

The Greatest Enemy of Freedom in America Is Big Tech

Just recently a friend passed me the link to [this](#). I don't recommend reading it before you go to bed tonight.

We've known that since 2014, the Chinese have been building up what is being called a *social credit system*. It is structurally similar to our financial credit system but will monitor far more than financial behavior.

The Chinese system comes straight out of the most dystopian science fiction imaginable!

How it works: each citizen is given a social credit score based on their speech, behavior, and spending patterns. The technology-enabled system is still piecemeal, but expected to be finished and in place before the end of 2020.

This is not a theory. You can [look for yourself](#). (You'll need your browser's translate option, obviously.)

The Chinese people will be ranked on their trustworthiness. What determines their ranking will include spending patterns including whether they buy Chinese-made products and whether they pay bills on time, their driving record if they own a vehicle, what they post their own social media, and especially if they criticize the government. Even if they spend "too much time" playing video games.

All these behaviors will be known because of data sharing across governmental and corporate platforms, and from facial recognition technology.

Surveillance cams already monitor offline behavior patterns including who people are seen with, whether they sweep the sidewalks in front of their places of residence or stores,

whether they smoke in nondesignated areas, if they jaywalk, etc.

Social credit scores run from 850 to 300, measuring five subcategories: social connections, consumptive behavior, security, wealth, and compliance with rules. Those with high scores are considered trustworthy. They can get discounts on energy bills. They can get better mortgages and better interest rates at banks. They can travel and obtain accommodations more easily. Their children can get into better schools.

Those with low credit scores are deemed untrustworthy. Their banking options are limited, they can be prevented from buying property, and will have trouble even obtaining high-speed Internet.

Social credit scores are matters of public record. The finished system will maintain two lists: the blacklist and the red list (their equivalent of a "white-list"). Those blacklisted have already been publicly shamed, e.g., their faces shown on a map on WeChat, the largest messaging app in China with over 850 million users.

One's social credit score thus becomes one's value as a person in Chinese society.

Chinese technology corporations and subsidiaries are actively at work developing the infrastructure for the nationwide system. Examples include China Rapid Finance, a partner of the Chinese social network leviathan Tencent, and Sesame Credit, the financial subsidiary of Chinese tech giant Alibaba which is also the dominant online shopping platform. There are others. Eight pilot programs are up and running, closely monitored by Beijing. All have already gathered huge quantities of information on China's 1.4 billion people. The first owns above-mentioned WeChat. The second runs AliPay, the most widely used online bill payment service in the country.

From the article linked above: *The ultimate goal is to “allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step,” according to the Chinese government.*

The Chinese social credit system punishes known Evangelical Christians, obviously, since China is still officially atheist. It also punishes Tibetan Buddhists and members of other undesired groups such as the Falun Gong.

One of the main sources of the unrest in Hong Kong is acute discomfort with the spread of this kind of system there under the watch of Beijing-sympathetic leader Carrie Lam. Hong Kong has a tradition of freedom and free enterprise. Mainland China is also still technically Communist. Back in 1997, via international agreement, Hong Kong was pulled in under Beijing. Anyone with his eyes open could have seen something like this coming.

The Chinese social credit system is a recipe for corporate-technocratic police-statism at a level never previously achieved! One wonders if Huxley or Orwell could have imagined it!

What is truly unnerving is that around 80 percent of Chinese citizens approve of the system! Not that they've been afforded much choice, as those who disapprove are doubtless afraid to say so!

But that's *China*, some might be thinking. Americans would never allow a system like this to be implemented in the U.S.

Or would they?

Fascination with power and the idea that people must be controlled was never limited to Communists, or even to a political class. Let's dispel that myth before we go any further.

Real power, as I've observed time and time again, has no interest in such categories as "left" versus "right," except to use them to divide and conquer. Nor does it limit its incursions to governments.

So most do not realize is that a similar system *is* in the works in the West.

The trend has been, increasingly, to gather information on individuals for purposes ranging from marketing to the kind of surveillance we see in China, using the same technology, usually under such rubrics as "security," or protection against "terrorists" or "hackers."

The biggest difference between what has been happening in China and what has just begun in the U.S. is that in China, the government is behind it. In the U.S., the impulse is now coming from the so-called private sector. Google, Facebook, and similar leviathans – Big Tech – are leading the way. Also involved are companies such as Uber and Airbnb, and others you may not have heard of.

The New York State Department of Financial Services announced earlier this year that life insurance companies can examine your social media posts and raise your premiums if they decide, unilaterally, that you are engaging in "risky" behavior. As defined by them.



An outfit called PatronScan, a subsidiary of a Canadian-based corporation called Servall Biometrics, was founded to help bar and restaurant owners monitor customers. Its technology scans IDs and saves the data. PatronScan can thus compile lists of "troublemakers" which will be shared with every bar and restaurant owner who participates in the system.

At first glance, this might seem a good thing. Surely bars should be able to refuse admission to those known to have been ejected from somewhere for “fighting, sexual assault, drugs, theft, and other bad behavior.” Someone banned from one PatronScan-using bar or nightclub is potentially banned from all of them (the system is becoming available in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K, with Australia developing an independent system).

What could go wrong?

How long before liberal Democrat nightclub owners are able to ban those wearing MAGA hats, or clothing with politically incorrect messages on them?

Uber and Airbnb customers can fill out online forms evaluating drivers and accommodations respectively. Both now maintain lists judging customers. Both can ban users for any reason. There are appeals processes, but the companies can simply deny them.

Airbnb now boasts of having 6 million user accounts. With the likely spread of such technology-driven enterprises and activities, and with increased data sharing, if transportation technology expands to include driverless vehicles during the next decade as now seems likely; and if this kind of system becomes widespread and deems you too politically incorrect, your travel options could be limited.

