

**Calculated Survival: Institutional Imperatives Driving China's Surveillance Apparatus**

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### **Abstract**

International relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have undergone a profound shift amid China's emerging superpower status. As the West faces increasing pressure to maintain the global status quo, China is antagonized in mass media and academic works in ways reminiscent of treatment once reserved for the Soviet Union. Recent portrayals of China have then painted an alarming picture of the internal operations of a Nation that has lifted unprecedented numbers of its population from abject poverty and transformed from an agrarian sustenance economy to the workshop of the world and an international force. Specifically, modern China is regularly chastised as a Technocratic Authoritarian Dictatorship with a disregard for human rights. The crackdowns on Uyghur Muslims in Xianjing and development of an Orwellian surveillance system have been widely reported on in the West. This paper aims to contextualize these recent reports in the historic priorities of the Chinese Communist Party. Taking a realist approach and assuming that the Chinese State is incentivized to maintain its control of Chinese society and maximize China's relative power on the international stage, the expansion of Chinese surveillance capabilities will be shown as the natural response to the proliferation of technological capabilities and demands placed on the State by a population living in rapidly changing society. This paper will show how expansions to a technological surveillance apparatus are a continuation of the Chinese Communist Party's preoccupation with stability maintenance and President Xi Jinping's demands for greater control of Chinese society. As advances in technology allow for the development of surveillance and behavioral modification capabilities that are increasingly discreet, this paper argues that the proliferation of the Chinese Surveillance Apparatus will and, from the party's perspective should, continue for the foreseeable future.

*Keywords:* China, Chinese Communist Party, surveillance, stability maintenance

### **Calculated Survival: Institutional Imperatives Driving China's Surveillance Apparatus**

The emergence of China as a key player on the international stage has been arguably the most important event of the 21st century. The GDP of China approached 15 trillion in 2019, more than three times what it was 2008 and making the People's Republic the World's second largest economy ("Historical GDP of China", nd). When considering the future of international affairs, it is now impossible to ignore China and their latent power that accompanies this new prosperity and an enormous population. Understanding China's internal motivations and goals, as well as its plans to achieve those goals, is then foundational to any reasonable assessment of global affairs. This paper is not concerned with moral arguments, values or political theory about the nature of good governance. Following Huntington's attitude that "The most important political distinction among countries is not their form of governance but degree of government", this paper assumes that the continued success of China is dependent on the Chinese Communist party's ability to establish a political system providing "consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness and stability" (Huntington, 2006, p. 1). In a rapidly modernizing China, the CCP faces new challenges in meeting the demands of a changing society, but also has new tools at its disposal. The Party, under the leadership of Xi, has publicly articulated its plans for the future of Chinese society in a general sense. At the 18th National Congress, the Two Centenaries became a popular party line. China officially aims to be a full Xiaolang society, loosely translated as moderately well off, by 2021 and a strong, democratized, civilized, harmonious and modern socialist country by 2049. These goals coincide with Xi's Chinese Dream of revitalizing the nation and restoring national glory (Brown, 2018). From a realist perspective, this is not unique and the Chinese Communist Party will deploy its full strength to maintaining rule and expanding China's relative power on the international stage. Amid

technological developments and unprecedented access to information, the rules of the game for all states and large organizations have changed. This paper will then show that a continuous and aggressive expansion of the Chinese surveillance apparatus will be, and from the party's perspective should be, pursued by the CCP in order to reach its stated goals and maintain power. This development will take place regardless of mass response, and will often be undetected.

To articulate the role the expansion of the Chinese Surveillance apparatus will play going forward, the state of a changing Chinese society will be explored. From this, the Party's response to these changes and its role in society will be shown. These foundations will then allow us to see the current iteration of the Chinese Surveillance apparatus and its goals. Finally, the future of the Chinese Apparatus will be contextualized with its possible impacts on the population and the operations of the State and party.

