston, though, feels that he has to make another step. He is rebelling against the party privately by having a secret affair, but now he wants to go to the next level by actively rebel against the government. One day, he gets his chance: O'Brien invites him to his apartment to talk about something work-related. Winston guesses that O'Brien must be part of the rebellion, because nobody invite people over to their home. Consequently, he and Julia go to O'Brien's house and confess that they want to be rebels. O'Brien reveals them he is a rebel too, and show them a book which explained why things are the way they are.

Winston reads the book and he is blown away by it. Unfortunately, right after he reads it, the thought-police bust into his apartment, arrest him and Julia and take them into the Ministry of Love in order to torture them.

The truth was O'Brien was not a rebel after all, he just wanted to catch Winston. In the ministry of love, they torture Winston in all sort of ways: they break his bones and his teeth, they starve him. He tells them everything he knows, he confesses everything they ask him and he tells

them everything he knows about Julia. After torturing him over and over, O'Brian finally tells Winston what is that the government really wants.

What they want is to have total power over the people's minds and thoughts. They want people like Winston to say "2+2=5" and to believe it. For the government is purely an exercise of power, they are not trying to control minds for some other purposes, they just want to exercise total power over people's minds.

Finally, they take Winston to Room 101, where the government does all the things a specific person is afraid of. The Party locks Winston's face into a cage and let rats enter. He has a phobia of rats, so he instinctively say "Do it to Julia, not me!", which is a complete betrayal of what is most important to him. To government is taking his last shred of integrity.

After he does that, they left he and Julia go, the thought-police do not care about them anymore. The two of them meet on the outside, but they cannot love each other anymore. Winston and Julia are basically broken people after they get out. Winston has changed to the point tht he does not even want to think about something that may be rebellious; he just sits in cafés, listening to the music and smiling.

The last sentence of Nineteen Eighty-Four is: "He loved Big Brother"⁸¹.

3.8 Big Brother Meets Big Data

The Chinese Social Credit System is nothing compared to the terrible world described in Nineteen Eighty-Four, so why do media find similarities between the two?

China is often described as a surveillance state, where Big Brother meets Big Data⁸². Cameras across the country are spying and watching citizens,

⁸¹ Orwell, George, "1984", New York: Signet Classic, 1949.

⁸² "Social Credit: China's Digital Dystopia In The Making", Journeyman Pictures, October 5, 2018.

mapping their digital footprint to every step they take. What people do, say and almost even think is being marked against you or in your favour. The Party calls it the social credit, a personal score system for 1.4 billion citizens. The future of China is described by hundreds of Western articles as a “dystopian future”. In Beijing, cameras see if a person jaywalks the street and, if he does, a monitor will immediately warn him/her to stay back and cross the street safely. China wants to build its future on artificial intelligence and technology, along with data of every single citizen, in order not to leave a dark corner where to hide.

At the Second World Intelligence Congress in Tianjin, in 2018, new “toys” and technologies were presented. The manager of Alipay in Tianjin is Chong Jiang; during the congress he declared:

Once a person has a score, all their credit behaviour in their life is recorded. A person can be evaluated by that number. Our goal is to ensure that if people keep their promises, they can go anywhere in the world; if people break their promises, they won't be able to move an inch⁸³.

Chinese citizens see clear skies in their digital future, they believe that the idea of big data is magnificent and that it will transform China more and more into a fantastic country to live in. From their point of view, the fact that every action will be controlled and rated is fine. They are not afraid about this system, because it will make Chinese society safer and more stable. If there are cameras in every public space, in every corner, they can feel safer. Chinese people live much of their lives online and on devices.

Former President Xi Jinping, talking about his country, declared “We will be rich, democratic, cultural, harmonious and beautiful⁸⁴”. This is also the hope of the whole Chinese nation.

⁸³ “*Social Credit: China's Digital Dystopia In The Making*”, Journeyman Pictures, October 5, 2018.

