Effect Of China’s Social Credit System On Its Citizens

A common thing one may do when purchasing a car is take out a loan through a bank, borrowing money to then pay back with interest. Another purchase could be buying an airline ticket using a credit card. Both of these scenarios first required some form of financial credit history check, where banks or brokers essentially make an informed decision and judge an individual based on their financial stability. Calculating how reliable an individual is based on their financial credit score. China not only uses financial forms of credit on an individual but is also implementing a social credit system. This social credit system rates a citizen of China based on their behavior which could have a negative or positive impact on their purchases, freedom and privacy.

When asked to describe the social credit system Dr. Rogier Creemers states “In essence, it’s an ecosystem of mechanism designed to generate trust in a society” (The Social Credit System-Part III). Starting off with the potential positive outcome of such a credit system. According to Center for public Philosophy “With this social credit System, the Chinese government aims to create a more honest and harmonious society” (China’s Social Credit System). Breaking the law in any way could potentially result in a citizen’s social credit score to drop. The quantity of the social score fluctuation would depend on the severity of the crime. As a result, a negative reinforcement or punishment towards the effected citizen could potentially deny them access to social benefits such as obtaining a home loan, access to certain public places and attractions or even buying an airline ticket. The apparent idea is to help the citizens make moral and ethical decisions correctly and more often. This adds another layer of discipline in a society. If a potential crime is committed of higher proportions such as murder, rape or grand- theft there is always sending the individual to jail or prison plus a substantial credit score drop that will follow the individual for quite some time. Furthermore, if a crime is less substantial to the previous examples such as traffic violations or jaywalking the punishment could be potential fines and a social credit score drop with potentially loosing privileges that other citizens still have by maintaining the standard laws of the Chinese government. This second layer of keeping people in line with the laws and morals of the government could potentially help the citizens think twice about what they say and how they treat other people. One last claim on the positive for the implementation of China’s social credit system, According to Center for Public Philosophy,

“The Chinese State Council postulates that if citizens are rewarded for good behavior and punished for bad behavior, then people will want to act better. Citizens in China are already seeing the positive effects of this system. As one Chinese citizen explained, “I feel like in the past six months, people’s behavior has gotten better and better… For example, when we drive, now we always stop in front of crosswalks. If you don’t stop, you will lose your points. At first, we just worried about losing points, but now we got used to it.” When there are negative consequences, people may think twice about engaging in bad or illegal activities. Over time, when citizens of a society are following laws and acting honestly, the society as a whole becomes just, fair, and peaceful (China’s Social Credit System).

The idea of China’s social credit system on the surface may appear to be an ideal way to help positively mold the ethics and morals of the Chinese government into its citizens. The question is, has the Chinese government gone too far? There is a potential downside to China’s social

credit system. The freedom and privacy of China's citizens may be breached. If we look back at some of the disciplinary actions of having a low social credit score such as not having the ability to buy an airline ticket and to take it a step further that also includes the inability to purchase a rail way ticket. According to Mable-Ann Chang "Low social credit scores barred 23 million people from buying air and rail tickets in 2018, while another 290,000 people were stopped from obtaining management-level positions, according to a report released by China's National Public Credit Information Center in February" (Getting Ahead: The Effect of China's Social Credit System). One could claim that the freedom to travel by preference of transportation has been taken away. The privilege to move up in a company, having huge successes such as becoming a manager is revoked strictly based on what the Chinese government's opinion is on how a citizen should behave. Is that Freedom? Another potential downside to the social credit system is the Chinese government monitors the citizen's social media activities, what they do and what they say is closely monitored, if the government does not like what one is posting they will attack that individual by lowering their credit score. According to Center for Public Philosophy "Additionally some critics argue that the system has flaws and may be subject to error or even abuse by the government. For example, the social credit score of Liu Hu, a Chinese journalist, placed him on an untrustworthy list, and as a result, he was prohibited from flying, buying a home, and sending his child to private school. His low score was due to a series of tweets that the government did not approve of" (China's Social Credit System).

One of the last potential issues with China's social credit system is, The invasion of privacy. There are many surveillance cameras watching over the citizens of China and although surveillance cameras are a good way to catch criminals, monitor for criminal activity and improve the safety of the general public, there is another use that China has implemented for all of these cameras. China has implemented facial recognition combined with artificial intelligence technology. This is all integrated with the surveillance camera system. One of the uses of this added technology bounces back to finding criminals and the other use is tracking people, their whereabouts. It is used to potentially make or break a citizen's social status, adjusting the social credit score of the citizens of China autonomously as they either abide by the law or break it. Maybe one is wearing a tee shirt with something offensive to the government. It may sound like a fantastic idea to some but according to Center for Public Philosophy

"Critics, however, regard it as an invasion of privacy and personal freedom. One concern is that the ability of the government to assign these ratings is dependent on China's increasingly dense network of surveillance cameras and the advancement of artificial intelligence technology" (China's Social Credit System). Just imagine one day a citizen decides to cross the road when the sign indicates that one should not, although there may not be traffic and it is realistically safe, bam! A video is recorded of the individual and the artificial intelligence drops their score just enough to not be able to purchase a plane ticket. This is without a doubt invasion of privacy, traffic cameras in the United States alone was a big deal, facial recognition is the next big problem, when used to adjust the potential freedom someone has. What if someone looks unbelievably close to another? Can such a system differentiate through millions of people?

In conclusion there seems to be some positive things and apparent negative things to China's social credit system. The positives are that there is an added level of discipline implemented China's society, ways to encourage good behavior and ways to discourage

unlawful activity. The potential negatives are overkill policies such as if one gets a traffic citation

they may not be flying anywhere because an A.I surveillance camera system lowered their social credit score. According to Mable-Ann Chang “Kostka conducted a survey in 2018 with 2,209 Chinese citizens, revealing that a whopping 80% of respondents said they approved of the government implementing the social credit system. Only1% reported a moderate to strong level of disapproval” (Getting Ahead: The Effect of China’s Social Credit System). One could ask, did the Chinese citizens that approved of the social credit system do so in fear of having their scores drop? And the 1% that did not want anything to do with it, did they already have a bad social credit score, so why not disapprove? The Chinese social credit system is a double edged sword. It can help build a strong moral standing ground in a society and help people think twice about doing something inappropriate while at the same time Chinese citizens are not free to say whatever they want on the internet without potentially having their credit score dropped. China’s social credit system is one of the many abstract ideas in a society that seems to have come out of a Black Mirror episode from Netflix, except it has become a reality.

Works Cited

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