### **Growing Pains: Societal Effects of China's Historic Modernization**

The moral foundation of the People's Republic has been a dynamic actor in Chinese society. In the early years of the party, Mao emphasized the mass foundations and changing nature of "the people" and "the enemy". While "the people" consisted of all classes and groups opposing the "Japanese imperialists" in the years preceding the Establishment of the People's Republic of China, "the people" later became all working towards socialist construction. "The enemy" was then all who resisted the socialist revolution (Mao, 1957, p. 2). While these internal conflicts climaxed during the Cultural Revolution (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 18) and reformers like Deng initiated a period where internal struggle was no longer a priority, CCP legitimacy has remained dependent on characterizing the party as the embodiment of "the people" and dedicated to the construction of socialism (Brown, 2018, p. 55). The same cannot be said for what that construction actually looks like. Deng's Socialism with Chinese characteristics allowed the

economy of China to liberalize, but corruption within the Party ran wild along with the new growth. Both developments were driving factors in the Tiananmen incident (Brown, 2018, p. 57), leading to the reinstitution of party control on students, workers, intellectuals and private enterprises after a decade long party retreat on public life (Tsou, 1991, pp. 266-277). In the aftermath of Tiananmen, the Party realized its need to consolidate intellectuals, private enterprise, professionals and students into the Party (Tsou, 1991, p. 321). Generally, between Tiananmen and the Xi era, the Party used impressive growth and wealth creation coupled with the historical pillars of the unification of China and defeat of the Japanese as the foundations for party legitimacy (Brown, 2018, p. 60). After Deng's Southern Tour of 1992 initiated an explosion of private economic activity, Jiang allowed entrepreneurs to join the party in 2001 (Dickenson, 2007, pp. 832-833). The addition of the "Three Represents" to the Constitution in 2002 then finalized the integration of private enterprises and private capital into the Chinese socialist construction.

Considering these rapidly changing definitions of morality and the official line of the party, the moral confusion of the Chinese people is unsurprising. The party lauds communist principles and envisions a socialist future that is often at odds with the market reforms of the post-Mao Era (Brown, 2018, p. 75). These contradictions have become apparent in very public ways. The removal of Politburo member Bo Xilai after his wife murdered an English businessman sticks out (Brown, 2018, p. 83). Less prominent, but maybe even more indicative of the current situation is a crack down on leftists. Students, union members and advocates were detained in 2019 for supporting workers in a Jasic Technology factory who were themselves arrested for attempted unionization. In an era where Xi hails Marx as the "greatest thinker of modern times" this is unsustainable (Y. Yang, 2019). Similarly contradictory are the high levels

of inequality. The attitudes of the population reflect their daily experience, and are consequently jaded. China is experiencing a crisis of trust. A 2013 study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences showed that 90% of Chinese believe that “anyone who is honest and trustworthy in modern China is at a disadvantage”(Strittmatter, 2019, p. 163). Zhang Zheng, a Professor at Peking University, Faculty Party Secretary and advisor to party on the emerging Social Credit Credit system makes a similar observation claiming, “China is experiencing a crisis of trust. No one trusts anyone. Our society is still immature, and our markets are chaotic” (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 163). In an era where private entrepreneurs have accumulated huge fortunes, often through blatantly ignoring regulations (Wang, 2013, p. 370), petitioners leverage the insecurities of local governments to get concessions and sometimes payouts (D. Yang, 2018), and low paid public servants wear expensive watches, this is not surprising. Living among these contradictions does more than effect the social beliefs of Chinese citizens; it enters into their conceptions of what is politically desirable. A 2018 study by Norwegian researchers revealed that the percent of Chinese holding libertarian political views, generally opposing redistribution and accepting inequality as the natural order, is higher than in America (Strittmatter, 2018, p. 185). Amid these attitudes, public unrest by villagers, workers and the emerging middle class concerned with land, labor and environmental issues is natural and pose very real threats to the current regime (Perry, 2019, p. 7).