⁸⁴ “*Exposing China's Digital Dystopian Dictatorship*”, ABC News In-Depth, YouTube Video. September 18, 2018.

3.8.1 Liu Hu's case

Investigative journalist Liu Hu is one of the few Chinese citizens who see the dark side of such social credit system. During an interview with the ABC News, in Chongqing (重庆, Chóngqìng), he said:

You can see from the Chinese people's mental state that their eyes are blinded, and their ears are blocked. They know little about the world and live in an illusion⁸⁵.

The journalist, during his career, has exposed high level corruption and solved murder cases abandoned by the police. In many countries, he would be celebrated, but not in China. He continues:

The government regards me as an enemy. The mainstream media is like a propaganda machine for the party. Their main duty is to indoctrinate people and stop them knowing the fact. In my view, if someone wants to prevent corruption being revealed, then they are corrupt too⁸⁶.

He is considered by the government a "dishonest person" because, after having accused an official of extortion and after having publicly excused in front of a court and paid a fee, he was asked to pay an extra fee. He refused to do it, and it was blacklisted.

Liu Hu's lawyer friends told him that these so-called "dishonest personnel" are people in debt. But Mr. Hu stated he does not owe money to anyone, so he believes he should not be on a blacklist. "There are several people who are on the blacklist wrongly. But they cannot get off it", he declared. All his social media profile was cancelled by the authorities. He had nearly 2 million followers, and he used his profiles in order to inform people, as a journalist.

⁸⁵ "Exposing China's Digital Dystopian Dictatorship", ABC News In-Depth, YouTube Video. September 18, 2018.

⁸⁶ *ibidem*

I had more than ten Weibo accounts; now they are all gone. I continue to make new accounts, and every time they block me.

His job, his life, his investigative reports, are on hold. This is not the first time he has experienced problems with the party and with authorities. In August 2013, he was detained without trial after exposing a senior party member linkage with illegal prostitution. He was accused his behaviour was defamation, and he was asked to admit it. Authorities also told him that if he admitted guilt, the leaders would have been happy and they would have set him free. Over the course of one year, he was interrogated more than 70 times. The authorities threatened him, telling him he must cooperate, otherwise he would have lost his job, his wife and his children. Hu refused to confess anyway, and he was released, but now he is trapped again.

It's been five years since I was released. Big changes have taken place in the media industry. A lot of people have left the industry, especially journalists doing investigative reports. But I still love this work, and I want to continue to be a journalist here. I want to keep on reporting as much as possible⁸⁷.

Liu Hu is worried about his family. The fact that he was blacklisted in the Social Credit System, has posed a shadow on his family and on the people who are close to him, too. If one person breaks the rules, all associated people are also punished; a form of political extremism. Maybe, people do not fully comprehend what is to come.

Liu Hu concluded:

This kind of social control goes against the tide of the world. We always say we should learn from the good aspects of Western countries. But when it comes to limiting the government's power, we do not learn anything.

⁸⁷ "Exposing China's Digital Dystopian Dictatorship", ABC News In-Depth, YouTube Video. September 18, 2018.

3.8.2 Xinjiang Province

Xinjiang, China's largest province, is the place where the principles of the Social Credit System have been taken to extremes. The party does not want the world to know about it. It has been defined by Western media as the "world's largest prison".

In Xinjiang there is a population of Uyghurs, Turkish people of Islamic faith. China's rulers have struggled to control the region and its people for two millennia. Surveillance technology is the new weapon in their campaign. A Uyghur film maker and poet living in Xinjiang, during an interview in 2018, stated:

The surveillance system suddenly ramped up after the end of 2016. Since then, advanced surveillance technology which we had never seen, experienced or heard of started to appear⁸⁸.

He can talk about the situation there, because he managed to escape with his family to the USA. He made the decision to go away at the end of 2017.

