



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

New 'social security' cards in Tibet expand China's control over Tibetans' lives

<https://savetibet.org/new-social-security-cards-in-tibet-expand-chinas-control-over-tibetans-lives>

August 21, 2019

- Chinese authorities in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) have apparently deepened their control over the Tibetan population with the rollout this summer of social security cards.
- According to Chinese state media, the cards cover a “wide range of functions” and support “online banking, mobile banking, consumption, settlement, payment, medical insurance settlement, city card and other functions.”
- The official media announced the distribution of about 2.7 million social security cards across the TAR by the end of June and expect to complete the distribution by issuing 3 million cards altogether by the end of 2019.
- The rollout of the cards reflects the Chinese government’s use of personal information as a tool of social control. The cards are in line with China’s controversial “social credit” scheme, which uses mass surveillance, big data and internet technologies to judge people’s behavior and reward or punish them as the officials see fit.
- The social credit scheme will be rolled out across the People’s Republic of China by 2020, and in Tibet—which is already one of the most repressed region on Earth — it will have a strongly political application in accordance with Beijing’s aims of eliminating Tibetans’ loyalty to the [Dalai Lama](#) and ensuring they act in compliance with the policies of the Chinese Communist Party.

In recent weeks, state media in Tibet have featured interviews with Tibetans welcoming a new “social security” card that brings together electronic data about individuals in one place, replacing the need for other cards for medical, credit and other purposes.

The state media further reported: “It is understood that the newly issued social security card functions cover a wide range of functions, and also supports online banking, mobile banking, consumption, settlement, payment, medical insurance settlement, city card and other functions.”¹

The International Campaign for Tibet is concerned the new social security cards will deepen the grip of the Communist Party-state over Tibetans’ lives. This concern is based on the state’s intrusive collection of every fragment of data about individual Tibetans and its use of this data to directly punish individuals with penalties such as loss of employment or pension, torture, imprisonment or worse.

¹ China Tibet News Network, ‘Tibet’s 2.7 million social security cards will be issued before the end of June’, May 14, 2019, http://shb.xizang.gov.cn/zjxz/xzly/201905/t20190515_82266.html. Another report stated that: ‘ICBC Tibet Branch began the issuance of the first batch of 20,000 financial social security cards’, state TV network, April 28, 2019, <http://www.kangbatv.com/xw/qxxw/2019-04-28/303918.html>

The new system — which authorities say achieves “one person, one card,” in TAR—and the rollout of the social credit scheme will strengthen the Chinese government’s comprehensive system of ‘grid management’ (the ‘Iron Grid’) in the TAR, which was developed by Chen Quanguo, the former Communist Party secretary of the region who went on to become the mastermind of the notorious detention camps in Xinjiang (known to Uyghurs as East Turkestan).

While grid management in the TAR first focused on profiling and targeting individuals regarded as potentially problematic, such as Tibetans who had returned from India, those who had attended teachings by the Dalai Lama and former political prisoners, the system has been expanded in scope and potentially now targets all Tibetans and all Uyghurs—entire ‘ethnic’ populations—assisted by surveillance technology.²

The Lhasa City Social Credit System Construction Action Plan announced in 2017 says the guiding ideology for the scheme is Xi Jinping’s instructions of "Enhancing ethnic unity, building a beautiful Tibet," which can be understood as a reference to the government’s priority of enforcing assimilation and accelerating the political and cultural transformation of Tibetans.³

Under Chinese President and Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, the government has emphasized the term “stability,” involving a broad and deep expansion of the powers of military and police backed by grassroots propaganda work and electronic surveillance. In Tibet today, even moderate and mild expressions of Tibetan national identity, religion and culture can be classified as “splittist” and therefore “criminal,” which means that activities such as attending religious ceremonies at monasteries or speaking Tibetan in a group with other Tibetans could result in downgraded credit scores and associated punishment.

² International Campaign for Tibet, The origin of the ‘Xinjiang model’ in Tibet under Chen Quanguo: Securitized ethnicity and accelerating assimilation’, December 19, 2018, <https://savetibet.org/the-origin-of-the-xinjiang-model-in-tibet-under-chen-quanguo-securitizing-ethnicity-and-accelerating-assimilation/>

³ Notice of the People's Government of Lhasa on Printing and Distributing “ the Action Plan for the Construction of Social Credit System in Lhasa (2017-2020)”, 拉萨市人民政府关于印发《拉萨市社会信用体系建设行动计划（2017-2020）》的通 uploaded September 11, 2017, Lhasa city government website: http://www.lasa.gov.cn/lasa/zwgk/2017-09/11/content_1048982.shtml>http://www.lasa.gov.cn/lasa/zwgk/2017-09/11/content_1048982.shtml