### ***Call to Action: Party Response to New Demands in the Xi Era***

Xi is undoubtedly aware of the contradictions in modern Chinese Society and the dangers that accompany them. In fact he has spoken to them in the context the fallen USSR, claiming “To dismiss the history of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party, to dismiss Lenin and Stalin, is to engage in historic nihilism, and it confuses our thoughts and undermines the

Party's organizations on all levels" (Strittmatter, 2018, p. 117). Kerry Brown illustrates the lessons the party learned from the post Soviet realignment, including the importance of maintaining control of the military, placing economic reforms before political ones and enforcing ideology's role as more than rhetoric (Brown, 2018, p. 126). While lessons may have been learned from the fall of the Soviets, the true deviation from the party's relatively stable view of itself as the enabler of a more prosperous China came with the ascendance of Xi Jinping in 2012 (Brown, 2018, p. 128). Notably his ascension finalized a deviation from the party's view of itself as the enabler of a more prosperous China by emphasizing the importance of an ideologically coherent party of disciplined public servants (Brown, 2018, pp. 128-129). The actions of the party under Xi have embodied the belief that the future of the Party, and in their view the future of China itself, is dependent on ideological principles and an extensive party establishing its presence in the lives of all China's people. The recent resurgence of public party propaganda illustrates the visions of Xi, and while old school propaganda may not be effective, the reminder that the party has the ability to dominate public life in ways no other actor can is a powerful message (Strittmatter, 2018, p. 33). With the inclusion of Xi Jinping Thought into the party constitution in 2018, Xi can now associate his thoughts and authority with that of an increasingly prominent party (Blanchard, 2018).

### **Stability Maintenance: A Continued Priority**

While the efforts by Xi are extensive, they should be viewed as a continuation of a historic preoccupation with stability maintenance that intensified following the Tiananmen crisis (D. Yang, 2018). For brevity, the historic development of the stability maintenance regime will be characterized as a transition from a reliance of strike hard campaigns to a technocratic comprehensive management system for the creation of a harmonious society (D. Yang, 2018).

The stability maintenance regime has then relied on the expansion of the party into the courts, an expanding national security state and censorship of public opinion. But more generally, the overriding motivations of achieving a harmonious society have effected the party's decisions on all fronts in the attempt to limit collective action (King et al., 2013, p. 2). According to Xi, "China now faces the most complicated internal and external factors in [its] history" (Cheung, 2016). These factors then threaten China from a national security perspective through their potential for encouraging "Invasion, subversion, and splittism", "Undermining of reforms, economic development, and stability", and "Western pushes for regime change" (Cheung, 2016). Interestingly, it is hard to spot the difference between the national security goals of China and the goals of the stability maintenance regime.

### ***Institutional Tools for Stability Maintenance***

The similarities between the national security and stability maintenance priorities of China show the extent the party is aware of its own fragility and committed to maintaining the current regime. Political security, emphasizing regime survival, is the core goal of the recently formed and Xi dominated National Security Commission (Ji, 2016, p. 179). The ability for the party to physically manage the population is clear. Due to party domination in the CPLAC and subsequent lack of judicial independence, specifically in cases where major incidents presented the potential for collective unrest, enables the party's agenda of maintaining stability independent of legal restrictions (D. Yang, 2016). In cases of serious unrest, the fact that China spends more on internal security than external security and Xi's complete consolidation of the People's Armed Police under himself in 2018 firmly places the management of any serious, internal mass movements directly under his control ("People Armed Police", n.d.). This reflects lessons learned from the Tiananmen Crisis, where disagreement at the highest levels contributed



to the escalation of protests, and currently no one questions that it is Xi in control. It is logical to conclude that that party's preoccupation with stability is not limited to its relation to the masses. Previous mass movements have not just been driven by a dissatisfied public, and key stakeholders in Chinese society, including government and military officials, economic leaders and intellectuals, have often played significant roles.

Xi has consolidated the party's control of these players, largely utilizing the renewed emphasis on ideology and anti-corruption as justification. A key part of this is the dominance by party members at top levels of each of these groups and the control the party has over its members. Party members dominate the upper levels of the state bureaucracy. 93% of the 508,025 leading cadres and 100% gaoji ganbu level cadres are members of the party (Brodsgaard, 2012, p. 74). Military reforms under Xi have led to greater personal and party oversight with legal authority moving to the Xi controlled CMC Political and Legal Affairs Commission and military party discipline being overseen by the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission (Wuthnow and Saunders, 2017, p. 12). More generally, reforms to the PLA have reinforced the Leninist roots of the PLA as a Party army and emphasized loyal, dogmatic party members in positions of military authority (Wuthnow and Saunders, 33). These trends reveal a mechanism making party membership a prerequisite for promotion inside the state (Brodsgaard, 2012, p. 74).

