

The Future Dystopian Consequences of Facial Recognition Technology

Alvin Sarkadi

University of Maryland Global Campus

10/10/20

Imagine a society where every single decision an individual makes is tracked and monitored. The government has full authority of civilian decision making and even play a role in an individual's social activities. Most people would say this is North Korea, Nazi Germany, or even a summarization of a Black Mirror episode. However, this is China. China is arguably the world's leader in technological advancement and innovation. Many of the most used technological products in the U.S are developed and manufactured in China. However, many people around the world fail to recognize the harsh reality most Chinese individuals endure. Many scholars and journalists analyzing the quality of life in China often label China as a 'tech dystopia'. In China, the government has progressively funded promising tech companies involved with facial recognition and artificial intelligence in the past in order to develop a nationwide tracking and security system. As of 2019, nearly all of China's 1.4 billion citizens are in the facial recognition database. This means that every public camera installed by the Chinese government has questionable and dangerous capabilities. These cameras can determine an individual's criminal status, mood, behaviors, day to day whereabouts, they even identify and alert authorities if an individual is acting suspicious or irrational. China is able to do this by using government issued identification cards as the basis of their facial recognition. In other words, if a Chinese civilian has a government issued identification, cameras are able to cross reference their live photo with the 1.4 billion ID's already in their database. Considering this, the Chinese government is able to have a tight social order on Chinese individuals by using facial recognition. China's push for surveillance and unification has changed the quality of life and has instilled fear for all individuals in China. These government technological initiatives create unprecedented social and economic imbalances, the fear that is created through these imbalances

generate the inability for individuals to discuss progressive change and the inequalities individuals face. It is also evident throughout history that adapting such harsh security on individuals will diminish the standards of quality of life globally.

The Chinese government's initiative in tech security has created significant social issues throughout the region. These initiatives have diminished the quality of life for many individuals in China. Having such imbalances normalized globally will create boiling tensions that would eventually lead to upheaval, violence, and chaos. Furthermore, their motives arguably revolutionized the meaning of governmental scrutiny. China began implementing facial recognition cameras during the start of Xi Jinping's presidential administration. In 2014, President Xi Jinping believed that such implementation would lead to the ideal communist state that past administrations have tried to achieve. This means eradicating crime and building trust between the government and its civilians. Although the government narrates its initiatives in a positive manner, many individuals have faced unprecedented punishment, and live their day to day lives in constant fear.

In China, the region of Xinjiang holds the largest population for the minority ethnic group known as the Uyghurs, these individuals practice the Islamic faith. Xinjiang's population consist of twelve million Uyghur individuals. Over the past decade tensions have risen in this region due to religious and ethnic differences. A handful of attacks and riots in Xinjiang has made the government deem Uyghur individuals as Islamic extremists. Today, over a million Uyghur individuals are in concentration camps to 're-educate' and ultimately change their 'extremist' religious beliefs. The government's capabilities and power allow for the intrusion of

these citizens privacy through their new security initiatives. One journalist living in Xinjiang was interviewed and highlighted their experiences and accumulated knowledge on the oppression that the Uyghur's faced. "Some Uyghur homes have QR codes affixed to the doors, which police can scan with their phones. How is the state using technology? 'When I lived in Xinjiang between 2014 and 2015 that process began as part of what they called the People's War on Terror. So they put a QR code on the door of my apartment in Ürümqi; the local police officer who was responsible for [our building] would come on a regular basis and knock on the door or scan that code. Her smartphone would pull up our pictures, as they were registered to that apartment. Because my partner and I are American they did not view us with suspicion, but my Uyghur friends told me that often during visits the authorities would look under their beds, search computers, search smartphones. If a person wasn't home, they would put a note on their door saying 'you need to come down to the police station' within a period of time and have an interview.'" (Byler, 2019.) Law enforcement's ability to search and gather information on its individuals through technology creates a major conflict that instills pressure between individuals in society and the ruling government. This pressure often erupts into chaos and violence because individuals can no longer ignore and endure harsh rulings. Often throughout history, these rulings are detrimental to quality of life and heavily interfere with trust and peace. In the United States, specifically New York City, stop and frisk was a normalized tactic used by police officers for decades to target minorities. "In **2011**, 685,724 NYPD stops were recorded. 605,328 were innocent (88 percent). 350,743 were Black (53 percent). 223,740 were Latinx (34 percent). 61,805 were white (9 percent).341,581 were aged 14-24 (51 percent)." (Bila, 2019.) The continued scrutiny of minorities within the U.S has led to significant injustices that is often never addressed. Usually, controversial events or policies conspire into protests and riots. Protestors

