Nationwide Surveillance in the Peoples Republic of China

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On my honor as a University student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this
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Nationwide Surveillance in the Peoples Republic of China

China has a long history of committing human rights violations (Ruz, 2015) and one of the largest surveillance infrastructures in the world (Bischoff, 2019). The Chinese government works with domestic corporations to manufacture and maintain surveillance networks. Such surveillance networks are being used to commit cultural genocide against Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang Province. The state is expanding its surveillance infrastructure into other nations under the Belt and Road Initiative. Dissident citizens protest against the government and use identity obfuscation to counter different means of surveillance. Human rights organizations advocate for the rest of the world to pressure China to change these policies.

Literature Review

Chen and Hua (2015) found an association between Chinese citizens' avoidance of cultural heritage cites and their participation in anti-government protests. Ong and Han (2019) found that protestors in urban China tend to value "greater accountability and transparency" more than democracy. They also found that the higher level of education a Chinese citizen has, the less likely they are to participate in political protest. The opposite is found in democratic societies, where the cost of political protest is far less (Ong and Han, 2019). This research shows a change from traditional values and a desire for a less totalitarian government.

Cai (2010) analyzed the methods and efficacy of protests in China finding that disruptive collective action is a widely accepted form of political activism because of its past successes in eliciting government concessions. Cai (2010) also states, "Chinese citizens' widespread

grievances and resistance have much to do with local officials' abuse of power and the limited effectiveness of redress mechanisms." This shows that the only way citizens can show government discontent is through protest, met with violent protest suppression. Surveillance systems are then used to identify and punish protestors, limiting the only effective form of political activism.

Liang (2018) studied China's social credit system and concluded that "state and commercial entities have exponentially increased their capabilities to monitor the populace," and citizens are less able to resist. They also found that the government and private sector are aiming to make a "corporate-state nexus" of aggregated surveillance data (Liang, 2018). This supports the claim that the state is using corporations to construct and maintain a surveillance infrastructure.

Hong Kong and Mainland China

In 2019, protests broke out in Hong Kong over an extradition bill that would allow suspected criminals to be extradited from Hong Kong to mainland China. Many residents of Hong Kong regarded it as a move by Beijing to limit Hong Kong's autonomy. The Hong Kong police used pepper spray, rubber bullets, ten-year sentences, and eventually, live rounds to disperse protesters. The bill was withdrawn in Sep. 2019, but protesters still demand an independent inquiry into alleged police brutality, declassifying protesters as rioters, amnesty for arrested protesters, and Mayor Carrie Lam's resignation. They also demand that Hong Kong have the right to democratically elect its leaders and legislators (Roa, 2020).

Since the protests, Roa (2020) looked into relations between Hong Kong and mainland China, concluding that "Hong Kong requires a political solution that addresses long-standing

social grievances and the prickly issue of local autonomy." This incident shows how mainland China secures power by incrementally subverting the autonomy of its provinces and how dissidents use collective action to resist.

Anti-surveillance groups outside of China resist such invasions of privacy by Chinese authorities. A self-proclaimed extension of the hacker group Anonymous has designed art projects to call attention to privacy threats, including scarves printed with many faces and a head lamp that projects a face over the wearer's to thwart facial recognition cameras (HKU, 2017). During the 2019 Hong Kong protests, protesters tore down 20 new smart lamp posts around the city out of fear that the lamp posts could have facial recognition capabilities. Hong Kong's secretary for innovation and technology acknowledged that the lamp posts had Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity, sensors, and cameras with visual analysis and tracking capabilities, but "those functions had never been activated" (Hu, 2019). This goes along with research that suggests collective resistance is the most powerful political tool Chinese citizens have, and shows unwillingness to accept high level surveillance.

On Oct. 4, 2019, the Hong Kong government, responding to weeks of protests against the Extradition Bill, has banned the use of masks or face coverings in public, which would allow police to review surveillance data and retroactively identify and arrest protestors (SCMP, 2019). The suppresses dissent. More protests followed this decision. One citizen said "If no one reacts to this then they can use the emergency ordinance to do anything, including interfering with the coming district elections. If the government can do anything, then Hong Kong is finished" (SCMP, 2019).

To resist state authoritarianism, Chinese citizens must be free to safely assemble and protest. Surveillance deprives them of this freedom.

Surveillance and the Private Sector

The ruling party in China, the Chinese Communist party (CCP), seeks to monitor and control the information on the internet. China has a heavily censored internet due to the Golden Shield Project (Golden Shield Project, 2003), also known as the Great Firewall, a censorship and surveillance network that allows the state to control what their citizens see and do online (pingp, 2011). A 2013 law criminalized spreading untrue information that "lead to mass protests, instigate ethnic or religious clashes, or damage the nation's image" (Zhai, 2013). In 2017, additional internet restrictions were put in place to make it illegal for citizens to disseminate prohibited material online and require citizens to register online under their real identity (CAC, 2017). These actions allow the state to control online discourse and prevent dissidents from organizing. The state defends its actions, claiming "National governments are entitled to enact public policies, laws, and regulations with no foreign interference" (Shaohui, 2017). This all leads to a highly controlled internet without the free discourse and anonymity usually given to users.

