

Two articles on
The Orwellian Society of China

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Orwell has Arrived Part One

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Recently, China's Communist Party Congress announced President Xi Jinping's two five-year terms had been extended. In so doing, the Party is most likely moving toward indefinite term limits for this President. Some commentators have related this situation to the life-long tenure of Mao Zedong and the associated calamities that befell China during Mao's reign, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

I do not believe such a direct comparison is valid. Mao was a demented and heartless killer. Xi is an even natured pragmatist, even a pleasant person in a social setting and in dealing with his job.

That said, make no mistake. Xi is ambitious for himself, his political party, and his country. China's economic initiatives and military expansions are taking place in many parts of the world because of Xi's view of what, in his vision, China has a right to be.

Because of President Trump abandoning America's traditional leadership roles in trade agreements and its withdrawal from climate accords, China is replacing Uncle Sam's now vacant places of foreign leadership. By not being a member of these international forums, America has no way of influencing their deliberations.

Since Xi's ascension in 2013, he has been consolidating his power and eliminating his rivals. At the same time, he is taking on China's deep-seated internal corruption problem. He has also been curtailing the already limited freedoms of China's citizens.

N is for No!

The Chinese government has censored the letter 'N' as well as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*. The letter "N?" Yes, apparently the letter *N* is not to be used because it will prevent "expressing dissent mathematically: $N > 2$, with *N* being the number of Mr. Xi's terms in office."¹ Whew! And we thought Trump was anal about criticism.

Social Credits and the Trust Score

To gain a sense of the events taking place in China, consider its Social Credit system, which is in the process of being implemented in 30 cities.² The system will consist of a file on each Chinese citizen. Each file will contain information on a citizen's purchases, comments about China, social relationships, movements around streets, medical profiles, ordering food at restaurants, educational background, hailing a cab, and so on.

This data will be crunched by software that comes up with a "trust score" for a citizen. The algorithm assigns a value ranging from 350 to 950. If a person scores a high number, the person is given preference for such things as seats on trains and airplanes, loans for homes, smaller deposits for making reservations, etc. Playing video games will lower the score.

Even more Orwellian, a person's trust score is affected by the trust scores of a person's friends. So, if a citizen hangs-out with the wrong crowd, the person's trust score drops. This situation will surely lead to the stratification of social relationships. Perhaps people will

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-proposes-removing-2-term-limit-for-president/2018/02/25/b86dfed6-1a0a-11e8-930c-45838ad0d77a_story.html?utm_term=.1d4c0dc3afcc.

² *The Week*, February 9, 2018, 11.

surreptitiously try to discover others' trust score in order to avoid jeopardizing their own.
(Alternately: "I'll show you mine, if you'll show me yours.")

Chinese citizen: Don't run that red light! Give to charity. Take care of your parents. Say nothing that criticizes the Communist Party. If you conform, you will have a better chance of obtaining a visa to travel and be given access to better schools for yourself and your children. If you do not adhere to this evolving Orwellian society, you will go to the back of the queue in most aspects of your life.

The second piece to this article will provide more details on China's Orwellian society.

Orwell has Arrived Part Two

March 16, 2018

The second part to this series continues the discussion of China's evolving Social Credit and Trust Score systems.

How will this massive amount of data about a Chinese citizen be captured? By smartphones, surveillance cameras, and the ongoing capturing of data from China's already nearly captured citizenry. But smartphones are the key for the data collection efforts.

Many Chinese citizens do not use cash very much, but rely on their phones for most of their transactions for goods and services. China makes about \$5.5 trillion annually in mobile sales compared with the United States' \$112 billion.

With GPS now a common feature of smartphones, data can be captured about a person's movements. In addition, the many apps available today store information on appointments, pictures, text messages, and video streams. You name it, and there's an app for it.

China is also increasing its use of facial recognition apps to pay for a service, open security gates, even unlock doors.

In fairness, China can use these systems to enhance credit checks, just as the U.S. does with credit-checking agencies. And like the U.S., the systems can be used to keep track and possibly apprehend law-breakers.

Nonetheless, this writer finds the pervasiveness of the Social Credit and Trust Score systems into individual lives of citizens to be chilling. All for what? Not for China itself, but for the Communist Party of China.

Subsequent articles about China will address other aspects of the country's structure and strategies (The Communist Party itself; freezing-out America's companies; Taiwan; off-shore islands, and others). For now, I close this article with a quote about China's dealing with its northwest region of Xinjiang, an area seeking separation from China.³

Granted, Xinjiang is populated with a hostile Muslim Uighur minority population. So, perhaps the close monitoring of a potential deadly opponent is prudent. My point is the efficacy of the use of digital surveillance systems that are taking place in China. As quoted in *The Week*, February 9, 2018, 11:

“(In certain areas) almost every aspect of daily life is monitored. Surveillance cameras read all license plates and alert police to the presence of out-of-region cars. Authorities use hand-held devices to search smartphones for banned encrypted-chat apps and politically suspect videos. The police checkpoints that dot the city are equipped with machines that can scan ID card faces and eyeballs. Anyone who buys a knife---which can be used in a terrorist attack---must have ID details etched by laser on the blade.”

Who are we to judge the threat the Uighurs pose to Chinese security and the Chinese measures to combat them? Again, the point of this article is the degree to which the Chinese are evolving their society into a semblance of an Orwellian state.

³ *The Week*, February 9, 2018, 11.

Should we care? In the short run, we can lament for the Chinese citizen, but it is not the function of the United States to “bring democracy” to China. We are coming to realize China, Russia, Afghanistan, etc. do not want America’s views of capitalism and democracy.

China, through the Communist Party, is undertaking these actions because of its own insecurity, its fear of itself, and its illegitimate origin and existence.

Risking a Chicken Little, “The Sky is Falling” syndrome, let us Americans be on guard about the encroaching power of the smartphone, digital surveillance, and their big data, big brother potential. We are a long way from what China is doing. Let’s maintain that distance.