and individuals hope to instill political progressiveness in order to create change. However, often, no efforts are made by politicians to address such problems. Similarly, in China, there is hardly anything an individual or a collective group of individuals can do to instill political change since China is ruled by a communist party. Through this example, it is evident that democratic countries can hold dictatorial and communistic values. Moreover, having such Artificial intelligence normalized will only give governments (even democratic) more incentive to limit the rights of individuals. The leading countries in the world today, (U.S, Russia, China, United Kingdom) have participated in immoral security efforts to track suspected and wanted individuals. When whistleblowing occurs, governments justify their intrusiveness by claiming their immoral activity was in the best interest of the public and national security. In the new age of tech today, there is nothing stopping governments from adopting such intrusive security since countries have done it repeatedly for years.

Another region that has experienced recent significant social change and imbalances is Hong Kong. Hong Kong resides in mainland China, there are vast political differences that have fueled animosity between the two regions. Although this state can be interpreted as free and democratic, mainland China has arguably had a significant influence on Hong Kong's politics, security, and global identity. Today, Hong Kong does not have its own military budget, instead, China provides a military to Hong Kong whenever they see fit. Moreover, Hong Kong has a limited global identity. In the U.N, Hong Kong is represented as a part of China, there are no exclusive Hong Kong embassies around the world. Moreover, China's adaptation of facial recognition security has only created an increasingly violent relationship between the two states. Recognizing this state as 'democratic' is a far-reaching statement, especially today. Instead, individuals should recognize the dilemma that will arise when implementing such security in a

democratic state. Having this security normalized even in democratic states will allow for the deterioration of individuals rights and will dismantle the structure in which society runs by. Recently, Hong Kong has taken the initiative to install facial recognition security to identify protestors fighting for democratic progressiveness within the region. “The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) has installed around 250 CCTV systems along the land boundary and Hong Kong waters for purposes such as boundary security, anti-illegal immigration and anti-smuggling. The HKPF has also set up temporary CCTV cameras at strategic locations (including places where large crowds may appear) to assess pedestrian flow and movement during festivals and large-scale public events, so as to implement corresponding crowd management measures. Such temporary systems are not equipped with recording function and will be removed after the events. The Immigration Department and the Customs and Excise Department have installed 2,331 and 3,070 CCTV systems at control points respectively, to monitor crowd and vehicle movements at immigration control points and the operation of e-Channels as well as for general security purpose. The Housing Department has installed around 24,000 CCTV cameras at venues such as public rental housing estates and shopping arcades for security and anti-theft purposes.” (Nip, 2019.) Hong Kong’s proposal to implement such security shows the impact facial recognition can have on countries where individuals’ rights are respected by the government. Although Hong Kong differs from many democratic countries today and deals with a power struggle that will possibly never resolve, democratic countries will always have the same capabilities as communistic countries when it comes to implementing intrusive measures. Often, democratic countries that adapt such scrutiny face violent resistance from common individuals in that society. Hong Kong proceeding with their security efforts will only make individuals fearful. Although the point of facial recognition security is to lower crime and make

individuals feel safer, in democratic countries individuals have far different definitions for 'safety.' Instead, individuals in democratic countries often believe safety first derives from the equal balance between individuals and government.

Democratic governments failing to abide by this core value will only result in the future diminishing quality of life globally. For instance, in the United States, controversy was created after Edward Snowden, an ex-CIA systems analyst revealed that the CIA uses software that clearly abridged individual's right to privacy. Edward Snowden highlighted how the CIA used confidential court orders to obtain sensitive personal information from companies such as Verizon, AT&T. He also explains the capabilities one possesses at a CIA desk job, simply having someone's name, email, phone number, I.P address, allows a CIA employee to track internet history logs, phone and SMS logs and GPS whereabouts. This instance shows the normalization of such invasion of privacy dating back to 2013. The government's ability to confine such a large secret from the public shows the immoral standards institutions of government can abide by. Furthermore, instead of the U.S government playing its part, and responding to this matter with care and apology, they instead criminalize those who publicly criticize the government's confidential efforts. Moreover, further security action by democratic governments will make these governments indistinguishable from the societies we deem corrupt today. Allowing these initiatives to happen globally will only result in individuals being miserable and chaotic. Furthermore, these chaotic behaviors will only instill future economic troubles and disasters.