A Chinese citizen was charged with 22 months in prison for making jokes about government officials on WeChat, the most popular social media site in China. It is believed that WeChat software automatically censors and reports any uploaded post with words from a continuously updating blacklist (Dou, 2017). The Chinese government is working with Tencent, WeChat's parent company, to surveil citizens online and punish dissidents.

The Chinese government wants to physically monitor its citizens using an extensive surveillance infrastructure built and maintained by private corporations. A 2019 report from *Comparitech* says that, by 2020, China could have 626 million CCTV cameras in use, which is

nearly one camera for every two people (Bischoff, 2019). In 2018, Beijing police unveiled facial recognition glasses connected to an offline database stored on a tablet carried by the officer. The CEO of the glasses manufacturer claims that the glasses can check an individual against a database of 10,000 entries in 100 milliseconds. William Nee, a China researcher at Amnesty International, said "[…] it could also make it easier for authorities to track political dissidents and profile ethnic minorities" (Chin, 2018). In Feb. 2019, a publicly accessible database was discovered containing the personal data and facial recognition records of millions of Chinese Muslims (Coldewey, 2019). The incident was a glimpse at the scale and sophistication of China's surveillance state, exposing the danger of large-scale data collection and the potential security risks with big data projects. This also shows that facial recognition is used for more than the social credit system, but also to monitor Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities.

In 2017, CCP ordered Alibaba, Tencent, and other Chinese companies to co-operate with the Chinese government to collect data and track people of interest. State-corporate relations are so entangled, major companies have state representatives on campus to allow immediate cooperation (Lin & Chin, 2017). Alibaba developed a mobile app to distribute Communist propaganda. Beijing ByteDance (creator of Tik Tok) and Tencent are also known to cooperate with the state (Li, 2019). The Alibaba Group is also the owner of the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), Honk Kong's largest English newspaper (Carew, 2015). All of this shows a strong partnership between the state and private corporations. This means that the state can control information and collect data on any platform, service, or product these companies develop (which also challenges the integrity of the SCMP).

Alibaba's CEO Jack Ma spoke with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about using Alibaba's social credit system to issue Chinese citizens Canadian visas. Ma said, "I guarantee

that we will allow everyone who comes to Canada" to have an online visa; "we have a good credit rating system" (Jia, 2017). This seems to be a state partnered corporation looking to expand surveillance systems outside of China with systems that report back to the CCP. This is an example of the Belt and Road Initiative in action.

Another Chinese company, iFlytek, which specializes in speech recognition, is collaborating with the Chinese Ministry of Public Security to develop a voice pattern database. The company claims its systems can recognize Tibetan and Uyghur languages (Human Rights Watch, 2018). These are minority languages in regions of China with advanced surveillance infrastructures. This shows that the private sector is complicit in the state's subjugation of ethnic minorities.

Xinjiang Province

The Chinese government is using the "People's War on Terror" to target ethnic minorities for re-education in internment camps. As a response to riots in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of Western China, the state asked citizens to report neighbors studying the Quran (Tiezzi, 2014). Citizens that the state deem "extremist" are detained in long-term "re-education" camps. The US Department of Defense estimates about 3 million of the region's 10 million Chinese Muslims are confined in internment camps. Former detainees described overcrowded cells, razor wire fences, being forced to eat pork, brainwashing, torture, electrocution, and daily party indoctrination (Stewart, 2019) (Malik, 2018) (Danilova, 2018). Women in these camps also face forced sterilization, sexual abuse, and rape (Hoja, 2020). An independent tribunal found that some prisoners were being killed for their organs. The tribunal concluded that the state is guilty

of crimes against humanity, and said that anyone who interacts with China is interacting with a criminal state (Nice, et al., 2020).

A local official said, "You can't uproot all the weeds hidden among the crops in the field one by one — you need to spray chemicals to kill them all. Re-educating these people is like spraying chemicals on the crops." (Danilova, 2018).

Outside of the camps, Uyghurs in Xinjiang are under constant surveillance from facial recognition cameras, iris and body scanners, mandatory monitoring apps, drones, a DNA database of 40 million people, and a police station on every street corner (Coca, 2018). Region police use a speech recognition system that monitors phone calls in real time, and have reportedly been given monthly quotas for collecting biometric data (fingerprints, voice samples, etc.) (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The orphanages are so full, children of detainees are being sent to mainland China (Hoja & Hoshur, 2017). The state, in order to demonstrate a "commitment to secularism", punished a region official for not smoking in front of Uyghurs (SCMP, 2018). The Chinese government also outlawed various Islamic practices such as giving children Uyghur names (Stewart, 2019), wearing veils, or growing "abnormal" beards (Gan, 2018).