Recent years have been similarly marked by expansion of the party into more insulated segments of society. Xi has stressed the development of party bodies inside private companies (McGregor, 2015). By 2016, 68% of private companies and 70% of foreign companies had internal party committees. These committees are increasingly demanding involvement in major business decisions (McGregor, 2015). Regulators leverage their position to acquire compliance

by major business while prominent entrepreneurs are integrated as party members and tactically go out of their way to praise the party (McGregor, 2015). Control of intellectuals by the party has been increased in recent years by centralizing stated funding to universities, particularly elite universities, and creating a mutually beneficial relationship between the state and universities (Perry, 2019, p. 9). For scholars, this control is exerted through party distribution of grants in the social sciences and humanities and Party committees controlling university administration (Perry, 2019, pp. 14 -15).

### ***Stability Maintenance: Methods of Control***

The party's ability to integrate itself into these structures enables a level of control, on an individual and systemic basis, that surpasses even the normal liberties the party can take in the judicial process with the general population. Xi's increased emphasis of ideological purity, which covers corruption as well as lack of loyalty, has relied on the rise of the Central Commission on Discipline Inspection. This body employs a shuanggui disciplinary system that operates outside the criminal justice system and reserves the right to summon, and in practice kidnap, any party member for arbitrary imprisonment that at times involves torture. This detainment often lasts until an official confesses to corruption or disciplinary violations ("Special Measures", 2017). While this system is not an official part of the Chinese criminal justice system, evidence from CCDI interrogations are often co opted by prosecutors and judges, who are themselves often party members, for official indictment ("Special Measures", 2017). The threat of the system is leveraged to maintain discipline in party members regardless of rank, and considering the previously mentioned extension of the party into all sectors of elite Chinese society, is extremely effective in maintaining the party line in almost all key areas ("Special Measures", 2017). This system is often justified inside China as a special measure to address

corruption, cementing the relationship between increased control, Xi's expansion of the party into all segments of society and the renewed emphasis Xi has placed on fighting corruption and ideological purity ("Special Measures", 2017).

### **Surveillance and Stability Maintenance**

Considering the established role of stability maintenance and Xi's mechanisms for managing behavior in the masses through consolidated control of the PAP and CPLAC, and elite society through the expansion of the party and shuanggui disciplinary system, the importance of surveillance becomes apparent. Generally, having the mechanisms to control the population and key players is a crucial part to maintaining stability, but the effectiveness of such a system is entirely dependent on information. Arbitrary crackdowns can have disastrous effects for the regime, especially if the population feels that they are unwarranted. A key part to the stability maintenance regime, and the continued survival of the CCP, is the challenge of making efforts that guarantee ongoing stability as unobtrusive as possible. By examining China's current surveillance apparatus, and postulating on what that apparatus might become, it will become apparent that the current success of the CCP is dependent on an already expansive surveillance system. It will then be argued that from the perspective of the current Chinese State, this system should and will be expanded and improved to create an invisible apparatus capable of realizing the goals of stability maintenance as the CCP pursues its ambitious goals for a revitalized China.

The current Chinese surveillance apparatus is a foundational, and often overlooked, component of the CCP's overriding preoccupation with stability. Traditionally, the system relied on household registration policies and personal archives (Liang et al., 2018). Underpinning the operations of the new system is a renewed emphasis on the native development of key strategic technologies, officially initiated by the 2006-2020 Medium and Long Term Science and

Technology Development Plan (Cheung, 2016, p. 4), and the collaboration between state and private actors (Liang et al., 2018). The state has thus demonstrated a willingness to invest heavily in critical technological sectors and foster innovation (Cheung, 2016, p. 4).