I can hear some Libertarian arguing already: *these are private companies; they can do business with whomever they please, and ban whomever they please.*

For whatever its worth, the first message I received from reality that this worldview is hopelessly naïve and no foundation for genuine freedom came back in 2000, when I watched a group of corporations (not government, not the Democrats) led by a city newspaper (owned by a corporation) gang up on a restaurant owner and frozen food manufacturer for

flying the Confederate flag over his restaurants.

The collusion to destroy the man's business was palpable. The effort was largely successful. By simply refusing to carry his products, they ruined a 40-year-old business worth millions, the sad irony being that several hundred black employees lost their jobs.

Our civilization has now reached the point technologically where a public-private distinction is increasingly meaningless. We are moving towards a Big Tech driven economic culture in which everyone will be expected, as a condition of running a business or just living a normal life, to be connected to online platforms all the time. They are used increasingly for transportation, accommodations, and payments of all kinds. This is *not* voluntary in any usual sense, and barring some kind of unforeseen calamity that takes down the Web, it is going to accelerate because it makes money for the owners of the technology on which these platforms run, and because the masses like the convenience.

For another thing, employers almost never advertise offline anymore; nor do many accept applications offline. They increasingly look for social media presence when deciding who to hire. Not having one is something of a red flag. Is this applicant "anti-social"? Increasing business / corporate networking and other interaction now occurs on sites such as LinkedIn. More and more organizations creating their own Facebook groups. Entire online articles on mainstream news sites consist largely of anthologies of tweets. If you don't have accounts on these sites, you cannot participate in those groups or contribute to their conversations. Even if such participation is not mandatory (yet), if you opt out you vastly reduce your options.

Big Tech's rules for participating, those governing acceptable speech and behavior, on or offline, are getting stricter as time passes.

There are strong arguments for reclassifying Big Tech leviathans as public utilities, licensing them, regulating them, and breaking them up if that is the only means of controlling them (i.e., controlling the power-fascinated at their helm).

An example of a public utility is the electric company you pay once a month. It would never occur to anyone in the electric company to turn off your electricity because you were observed on a surveillance cam wearing a MAGA hat in public.

De facto censorship by Google, Facebook, Twitter, etc., has already reduced traffic to media sites known to promote Trump or conservatism by limiting their visibility. Google's is the most widely used search engine. Other search engines (e.g., Yahoo) are carbon copies of Google. To be invisible on Google is to be invisible *period*. Except for those with lots and lots of patience, who in our era of instant gratification and short attention spans are increasingly rare!

What should be clear from all this is that corporate power not just can be, but *is*, at least as dangerous as governmental power. Governments lie all the time, of course, and holding them accountable is extremely difficult. But at least there are specific and fairly transparent appeals processes, with the ultimate court of appeal being the U.S. Constitution (if one is in the U.S., of course).

There are no, or only the most limited, appeals processes against Big Tech's unilateral decisions. A social credit system run on existing platforms would operate almost entirely outside the rule of law, avoiding such messy matters as due process.

And to reiterate: *no*, increasingly, you cannot simply *not* do business with Big Tech, any more than you can refuse to do business with the electric company. Your "choice" is Pickwickian. Do you want to sit in the dark? Of course not.

Do you own a business and want to be able to market your services or would you prefer the invisibility of spreading leaflets? Do things Google's way, or be invisible.

My term for this is *systemic coercion*, which is not accounted for in Libertarians' / free-market absolutists' arsenal of abstractions. Coercion in their sense reduces to the truncated notion of the gun pointed at your head. Corporations don't have to point guns at people's heads. They rely on incentives, consumer mass behavior which has been studied at great length, and the fact that footdraggers can be made to suffer. All the company has to do, often in collusion with other companies, is reduce your convenience and increase your discomfort and isolation to the point of unmanageability.

Systemic coercion works by allowing your own decisions, such as to wear a MAGA hat in public or exercise other Constitutionally protected rights, to work against you given the social or structural and technological realities.

And then blames *you*. It was *your* decision to wear that hat, after all.

Very much like what is happening in China, which may very well be just a few years ahead of the U.S. on this curve.

We are clearly on a trajectory to see technocratic totalitarianism spread during the 2020s. America's technology-addicted masses will sleepwalk right into it, following the dopamine drip they get from those images on a screen.

Neoliberal economists will say it's "the free market at work."

Social credit systems may well spread everywhere. They may afford power elites the world over the most efficient controls over populations ever seen.

And so much for expatriating elsewhere, e.g., to Chile. Chile's main trading partner is now China. To walk into a

typical Chilean department store is to see almost nothing except cheap Chinese-made mass consumables. If you seek to purchase technology or common household appliances made elsewhere, good luck. They can be found, but you're going to pay through the nose.

Banks in Chile have adopted many of the same policies seen in the U.S., e.g., requiring documentation as to the money's source for investing cash deposits valued at over \$10,000 (did you sell something? can you present a work contract?). This happened to me just last month.

Surveillance cams have appeared everywhere in and around buildings in Santiago. There are videocams all over the place in the building where my wife and I live. We cannot leave our apartment without being seen by "little brother." Other buildings do the same. Watchful electronic eyes are now almost universal unless you want to live in a pigsty.

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*As everyone knows, or should know, alternatives to Establishment corporate media are under direct attack. There is Google's algorithmic censorship as well as the deplatforming we have seen on YouTube. **Everyone** is hurt by this! Those not supporting official narratives are being kicked off Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, which will no longer link to sites accused of delivering – we still have no definition of the term – "hate speech."*

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