Everything these people see, do, read, and have access to is controlled by the state. Privacy and anonymity do not exist. Citizens cannot assemble and collectively resist government oppression. Religious and cultural practices are being outlawed, and following these practices leads to detention in the camps. The Chinese state is committing cultural genocide through forced assimilation. This is a dystopian use of technology to wipe out an entire culture.

A Chinese researcher warns about possible expansion of this level of surveillance, "They are able to pioneer new methods of control that, if successful, they could use elsewhere in China"

(Coca, 2018). These methods of control can then be sent to other countries that are either seeking this level of authoritarianism or countries partnered under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Belt and Road Initiative

In 2013, China President Xi Jinping announced a 20-plus year foreign policy program called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR). The BRI aims to bring Eurasian countries closer together and inspire cooperation with "mutual benefit and win-win opportunities" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). There are plans to build roads from the Pacific to the Baltic Sea, and then throughout Asia. According to the state, under the BRI, China would not try to interfere with the region's politics, but would promote trade in the area to develop itself and the rest of the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013).

At the turn of the century, China recognized that the main factors affecting economic growth were its lack of natural resources (i.e. oil), high pollution development, and uncoordinated economic and social development. The state is now trying to "transcend" old models of industrialization, power accumulation, and social control (Bijian, 2005). This transcendence is shown in the BRI's focus on sustainability, pollution reduction, and renewable energy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). The BRI also encompasses the Digital Silk Road (DSR), an initiative to expand information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure (fiber optic lines, 5G networks, etc) (Yamei, 2017).

The BRI aims to be an alternative to western development. As other countries take loans from Chinese banks and sign development contracts with Chinese companies, China's economy surges. And as more people use Chinese goods and services, the influence of Chinese companies spreads, effectively expanding the influence of the CCP beyond China. Jack Ma proposed to

extend Alibaba's social credit system to provide Canadians visas (Jia, 2017). Egypt's Minister of Communications and Information Technology met with several Chinese technology companies to discuss investing in Egyptian markets (MCIT, 2019). Venezuela has a card identification system, similar to China's social credit system, developed by Chinese ICT company ZTE. Critics say this "illustrates how China, through state-linked companies like ZTE, exports technological know-how that can help like-minded governments track, reward and punish citizens" (Berwick, 2018).

The problem with this development and growth of Chinese ICT companies, is that the state and private sector as so closely related. The state will likely have companies implement backdoors in the systems developed under the DSR, giving the state access to all the information on the client server. This also means that CCP can control what content is shown on Chinese based services. So, a China-based internet service provider (ISP) might throttle speeds for connections for anti-China websites or remove content with certain keywords.

Chinese surveillance technology is already being used in Ecuador (Mai, 2018), Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, and Zambia (Biryabarema, 2019). The headquarters of the African Union (AU) in Ethiopia was built by Chinese companies, and then it was discovered that their servers were being backed up to an unknown server in Shanghai (Tilouine & Kadiri, 2018). China denied allegations of spying on the AU (Adebayo & Schwarz, 2018). This shows expansion of China-based surveillance systems and the security risks associated with relying on Chinese technology.

The concern of Chinese globalization is the expansion of Chinese surveillance infrastructure. China is leveraging the promise of development and economic growth to pressure less developed countries to rely on Chinese goods and services. This gives China heavy influence over partnered counties as well as significantly increasing demand for Chinese exports. These

exports, including software and security systems, will likely use servers to which the CCP has unfettered access. Also, by relying on Chinese development and resources, less developed counties will be pressured to align with China in UN propositions. For instance, China could pressure BRI partners to vote against propositions to investigate crimes against humanity claims in Xinjiang Province.

Advocacy

Advocacy groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Chinese Human Rights Defenders publicize human rights violations by the Chinese government to raise awareness. Amnesty International and 12 other organizations sent a joint open letter to Google asking it to withdraw from a deal with China to develop a censored search engine. "The Chinese government runs one of the world's most repressive internet censorship and surveillance regimes" (Amnesty, 2018).

The executive director of Human Rights Watch called for UN action on Xinjiang, prosecution for officials in charge of detention, and companies who take part in the surveillance infrastructure. The director writes, "Governments should tightly regulate the technology that empowers China's mass surveillance and repression—and bolster privacy protections to check the spread of such surveillance systems" (Roth, 2020).

Human Rights Watch reverse engineered an app used by police in the Xinjiang Province to access a mass surveillance system. The app collected information like a person's fingerprints, facial data, iris scans, blood types, voice samples, and package delivery patterns. The system can alert police to conduct a home visit if a suspicious person uses too much electricity or if they turn their phone off (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

The work of these advocacy groups raises awareness to the conditions of Chinese citizens. If enough people are made aware to these conditions, then governments and oversight bodies can pressure China to undo these injustices.

Conclusion

The Chinese state and private sector work together to censor, monitor, and control billions of people and commit cultural genocide on millions of Uyghur Muslims using a highly sophisticated surveillance infrastructure. This regime will be forever remembered as the embodiment of technology in the wrong hands.

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