### ***Leveraging New Technology in the Stability Maintenance Regime***

The current surveillance system relies on the mass collection of data through the homegrown technological sector and contradicts optimistic predictions that the Internet would be a catalyst for a democratic China (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 39). The Chinese censorship apparatus is often referenced in the context of the stability maintenance regime. Previous examinations have revealed the ability for the state to effectively set the terms of online discourse and limit horizontal associations that may lead to collective action while allowing criticisms of the regime (King et al., 2013). The key part of this effort is limiting interventions, thus giving the illusion of relative freedom to hide the extent of the system, but a prerequisite is party access to all online activity. State control of Internet infrastructure gives extensive access to the activity of each citizen and information exchanged between China and the outside world. The party also has complete control of the right to operate within China and the clear cooperation of major social networking sites (King et al., 2013), giving it access to the data collection efforts that characterize social media and internet content providers in all states. By only allowing native companies to operate in these spaces, the party guarantees its access. The quick removal of unacceptable speech shows the effectiveness of this monitoring and depth of cooperation by major players (King et al., 2013). The current apparatus takes advantage of these resources and more. Considering that party membership among elite technology entrepreneurs is widespread, the previously mentioned expansion of the party into private business, and extensive state funding into emerging technologies that makes participating in the development of surveillance

capabilities a lucrative venture, the day to day decision making processes of private companies are increasingly dictated by, and beneficial to, the party.

So what does the current system look like for the masses of Chinese society? While the majority of people are not a threat to the regime individually, the consolidation of Internet authority by the party began anew in 2013. Sites like weibo, which before this were boards for free speech and liberal activism, were subdued by 2013 restrictions making any post upsetting the social order and shared more than 500 times or viewed more than 5000 times punishable by up to 3 years in prison. While this limits dangerous content in general, party access to all online activity creates an environment where the party can identify its enemies by reading weibo or weChat (Strittmatter, 2019, pp. 44-46). This access and authority is simply the tip of the iceberg. Emerging technologies have allowed the party to examine the lives of its citizens, individually and collectively, in ways unimaginable just a decade ago. The priority China has placed on the domestic innovation in artificial intelligence and big data has paid off. The stability maintenance regime has integrated an extensive system of surveillance cameras, exceeding 176 million in 2016, into A.I. powered networks. These systems already have the ability to recognize and track individuals, make more general conclusions about what type of people will be where at a given time and predict the movements of crowds (Strittmatter, 2019, pp.100-102). Other systems, including smart city pilot projects, have led smaller cities to partner with technology companies for improved public services through big data and mapping of behavior in public spaces (Liang et al., 2018). The previously mentioned expansion of the party into the judicial system has enabled China to operate on the cutting edge of deployment of these new, and potentially problematic, technologies. Unsurprisingly, the largest investor in the private enterprises behind these developments is the State security apparatus (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 102). It should also be

noted that in many cases, the use of these new technologies is unnecessary. Considering the prevalence of Alipay and WeChat, the tracking technology inherent in basically any application or mobile device, and party access to the data of these companies, the Party can know where anyone is, who they are with, what they are saying and what they are buying at any time. This ability is even more exaggerated for party members, as the introduction of a mandatory app, *Xuexi Qiangguo*, requires a daily quota of indoctrination in the newest official line of CCP doctrine while giving the party root privileges. The party then has unmitigated access to every party member's personal phone (Dotson, 2019).

### ***Surveillance Statism: Theoretical Context***

While the details of the current apparatus are alarming, it should be noted the emergence of these capabilities is neither isolated to China nor complete. In short, theoretical works and pilot programs inside of China can give a clear understanding of the future capabilities that come with new technological breakthroughs. The complete picture comes from viewing these capabilities in the context of the CCP's motivations. Harvard Professor Shoshanna Zuboff has written an extensive text on the surveillance capabilities that accompany our newest gadgets. Zuboff illustrates the principles of how emerging technologies serve the interests of the institutions that deploy them, and how institutional imperatives dictate the use of these new technologies for certain ends. Focusing on this mechanism inside of liberal, capitalist systems like, she lays out some general principles that will prove transferable to the emerging surveillance apparatus in China. Generally Western corporations have institutional imperatives to transition from guaranteed levels of performance to guaranteed outcomes for maximal profit (Zuboff, 2020, p. 195). Technological integration, access to big data and artificial intelligence have enabled the development of algorithms designed to produce increasing amounts of certainty