We had a call from the police instructing us to come by. We were taken to the basement. There were manacles and shackles hanging in the cells, and iron chairs called "tiger chairs" where criminals are strapped in. We went inside and there were about 20 to 30 people there. We were all Uyghurs. When it was our turn, my wife and me, they first drew blood from us. After we finished the fingerprinting, they began the facial analysis (Fig 19). They were recording and we looked straight at the camera; then we looked to the right and back; looked left and back. Looked up, came back; looked down⁸⁹.

⁸⁸"Exposing China's Digital Dystopian Dictatorship", ABC News In-Depth, YouTube Video. September 18, 2018.

⁸⁹ ibidem

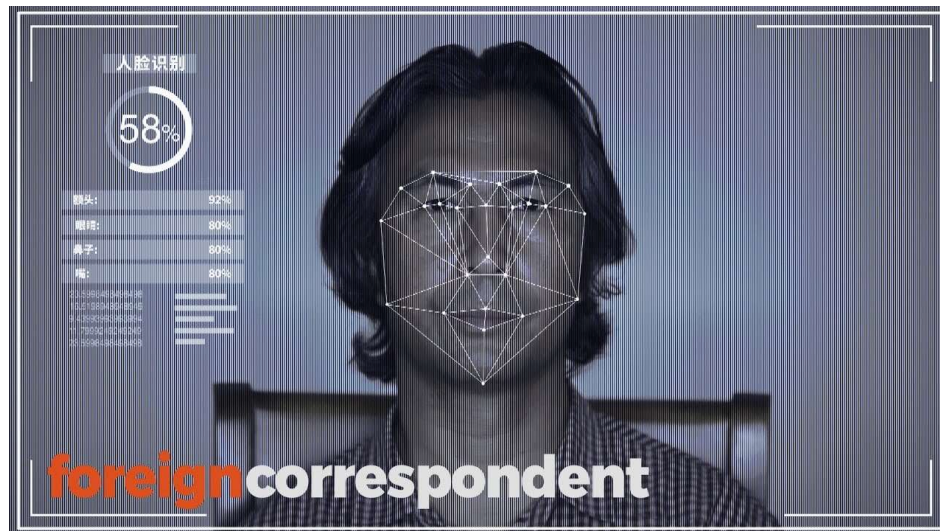


Fig 20: Source: ABC News In-depth, the facial recognition system in the region of Xinjiang, China.

In Xinjiang, facial recognition methods are very sophisticated. People's faces are scanned from every angle. They are also forced to produce a range of facial expressions. Such surveillance controlling system is specifically targeting Uyghurs. This is because Uyghurs in China are a minority, and ethnic culture is often the first target for political oppression.

In the cities of the huge region of Xinjiang there is tension. Police and cameras are everywhere, and they keep an eye on everybody. Technology is at the very centre of this repression.

Citizens here are not given a score, instead, they are divided into just three categories: trustworthy, average, untrustworthy. If a person is Chinese, he/she is then trustworthy and granted freedom of movement. However, if a person is Uyghur, such person is average, with restrictions imposed on travels and religious practices. If a person is a male Uyghur who breaks such restrictions, he will be marked as untrustworthy and detained in the so-called by the Party "education and training centres".

The Uyghur man continues his interview by explaining what the situation of the camps is from his point of view:

The concentration camps are very congested and over-populated with detainees. They have to study political propaganda 12 hours a day. The food, drinking water and living conditions are very poor. Many people are getting sick in the camps. When we were still living there, we started to hear that some were even dying in there⁹⁰.

In August 2018, the United Nations announced that over a million Uyghurs were held in detention camps in Xinjiang, purely because of their ethnicity. The China East government rejected the claim, insisting that the camps only detain terrorists. But when the Uyghur man who realised the interview for ABC flew away from Xinjiang to move to America, his brothers and his brother-in-law disappeared. He stated:

It is impossible to communicate with them. They are in the concentration camps. Even contacting their families, their wives, is impossible now. We could contact them, sure, we could call. But if we do it, the police will immediately know and then the others will be taken to the camps as well.