Economic disasters have shaped countries for centuries. Often, countries' economic deficits and growth is how individuals predict the quality of life for individuals in that country. These imbalances and disasters also determine whether common individuals in society are able to rise from their economic class. China's monitoring of its individuals has made it more difficult for individuals to financially thrive under such scrutiny. China is able to do this through their social credit system. This system tracks and identifies individuals' behaviors. The government and the third-party developers of this system have clear set rules for immoral and moral behavior. Committing certain immoral behaviors can result in a lower social score or being placed on a 'blacklist.' This blacklist can ultimately determine an individual's eligibility to buy or rent property, future academic eligibility, and much more. Such instances of immoral behavior include, jaywalking, buying alcoholic beverages, shoplifting and more. "Such behavior, however, is vaguely defined and hence triggers a great deal of legal uncertainties. For instance, "spreading rumors" on the Internet is also deemed "trust-breaking." Other behavior that may not violate any laws or regulations is not spared under the SCS. Rejecting university admission after passing the national exam, for example, is seen as a "trust-breaking" act in Henan Province. In 2016, the State Council issued a Guiding Opinion that seeks to impose joint sanctions by multiple agencies on "serious trust-breaking behavior" in certain priority areas. This is broadly defined to include (1) "behavior that seriously damages people's health, lives and security;" (2) "behavior that seriously damages the market order of fair competition and normal order in society;" (3) "refusal to fulfill legal obligations, thereby seriously affecting the credibility of judicial and administrative organs;" and (4) "refusal to fulfill national defense obligations."(Chen, Lin & Liu, 2020.) Although the goal is to create a higher standard for citizens to live by, the article clearly demonstrates the Chinese governments clear intent to instill

fear rather than actively finding efficient and effective solutions for decreasing bad or criminal behavior. Maybe, a homeless man begging on the street for money may result in him being put on a 'blacklist'. Which can make someone ineligible to buy property, get employed, go to school and have a decent quality of life. This is important to consider because throughout history and even today, economic immobility has been a major conflict for families and individuals globally. An individual's ability to be successful and wealthy are put in jeopardy simply because that individual was raised in a poor family. Moreover, if systems such as the social credit system are adapted in democratic countries today like the U.S, many individuals will fail to conform to the implemented norms, resulting in the inability to create a thriving economy. Besides the social credit system, the funding of facial recognition by the government has allowed the country to fully automate certain lower- and middle-class jobs. "Automation is killing off jobs. At Hema grocery stores, owned by Alibaba, little white robots work the lunch counter in place of waiters. Gym patrons follow steps on a video screen embedded in the floor, no trainer in sight." (Sharma, 2020.) These governmental actions will often cause a large population to face severe consequences. Often individuals that experience pressing economic troubles go through starvation, mental and physical illness and even death. These individuals often resort to crime, violence and resistance since their voices are continuously ignored. Although the Chinese government believes automation in jobs and the observation of every individual's actions will result in an increase in productivity and individual morality, it will also deteriorate an individual's ability to be creative. In addition, the lack of pushing for creativity within society, or governments limiting creative ability, will only create a meaningless and dangerous relationship between individuals in society and government. Conflicted relationships between government

and people throughout history can also help illustrate the future global dilemmas that will occur if such security is normalized.

Often throughout history, governments that have intended to subject its citizens through immoral scrutiny have experienced destructive consequences. These consequences are recognized today to further understand the way in which society should be maintained and how individuals should be treated. Although in this instance technology has progressed and historical time periods cannot fully express the dangers of what is happening today, related circumstances throughout history can suggest the predictable human behavior that will occur when experiencing imposed immoral scrutiny. “In the former German Democratic Republic, for example, the Stasi would spy extensively on its populace, singling out subversive individuals. By utilizing a network of informants, including friends and family members, the Stasi collected the most intimate information on persons of interest, bugging their homes and offices.” (Bila, 2019.) These imbalances put in place eventually made individuals flee to West Germany to pursue a better life. Others fought to unify Germany and remove the political differences between the two states. This historical time period specifically identifies people’s expectations of quality of life at an early point in time. This is important to note because during this time when communism was thriving in Europe, many individuals understood the dangers of such ideology even with propaganda fueling communism. Today, many individuals even in China fail to recognize the dangers of such imposed security. Ignoring such a dilemma overtime will result in the same key issues that led to the German Democratic Republic’s downfall. Moreover, the British acts imposed on American colonies within the 1700’s also shows similar scrutiny that resulted in violence and chaos. The quartering act of 1765 “The act required colonial assemblies to provide