about consumers, with an end goal of making the future for the sake of predicting it (Zuboff, 2020, p. 195). This mindset emerges from a technocratic belief in radical behaviorism, which claims that all behavior is the result of learned associations between a stimulus and response. The guaranteed outcomes the system seeks are then enabled by the ability to shape individual behavior through external stimulus (Zuboff, 2020, p. 331). From this perspective, all human behavior can be scientifically regulated with enough data, provided by an ever-expanding collection apparatus, and the ability to inject stimuli (Zuboff, 2020, p. 481). Recent technological developments, such as wearables and internet of things connected devices and augmented reality products, mark the next step of rendering human experience as data for use by the apparatus and introducing external stimuli (Zuboff, 2020, p. 199). A key difference between this collection and previous targeted surveillance technologies is the tendency for big data technologies to collect data indiscriminately, and to the greatest extent possible to provide the raw material needed for the behavioral modification apparatus (Liang et al., 2018). The success of these systems is dependent on their natural integration, and in an ideal implementation there is an inherent lack of awareness by those operating within the apparatus (Zuboff, 2020, p. 236). As the ability to collect data and insert stimuli increases, any organization with the ability to perform this type of behavioral modification has an institutional imperative to use them for its own ends.

### **Implementation: Surveillance in Practice**

While the previously mentioned theory may seem alarmist and unrealistic, an examination of Chinese pilot programs reveals an implementation of new technologies for behavioral modification that has uncanny similarities to Zuboff's analysis, but guided by the CCP's institutional prioritization of maintaining stability and constructing a harmonious society

amid current challenges. It appears that guaranteed outcomes through behavioral modification is the next great goal of the Chinese stability maintenance regime.

### ***The Social Credit System***

The main scholarship on the future of the Chinese surveillance state focuses on the development of the social credit system as the key component of future Chinese surveillance (Liang et al., 2018). In 2014, the Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System outlined the desire to deploy a Social Credit system that takes advantage of new technologies to generate a credit system grounded in financial, commercial and social activities by 2020 (Liang et al., 2018). Underpinning these efforts is the construction of multiple national data platforms, most prominently the National Credit Information Sharing Platform being developed by the NDRC (Liang et al., 2018). This dataset is provided by a variety of actors, and the eventual deployment of the system anticipates the aggregation of data to create a reward and punishment mechanism, taken as the external stimulus detailed by Zuboff, for citizens, firms, organizations and government agencies (Liang et al., 2018). This is just another aspect of Xi's determination to expand the authority of the party. On an individual level, China has already used this system on a national basis to ban 23 million people for buying plane and train tickets in 2019 (Kuo, 2020). However, a significant and even driving force behind the system, is the stated desire to reign in entrepreneurs and private enterprises, corrupt officials, and intellectuals participating in questionable practices and threatening social legitimacy.

Though many dystopian claims are made about the deployment of the social credit system in China as the next development of the surveillance apparatus, this paper argues that the deployment of the system will mirror the party's established preoccupation with stability maintenance just as the development of similarly robust systems will and are being integrated for



corporate interests and maximal profit in the liberal western states sounding the alarm (Zuboff, 2020, p. 195). The need for pure speculation on what this system will look like is unnecessary, since pilot projects in dozens of small cities have already deployed the system. Officials are blunt when they outline their goals for the new systems. We have already discussed the distrust that permeates Chinese society. This crisis of belief is again largely a product of the rapid market development in China, and the accompanying unregulated pursuit of profits by entrepreneurs, political corruption, and inequality in a socialist nation with excessive riches for some, but a per capita GDP that is 65th in the world. As the CCP prioritizes the continued growth of a market economy that is dependent on trust, the goal of the Social Credit System is to maintain order by assigning a score to someone's trustworthiness (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 120). Similar systems already exist in the west, namely through credit scores and criminal records, but the Chinese conception of trustworthiness aims to incorporate social behavior and morals in a unique manner (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 120).