The situation that people live in Xinjiang is oppressing, and it reflects a true totalitarian system. This is the most extreme pilot project established by the government.

⁹⁰ "Exposing China's Digital Dystopian Dictatorship", ABC News In-Depth, YouTube Video. September 18, 2018.

3.9 Summary

The Chinese Social Credit System is a controversial topic. Some considers it a great project, others fear it. Since the project is still under its way to be implemented, nobody can know for sure how will it be and how it will be implemented all over China.

What it is clear is that Chinese citizens regards at the Social Credit System in different way, depending on the pilot projects they are experimenting.

In Ronghceng people are happy, and the majority of them likes it. The pilot project of Ronghceng is likely to be the most similar to the effective Social Credit System.

In the region of Xinjiang, on the other hand, people feel oppressed by surveillance cameras, rules and restrictions. This is why in Xinjiang, the Social Credit System is extreme, and it is more similar to a political and ethnic oppression than to a rating system. The demonstration is that people in Rongcheng do not even have scores; they are not rated on the basis of their behaviour. It is a project which goes far beyond the social credit system which will be implemented by 2020.

The western media continues to look at this system as something dangerous and scaring. They consider it a dystopian reality to the levels of "Black Mirror" or "Nineteen Eighty-Four".

People just have to wait in order to see what such new system can bring in society and in Chinese citizens' lives.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has tried to answer to the following question: “what is the Chinese Social Credit System and what are its implications?”. To this end, I have collected a series of interviews, speeches, articles, trying to describe in detail the System, its origins and its implications.

In the first chapter, I focused on the forms of social control and policing practices adopted by the Chinese authorities in the past, which subsequently brought to the idea of establishing a social credit system. Thereafter, I explained what the social credit system is and the ways in which its implementation is on its way, thanks to pilot projects. The pilot projects are both local and commercial. The different kind of pilots have been presented in detail. Research show that the majority of Chinese citizens are favourable to the introduction of such system. At the end of chapter 1, I focused on the influence of the Chinese Social Credit System on other countries which, in turn, adopted a system able to control their citizens and maintain stability.

The second chapter aims at understanding the perception of the Chinese Social Credit System among Chinese citizens. A survey has been made in 2018 by political scientist Prof. Dr. Genia Kostka on 2200 Chinese people. The principal topic of the survey was the social credit system; the aim was to understand how Chinese citizens considered this new project.

The results showed that the 80% of participants already engaged in a volunteer commercial credit system and they were favourable to the establishment of an official system; 7% took part in projects requested by the local government. More than the 40% of the surveyed people stated that, thanks to such credit system, they could benefit of discounts and privileges. Focusing on the survey, it was evident that individuals living in urban areas were more inclined to accept the social credit system compared to those living in a rural one. As a matter of fact, in urban

centres the percentage of approval was 82%, while in rural areas only 68%. The results of the survey are pretty clear: they show that the Chinese population look at the Social Credit System more as a tool capable of improving the quality of life and able to regulate institutions than as an instrument of mass surveillance.

The second chapter also underlines the different vision of Western media which, contrary to Chinese citizens and authorities, regards at the system as a “dystopian nightmare”, a powerful tool for mass surveillance.

In the third and last chapter I analysed the Social Credit System in relation to the TV show “Black Mirror”, focusing, in particular, on one episode called “Nosedive”.

Additionally, through the study of Rachel Botsam, the role of trust in society was addressed.

Finally, I introduced George Orwell’s novel, “Nineteen Eighty-Four”, in relation with a pilot project of the Chinese Social Credit System, implemented in Xinjiang, and with the case of an investigative journalist, Liu Hu.

What is clear from this research work, is that Chinese citizens regard at the Social Credit System in different ways, depending on the pilot projects they are experimenting, while the western media continues to look at this system as something dangerous and scaring.

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