

Handout on AI Concerns for Personal Freedoms and Government Misuse

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This talk presents an overview of computer-vision aided surveillance in the context of Northwest China and the way it produces a form of authoritarian lock-in that radically undermines the civil liberties of disfavored populations such as the Turkic Muslim Uyghur ethnic minority—constituting what the UN Human Rights Commission has said may rise to the level of crimes against humanity.¹ The talk demonstrates how this system was built in reference to tools, software, and strategies found in U.S. based surveillance firms, demonstrating that the logics of authoritarian lock-in in China are different in kind but not in type from those used in many places in the world. This is cause for concern, not only on moral grounds, but because the primary difference in their deployment is one of legal safeguards which themselves are being outpaced by AI development.

- The demand for resources in Uyghur lands is the underlying driver of the Chinese state’s treatment of the Uyghur population
- More than 85 percent of Chinese cotton (around 20 percent of world supply) comes from this region. Around 20 percent or more of Chinese oil, natural gas and coal.
 - Region is the size of all of Southwest United States.
- The Shanghai based company Landasoft bills itself as China’s version of the U.S. company Palantir,² it builds its systems using open-source software from the Texas based company Oracle.
- Digital forensics tools that companies like Meiya Pico adapted from Israeli Cellebrite systems is widely used in the Uyghur and Kazakh regions by policing contractors.
- With the assistance of over 90,000 low level police and over 1 million volunteers they build a “digital enclosure”
- Manufactures such as this “smart” factory using AI enhanced surveillance has been placed on US Department of Homeland Security Entities list³
- Over \$100 Billion invested in infrastructure in Xinjiang alone since 2017
- China to invest \$150 Billion investment in AI research by 2030. Most invested in “National Champions” such as:
 - Megvii
 - Tencent (parent company of WeChat)
 - Alibaba
 - Bytedance (parent company of TikTok)
 - SenseTime
 - HikVision
 - Dahua

¹ The UN report can be found here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/un-human-rights-office-issues-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang>

² For details on Landasoft systems see here: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/04/china-phone-search-program-tramples-uyghur-rights>

³ For the most up-to-date list see here: <https://www.dhs.gov/uflpa-entity-list>

- Huawei⁴
- AI projected to bring \$7 trillion to China's GDP by 2030⁵
- Within 2 years of state security contracts, Chinese face recognition companies build commercial applications⁶
- "Unlimited market potential," competing with US, Israeli firms for global market: See for example Mexican border cities⁷

Implications:

- Public-private tech builds matrix of assessment, removal, control
- Public-private manufacturers uses matrix to hold targeted populations in place
- Produces a class of unfree workers in a "reeducation labor regime"
- For now, system requires an army of coerced "gridworkers," checkpoints, camps
- Behind & in front of Xinjiang stands Seattle
 - Example: Megvii + Microsoft Research Asia + University of Washington
- Predictive policing is the practice of using artificial intelligence to forecast crimes.
- The most common objections to predictive policing involve the way that it produces technologically disguised racial profiling.
- The "authoritarian lock-in" objection: that predictive technologies are used by authoritarian regimes to eliminate morally legitimate activities that threaten their exercise of power.
- Authoritarian lock-in requires not only predictive policing technologies it also requires antidemocratic laws.
- However the deliberate malicious use of surveillance technologies is not significantly different from *their misuse* by democratic governments.
- Many studies have shown that use of these technologies place unjustified burdens on the freedom of racialized minority citizen and non-citizen communities, producing what Sarah Brayne calls "system avoidance" in her study of LAPD use of such tools.⁸
 - System avoidance mean avoiding state regulated institutions such as hospitals, schools, banks and so on
- Evaluating the harms caused by these technologies requires asking, who do they benefit?

⁴ Some of these companies are now on a U.S. treasury department "entities list" which means US based entities cannot sell goods or services to them: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0538>

⁵ Lee, Kai-Fu. *AI superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the new world order*. Houghton Mifflin, 2018.

⁶ Beraja, Martin, David Y. Yang, and Noam Yuchtman. "Data-intensive innovation and the State: evidence from AI firms in China." *The Review of Economic Studies* 90.4 (2023): 1701-1723. http://davidyyang.com/pdfs/ai_draft.pdf

⁷ For details about this development see: <https://empowerllc.net/en/2023/06/07/surveillance-border-dahua-hikvision/>

⁸ Brayne, Sarah. *Predict and Surveil: Data, discretion, and the future of policing*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2020.