### ***Case Study 1: Rongcheng and the Social Credit System***

The system implemented in the city of Rongcheng shows what the theoretical system of behavioral modification through ubiquitous data collection and external stimuli looks like when it is adjusted to fulfill the needs of the CCP under normal circumstances. Here, citizens are rewarded for socially desirable behavior, such as helping the elderly, hosting public events and helping children with their homework, and are punished for detrimental behavior, minimally for breaking traffic laws (Strittmatter, 2019, pp. 121-122), and heavily for illegal religious activities, petitioning authorities and disruptive online comments (Strittmatter, 2019, pp. 127). The system will use whatever data it can acquire, which even in this early stage is extensive. When a person or organization's score falls below a certain threshold, they are added to a black list and the

public is informed through billboards (Strittmatter, 2019, pp. 121). Residents have detailed the effectiveness of the system, and people with low scores are treated as social pariahs by some (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 122). Rewards for a high score extend beyond social prestige, as these “good citizens” have access to easy credit among other privileges (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 123), while citizens with low scores can be barred from government jobs, insurance and credit, restricted in their travel, denied access to elite schools and targeted for significant surveillance (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 123). Similar scores are calculated for companies and government agencies. At these levels, companies with low scores can be excluded from public contracts and supporters of the system claim they are valuable tools for public regulation (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 123). It should be noted that it is the party who decides what behavior, and thus who, is and is not trustworthy despite the prominence of the system, some people in Rongcheng are not even aware of its deployment (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 127). This latter point is a success of the system. Another implementation of the system is Sesame Credit, a subsidiary of AliPay that assigns social credit scores often displayed on Baihe dating profiles (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 126).

While supporters have correctly pointed out that this system will help many poor Chinese gain access to credit they did not have access to before, some worry that politically undesirable behavior affects the scores (Strittmatter, 2019, p. 126). In the context of the Chinese stability maintenance preoccupation, it is clear that the latter, along with the idealistic goals about restoring trust in the market and society, is the point. The system is on its way to deployment, as travel restrictions have already been implemented for citizens, and businesses are already being rewarded for good social credit with expedited and less costly tax filings, customs fee waivers and low-interest loans, and punished with customs penalties and frequent audits (Sutherland, 2020).

### ***Goals for Mass Society***

In the words of XI, the goal of the system is, “to make everything convenient for the trustworthy, and ensure the untrustworthy cannot move a single step” (Sutherland, 2020). In a broader sense, it is a clear attempt by the party to leverage its newfound surveillance capabilities into Xi’s overriding commitment to reinstituting party control over society inside the broader agenda of stability maintenance (Creemers, 2018). However, while the example of Rongchen shows how the system could be deployed under the best of circumstances, it is also worthwhile to consider more extreme cases. Specifically, considering that the expanding surveillance apparatus is at its core a mechanism for preserving stability, its deployment in areas where stability is most fragile should be examined. Historically, the CCP portrayed itself as embracing ethnic minorities as members of a larger family of Chinese nationalities (Stroup, 2019). But, violence between Han Chinese and ethnic minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang cast doubt on this social cohesion and presented a challenge to the stability maintenance regime (Stroup, 2019). Consequently, viewing the response of the party in these regions, with specific attention to expansions to surveillance and behavioral modification, is valuable when considering how the CCP will use its new tools when faced with future threats to its rule. Unsurprisingly, Xi’s preoccupation with stability maintenance extends to these minority groups and he has connected China’s survival to the management of ethnic policy (Strout, 2019).

### ***Case Study 2: Xinjiang and Deployment When Threatened***

In pursuit of a harmonious society, the CCP has placed an emphasis on restricting minority ethnic expression as a safeguard against ideologies the party believes are shaped by religious extremism, foreign interference and can potentially lead to social unrest (Stroup, 2019). Party officials tout the response in Xinjiang, targeting Uyghur Muslims, as an example for other

provinces to learn from (Stroup, 2019). A core part of this effort is reeducation camps, created for the purpose of indoctrinating Uyghurs. These camps are operated outside of the legal system and hold hundreds of thousands of detainees, often without trial or charges (“Xinjiang re-education camps”, nd). These camps serve a coercive function when combined with the cutting surveillance system implemented throughout the province. In the city of Kashgar, a surveillance system developed by a state run defense enterprise applies military style systems to civilian public security (Buckley and Mozur, 2019). Specifically designed to target Muslims, the system uses a system of cameras, data collected at checkpoints, and information gathered by police and informants to track and analyze individual behavior while predicting potential crime, violence and protest (Buckley and Mozur, 2019). Behaviors like stopping the use of a smartphones, not using the front door at your home, or refueling someone else’s car can cause someone to be flagged. Once identified as a potential threat, the system can alert authorities whenever someone leaves their neighborhood using extensive databases and cameras (Buckley and Mozur, 2019). Unlike the social credit system, the perceived need for immediate deployment by the party, open support for Sincicization and technological limitations has created an environment where the intentions and presence of the system are not hidden. Authorities in the region have systemically collected biological data from residents, and some residents are forced to install an app giving authorities root access to their devices (Buckley and Mozur, 2019). Checkpoints, heavy police presence, open observation and the threat of being put in a reeducation camp serve a coercive stimuli to eliminate behavior seen as dangerous by the party. Generally, it is a crude implementation of the behavioral modification apparatus.