housing, food and drink to British troops stationed in their towns with the purpose of improving living conditions and decreasing the cost to the crown.” (2008.) and the Tea Act of 1773 “The Tea Act of 1773 granted the East India Company exclusive license to import and distribute tea to the American colonies. Tea was sold in America at 10s per pound, half its previous price and less than the cost of smuggled tea. Despite the economic benefit to end consumers of tea, the law damaged the position of independent shippers, smugglers and local shopkeepers.” (Stamp, 2008.) These two acts establish the principles behind individual conformity and ruling class injustices. When injustices are put in place by people of power and bodies of government, individuals of the most common social and economic classes tend to revolt. Throughout history, it is evident that individuals expect their rights to be respected even in states of corrupt rule. However, this also tends to create boiling tensions that will eventually cause significant dilemmas. China actively silences its citizens, eventually, many will eradicate their conformity to pursue a meaningful quality of life. Recognizing this issue globally will ultimately pursue bodies of government to refuse such tech adaptation. Hopefully by doing this, the likelihood of an enjoyable future would be greater.

Some might recognize China’s tech initiative as a positive contribution to society. Many in China that abide by such security principles appreciate China’s motive to keep the country safe. However, such intrusive security creates social and economic immobility. Individuals of the lower class such as the homeless are judged solely based on previous offenses and day to day activities that might be deemed ‘immoral.’ These ‘immoral’ actions can determine whether an individual can change their life and pursue their goals. Recognizing the harsh reality individuals

in China suffer will help illustrate to others the dangers such security has on society, individual quality of life, and social class.

China's funding of tech startups implies future complications that are often not discussed throughout the media. Limiting and changing individuals' behaviors through facial recognition in order to unify and 'protect' society, will only serve as a steppingstone for mass oppression if adopted globally. Today, many companies developing facial recognition technology in democratic countries have free capabilities and lenient restrictions just like in China. Supporting future legislation in the U.S to eradicate such dangerous technology will hopefully inspire countries globally to limit facial recognition to sustain the quality of life for individuals.

References -

. British acts on colonial America. (Stamp 2008..). <https://www.stamp-act-history.com/british-taxation-colonial-america/list-of-british-acts/>

. Byler, D. (2019, November-December). Living in a Ghost World. *New Internationalist*, (522), 26+. Retrieved from [https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.umgc.edu/apps/doc/A604895165/PPGB?u=umd\\_umuc&sid=PPGB&xid=c806fd2c](https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.umgc.edu/apps/doc/A604895165/PPGB?u=umd_umuc&sid=PPGB&xid=c806fd2c)

. Chen Lin Liu, Y. (2020, June 1). "Rules of Trust": The Power and Perils of China's Social Credit MegaProject. *Columbia Journal of Asian Law*. <https://eds-b-ebshost-com.ezproxy.umgc.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=e43dbe5e-f091-4ca7-b880-66cdb305e5ac%40sessionmgr101>

. Bila, N. (2019). The Danger's of Facial Recognition In Our Children's Classroom. *Duke Law and Technology Review*, Retrieved from <https://eds-b-ebshost-com.ezproxy.umgc.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=6f8904c0-f1e0-4ef4-9442-f9f447f07723%40sessionmgr101>

.Nip, P. (2019, June 5). LCQ15: Privacy issues involved in use of CCTV systems with automated facial recognition function. *The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*.  
<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201906/05/P2019060500349.htm>

.Sharma, R. (2020, January 23). How technology saved China's economy. *The Economic Times*.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/how-technology-saved-chinas-economy/articleshow/73542691.cms?from=mdr>

. Stop-and-Frisk Data. (2020, March 11). New York Civil Liberties Union.

<https://www.nyclu.org/en/stop-and-frisk-data>