## Conclusion

The Social Credit system and system deployed in Xinjiang are both attempts to leverage new technologies for the overriding goal of stability maintenance. The Party's belief in the urgency of the situation in the Xinjiang and open support for Sinicization, as well as the limited threat Uyghur dissatisfaction brings to the regime's survival as a whole, makes it possible to exert greater control through a more aggressive and visible approach. The limited visibility and deployment of the social credit system then reflects the belief that the regulation of most Chinese behavior is not as urgent, and the system may not be needed currently. It seems that the regime is willing to impose a higher level of restriction in places it feels it is necessary, but does not view obvious interference as politically advantageous where it is not needed. This makes sense with current technological limitations, but this distinction will become unnecessary when advances in capabilities allow for the deployment of less intrusive external stimuli and surveillance. The party has demonstrated a desire for the unmitigated expansion of its authority and the discreet system outlined by Zuboff eliminates the current tradeoffs with improving technology.

Going forward, the codependent existence of the surveillance apparatus and stability maintenance regime suggests that many of the problems that accompany the existing stability maintenance regime will persist as the surveillance state expands and is integrated into society. Ranking localities on their ability to maintain stability is a key part of the central authorities' evaluation of lower levels and often leads to questionable activities including hiring private security and black jails (D. Yang, 2018). It is likely that the concern with meeting the central authorities expectations will persist on lower levels, incentivizing localities to push for extensive surveillance and high social credit scores among their populations. In best case, this could mean providing for citizens to encourage their eager participation in society and subsequently cause

higher social credit scores, but more nefarious outcomes, such as exporting undesirable social elements or black jails, could also occur (D. Yang, 2018). More generally, the stability maintenance regime has benefited the elites in society as inequality rises. This is a self-perpetuating mechanism, as rising inequality or restrictions cause more grievances among the poor or minority ethnic groups, necessitating further expansions to a system that typically protects elites (D. Yang, 2018). This is a system that then leads to suppressed grievances and strategic deployment of unrest, not stability (D. Yang, 2018).

The question about the emerging surveillance capabilities of China is to what end they will be deployed. The system seems likely to perpetuate the previously mentioned cycle if deployed as an aggressive tool to manage individual behavior. Specifically, if the social credit system and underlying surveillance are used for mass behavioral modification and to reinforce existing structures, the existence and expansion of bottled up grievances will persist. However the tendency for the surveillance and behavior modification apparatus to operate without the awareness of its targets could create a society that is patently ridiculous but leaves its subjects unaware of the mechanisms perpetuating the absurdity (Zuboff, 2020). Similarly concerning is the CCP's lack of concern for civil liberties in building the "harmonious society", currently on display in Xinjiang (Strout, 2019), and lack of constitutional checks on the party (Xin, 2017). The extension of the social credit system into business and the state itself offers some hope that the surveillance apparatus could be used in more benevolent ways. Generally, the party could leverage these tools to punish bad actors in business and government to encourage beneficial practices while limiting the use on the individual level to address exorbitantly bad behavior. However, this would antagonize an increasingly important segment of Chinese Society. The likely outcome is then somewhere in the middle, and the Party's record is not particularly

reassuring. What is not up for debate is the fact that the Chinese surveillance state is increasingly establishing the party, with Xi at its head, as dominant over all aspects of society. This means the prioritization of stability maintenance will continue. The direction of China remains in the hands of the party, and the new tools strengthen this control as the CCP pursues its overriding goals of continued economic development and international prestige. Considering the role increasing surveillance can play in maintaining stability and allowing for the development of Chinese economic and military power, the continued development of the surveillance apparatus is inevitable.

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